

Jordan

NOT FREE

33
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	11 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	22 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

33/100 **Not Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.

[TOP](#)

Overview

Jordan is a monarchy in which the king plays a dominant role in politics and governance. The parliament's lower house is elected, but the electoral system and limits on civil liberties put the opposition at a disadvantage; the chamber wields little power in practice. The media and civil society groups are hampered by restrictive laws and government pressure. The judicial system lacks independence and often fails to ensure due process.

Key Developments in 2023

- The new Cybercrime Law was approved by King Abdullah II in August and took effect in September. It criminalizes the use of the internet to publish news deemed false or damaging to national unity and requires large international social media companies to have offices in Jordan.
- There were increasing reports of Jordanian authorities digitally monitoring, harassing, and prosecuting LGBT+ individuals under vague morality provisions of the penal code and the Cybercrime law. In February 2023, Human Rights Watch reported instances of security forces using social media and dating applications to engage in “online entrapment” of LGBT+ people.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

0 / 4

Jordan's hereditary monarch, King Abdullah II, holds broad executive powers. He appoints and dismisses the prime minister and cabinet, as well as a several other positions such as the crown prince and a regent and may dissolve the bicameral National Assembly at his discretion.

Abdullah II dissolved the parliament in 2020. Bisher al-Khasawneh, a veteran diplomat and royal adviser, was appointed as prime minister.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

1/4

The king appoints the 65 members of the upper house of the parliament, the Senate. The lower house, the 130-seat House of Representatives, is elected for four-year terms. Its members win office through races in 23 multimember districts, with 15 seats reserved for the leading women candidates who failed to capture district seats. Twelve seats are reserved for religious and ethnic minorities.

The current parliament was elected in November of 2020. Uncertainty over the polling date amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic prompted some candidates to delay campaign efforts. International observers, who regularly monitor parliamentary elections, were largely absent.

Independents, many of whom were tribal figures and businesspeople considered loyal to the monarchy, won most seats. The main opposition group, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), and its Islah Alliance won just five seats. Voter turnout stood at 30 percent. Vote buying was observed during the contest.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

1/4

Elections are administered by the Independent Election Commission (IEC), which generally receives positive reviews from international monitors in terms of technical management, though irregularities continue to be reported. IEC members are appointed by royal decree.

The 2016 electoral-law reform introduced multiple-vote proportional representation for parliamentary elections, replacing a single nontransferable vote system that favored progovernment businesspeople and tribal elites over opposition-oriented political parties. The new law also redrew district lines to mitigate acute malapportionment that has long placed urban voters at a severe

disadvantage. However, even after these changes, rural and tribal voters making up the regime's support base remain heavily overrepresented.

The legal framework for elections is unstable. Major changes are often introduced weeks before polling day, hindering campaign efforts. Candidate registration is reportedly easier in some progovernment areas. A national electoral law passed in 2022 lowered the eligibility age for candidates to 25 years old and increased the required proportion of women on party lists.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

2 / 4

Political parties based on ethnicity, race, gender, or religion are banned in Jordan. Parties must receive approval from the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs and the IEC. Authorities have reportedly intimidated individuals attempting to form political parties and there is a long-standing fear of creating or joining political parties due to the regime's historically harsh repression of them.

While the IAF has been tolerated, it suffers from the electoral system's malapportionment, which weakens its urban support base. Its parent organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, was deregistered in 2015 and was forcibly shuttered in 2016. The government licensed an offshoot group, the Muslim Brotherhood Society (MBS), exacerbating preexisting divisions and weakening the original Muslim Brotherhood. In 2020, the organization lost an appeal against the transfer of its offices to the MBS, with the Court of Cassation ordering its complete dissolution. The IAF participated in the 2020 polls despite the ruling.

The electoral system favors tribally affiliated independents over political parties with specific ideologies and platforms, as does the patronage-based political culture. In 2020, just 12 percent of candidates relied on party-lists to earn votes.

An electoral law enacted in 2022 transferred oversight of candidates' partisan affiliations to the IEC, but it has been criticized for maintaining vague language allowing for arbitrary restrictions on parties. Some party leaders and members are subject to harassment by officials including travel bans, summons by the security officials, and denials of legal document renewals.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

1/4

The political system—including the overrepresentation of rural voters—limits the ability of any party-based opposition to make significant gains. The IAF and its allies in the Islah Alliance won a combined 8.7 percent of lower-house seats in the 2020 election. The constitutional authority of the monarchy means that no opposition force can win control of the executive branch by democratic means alone.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

1/4

While voters and candidates are generally free from overt threats or violence, they remain heavily influenced by tribal affiliations and the state-sponsored patronage networks that accompany them. The Jordanian intelligence service is widely believed to influence the electoral process. Citizens' political participation is also constrained by the fact that many important positions are appointed rather than elected.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

2/4

Women have equal political rights but cultural prejudices remain an obstacle to their full participation in practice. No women won parliamentary seats beyond the 15-seat quota in the 2020 poll.

