



Freedom in the World 2017 - Jordan

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Freedom Status: Partly Free

Aggregate Score: 37 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 5.0 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 5 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 5 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 8,200,000

Capital: Amman

GDP/capita: \$4,940

Press Freedom Status: Not Free

Net Freedom Status: Partly Free

Status Change, Ratings Change:

Jordan's status improved from Not Free to Partly Free, and its political rights rating improved from 6 to 5, due to electoral law changes that led to somewhat fairer parliamentary elections.

OVERVIEW

Jordan is a hereditary monarchy in which the king holds ultimate power over policymaking. The lower house is elected, and while electoral laws have limited the development of opposition parties in the past, reforms contributed to somewhat fairer elections in 2016. Press freedom is curtailed by strict media laws and the intimidation of journalists, and the judicial system is neither independent nor does it fully adhere to international standards.

Key Developments in 2016:

- September's parliamentary elections took place under a new electoral law mandating a proportional representation system in place of the previous single nontransferable vote system, which had been criticized for favoring progovernment tribal elites. The main opposition Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, consequently returned to formal politics after boycotting past elections, but won just 16 seats out of the 130 contested.

- In April, with little public debate, Jordan's parliament amended the constitution to reinforce the king's control over succession, the judiciary, the Senate, and the police.
- In September, well-known writer Nahed Hattar was assassinated outside a courtroom where he was facing blasphemy charges.

Executive Summary:

In September, Jordan elected its lower house under a new electoral law, adopted in March, which mandated a proportional representation system and included new districts boosting representation for urban areas where support for the opposition is strong. Jordan's main opposition party, the IAF, consequently participated fully in elections for the first time in years; the party had boycotted the 2010 and 2013 polls in