Nine lower-house seats are reserved for Christians, and three are reserved for ethnic Circassians and Chechens together. Christians are not permitted to contest unreserved seats. Citizens of Palestinian origin, who tend to live in urban areas, make up most of the overall population but remain politically underrepresented.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

0 / 4

The king dominates policymaking and the legislative process. Though the appointed government or groups of 10 or more lawmakers can propose legislation to the House of Representatives—which may approve, reject, or amend bills—every law requires approval from the appointed Senate and the king to become law. Among other royal prerogatives, the king unilaterally appoints the heads of the armed forces, the intelligence service, and the gendarmerie.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

2 / 4

The government has undertaken some efforts to combat widespread corruption, and the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission (IACC) is tasked with investigating allegations. However, successful prosecutions—particularly of high-ranking officials—are historically rare. Anticorruption efforts are undermined by a lack of genuinely independent enforcement institutions and restrictions on investigative journalism and civil society activism.

In 2020, the government cracked down on businesspeople and politicians suspected of tax evasion, money laundering, and customs evasion after expanding

the IACC's powers. While Jordanians cautiously welcomed the crackdown, observers warned that political opponents were also being targeted. January 2022 constitutional amendments prohibit parliamentarians from obtaining state contracts through companies they own, directly or indirectly.

In March 2023, the IACC announced the launch of a media campaign encouraging citizens to report acts of corruption and reasserted its commitment to protecting whistleblowers and witnesses in corruption cases.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	1/4
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Access-to-information laws are vague, lack procedural detail, and contain sweeping exceptions. Officials are not required to make public declarations of their income and assets. The National Assembly does not exercise effective or independent oversight of the government's budget proposals. Activists and journalists who attempt to investigate state or royal finances are subject to arrest on defamation and other charges.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	1/4
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Jordanian media laws are restrictive, vague, and arbitrarily enforced. Various statutes penalize defamation, criticism of the king or state institutions, harming Jordan's relations with foreign states, blasphemy, and any content considered to lack objectivity. Authorities appoint the editors and control the finances of several media outlets. Government gag orders and informal instructions to editors

regarding news coverage are common, and journalists are routinely arrested for violating such orders. News sites face onerous registration requirements that, if not met, can serve as a justification for blocking. Journalists rarely face serious violence or significant jail time for their work, but they often practice self-censorship.

In 2023, journalists and human rights defenders were harassed or arrested under the penal code and other legislation for critical reporting or for discussing topics that the regime deemed taboo. Family members and friends of reporters who challenge the regime have been reportedly threatened with loss of employment and faced difficulties renewing official documents.

In June 2023, Jordanian authorities banned the satirical news site Al Hudood.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?

2/4

Islam is the state religion. The government monitors sermons at mosques for political, sectarian, or extremist content and issues prescribed texts and themes. Muslim clerics require government authorization to preach or dispense religious guidance. Many Christian groups are recognized as religious denominations or associations and can worship freely, though they cannot proselytize among Muslims. While converts from Islam are not prosecuted for apostasy, they face bureaucratic obstacles and harassment in practice. Unrecognized religious groups are allowed to practice their faiths but face disadvantages stemming from their lack of legal status. Atheists and agnostics are required to list a religious affiliation on government documents. The king appoints the country's Grand Mufti.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

2/4

Intelligence services reportedly monitor academic events and campus life, and administrators work with state officials to scrutinize scholarly material for politically sensitive content.

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

1/4

Open discussion of politics, the monarchy, religious affairs, and security issues is inhibited by the threat of punishment under various laws governing expression. The telecommunications law requires companies to enable the tracking of private communications upon the issuance of a court order, and authorities may order surveillance of people suspected of terrorism. Many Jordanians believe that government agents routinely listen to their phone calls and monitor their online activities. The Cybercrime Law, the Crime Prevention Law, and the penal code allow officials to detain citizens at will. Pegasus spyware was reportedly used to hack the phones of human rights activists, lawyers, and journalists between 2019 through 2023; Jordanian government agencies are suspected of being behind these attacks. Social media users, including activists, have been arrested for their activity in recent years.

Under cybercrime legislation, internet users can face fines or prison terms if they are convicted of defamation for online comments. The revised Cybercrime Law, which took effect in September 2023, strengthened those penalties and offers authorities overly broad discretion to prosecute citizens by criminalizing use of the internet for publishing news deemed false or damaging national unity, among other things. Article 17 prohibits the use of the internet or social networks to publish content that may provoke conflict under threats of hefty fines or imprisonment for up to three years. The law was characterized by human rights organizations as repressive, ambiguous, and complex; threatening to freedom of expression, the right to information, and the right to privacy; and tightening government control over the internet. A number of lawyers for the *Hirak*, a broad social and political reform movement, were arrested for social media posts under this law.

Restrictions on social media apps, such as TikTok, Clubhouse, and Grindr, are common. Article 37 of the 2023 Cybercrime Law requires international social media companies with more than 100,000 subscribers in Jordan to have offices in

the country. Penalties for companies that do not comply include advertising bans and restrictions on their platforms' bandwidth.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because authorities have arrested social media users over their activity in recent years and because the government enacted the harsh Cybercrime Law in September, placing further restrictions on online activity.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

1 / 4

Jordanian law limits free assembly. Authorities require prior notification for any demonstration or event and have broad discretion to disperse public gatherings. The Ministry of the Interior has canceled planned public events without advance notice or explanation. Violations of the law on assembly can draw fines and jail time. Security forces are known to engage in violent confrontations with protesters. Assembly rights were also curtailed under COVID-19-related measures, which the government rescinded in May 2023.

In 2022, hundreds of journalists, politicians, and activists involved in the country's Hirak movement were arrested under vague stipulations in the penal code and the Cybercrime Prevention Law. Authorities were also deployed to put down widespread cost-of-living protests in December 2022; the confrontation resulted in dozens of arrests as well as the death of a police officer.

However, assembly around some topics is permitted. Thousands of Jordanians participated a series of pro-Palestinian protests in late 2023.

Score Change: The score improved from 0 to 1 because pandemic-era restrictions on assembly have been lifted, and the government tolerated mass pro-Palestinian protests in the latter months of the year.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?

1/4

While many local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can operate in the country, there are significant restrictions on civil society. The Ministry of Social Development has broad supervisory powers over NGO operations, has the authority to deny registration and requests for foreign funding, and can disband organizations it finds objectionable. Board members of NGOs must be vetted by state security officials. In practice, these regulations are applied in an opaque and arbitrary manner.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?

0/4

Workers have the right to form unions, but only in 17 designated industries; no new union has formed since 1976. Groups must obtain government approval and join the country's semiofficial union federation, the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU). The right to strike is limited by requirements for advance notice and mediation, and participants in an illegal strike are subject to dismissal.

In 2013, a dozen unofficial trade unions formed the Jordanian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (JFITU). Lacking official status, they are not allowed to establish headquarters, collect fees from their members, or engage in collective bargaining. They also face heavy pressure from the GFJTU and government bodies to cease their activities and shut down.

The Teachers' Syndicate began the longest public-sector strike in Jordanian history in 2019, which ended after a deal was struck. However, in 2020, the union claimed the government reneged on the deal, after which the government ordered a two-year closure of the syndicate and arrested its governing board. In 2022, the courts approved an appeal to cease the prosecution of the Teacher's

Syndicate leadership council and shorten their prison sentences, but it upheld a later decision to dissolve the association.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	2/4
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The judiciary's independence is limited. The king unilaterally appoints the entire Constitutional Court and the chair of the Judicial Council, which nominates civil court judges and is mostly comprised of senior judiciary members. Judges of both the civil and the Sharia (Islamic law) courts—which handle personal status matters for Muslims—are formally appointed by royal decree. Constitutional amendments in 2022 gave the king sole authority over appointing the chief judge of the religious courts and the president of the council that administers them. The Ministry of Justice monitors judges, promotes them, and determines their salaries, further weakening the branch's autonomy. However, de facto instances of judicial independence and citizens successfully pushing back against state actors in court cases are not uncommon.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	1/4
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Police can hold suspects for up to six months without filing formal charges, and governors are empowered to impose administrative detention for up to one year. In practice, authorities often ignore procedural safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention, holding individuals incommunicado or beyond legal time limits. Criminal defendants generally lack access to counsel before trial, impairing their ability to mount a defense. Despite a constitutional prohibition, courts allegedly accept confessions extracted under torture.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

2/4

Torture and other mistreatment in custody are common and rarely draw serious penalties. Prison conditions are generally poor, and inmates reportedly suffer from beatings and other abuse by guards. Terrorist attacks remain a threat to physical security. Prisons are also overcrowded. As of January 2023, Jordanian prisons held an average of 21,000 prisoners, but had an official capacity of about 13,500 prisoners.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

2/4

Women face discrimination in law and practice. Discrimination against LGBT+ people is also prevalent and includes the threat of violence. Authorities have denied registration to NGOs that support equal rights for LGBT+ people. These organizations have faced increased persecution since January 2023.

The harassment, extortion, and arbitrary detention of LGBT+ people by Jordanian authorities is also on the rise due to digital targeting. In February 2023, Human Rights Watch reported that security forces used social media and dating applications to engage in “online entrapment” of LGBT+ people. The unlawful seizure and search of smartphones for photos, chats, or other evidence to prosecute detainees was also reported.

Refugees and asylum seekers do not usually receive permanent settlement in Jordan, though they are usually allowed to remain in the country while UN agencies seek resettlement for them. Refugees often lack access to work permits and work informally. Syrian refugees have at times been forcibly transferred to areas where they are at risk of refoulement, which places them at risk of torture, rape, and physical violence.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) counted over 740,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Jordan in 2023, representing the second-highest number of refugees per capita in the world. Syrians make up

approximately 650,000 of these refugees. Over 200,000 work permits have been granted to Syrians. However, the conditions to obtain and maintain a work permit are onerous, and Syrians are limited to specific sectors that are generally not prestigious. In 2018, refugees were prohibited from accessing subsidized health care. Many refugee and asylum-seeker children are prevented from enrolling in school.

Jordanian citizens of Palestinian origin risk the arbitrary revocation of citizenship or documentation and are often excluded from jobs in the public sector and security forces, which are dominated by East Bank tribes.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

2/4

Jordanians generally enjoy freedom of domestic movement and international travel. Refugees and migrant workers face impediments to travel and are often unable to change employers. Employers reportedly confiscate migrant workers' passports. Children of Jordanian mothers and non-Jordanian fathers, who lack citizenship themselves, have difficulty accessing jobs, education, and health care. Women can be prevented from traveling abroad with their children without the approval of the child's father, a male guardian, or a judge. The male guardians of unmarried women may interrupt their travel with approval of the authorities.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

2/4

The legal framework generally supports property rights for citizens, but women do not have equal access to property under Sharia-based inheritance rules.

Private business activity is hampered by obstacles such as corruption and the abuse of political or other connections.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

2/4

Personal social freedoms are limited by the country's conservative culture and specific laws. The government does not recognize marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men. Matters such as marriage and divorce are handled by religious courts, which place women and converts from Islam at a disadvantage and restrict some interfaith marriages. Jordan's personal status law requires a woman to obey her husband in "permissible matters" and stipulates that she may lose her right to spousal maintenance for noncompliance.

In recent years, the parliament has adopted laws that better regulate the processing of domestic violence complaints and abolish a penal code provision allowing rapists to avoid punishment by marrying their victims. However, reduced sentences are still possible for those who murder a spouse caught committing adultery, and spousal rape is not a crime. Women marrying for the first time must obtain approval of a male guardian. Under current legislation, females who are between the ages of 15 and 18 are allowed to marry in exceptional cases with judicial approval, which risks forced marriage for female children.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

1/4

Migrant workers, who are the majority of the Jordanian garment industry's workforce, are especially vulnerable to exploitative labor practices. Labor rights organizations have raised concerns about poor working conditions, forced labor, and sexual abuse in Qualifying Industrial Zones, where mostly women and foreign factory workers process goods for export. Rules governing minimum wage, working hours, and safety standards are not well enforced. In a September 2023 report, the Jordanian Labor Observatory noted that nearly half of the workforce

was not covered by the social security system. Syrian refugees are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and, as many are without work permits, often work in the informal sector for low wages. Ethiopian workers, including from the Tigray region, have been subjected to forced labor upon arrival in Jordan.

As of January 2023, over 157,000 Jordanians faced prison terms for unpaid debts, a practice that is in violation of international human rights law. The prime minister prolonged a COVID-19-related moratorium on imprisoning debtors until the end of April 2023. However, it only protected those who owed less than 20,000 Jordanian dinars (\$28,200), a lower limit than the previous protection order.



On Jordan

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Country Facts

Population

11,290,000

Global Freedom Score

33/100 **Not Free**

Internet Freedom Score

47/100 **Partly Free**

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2023

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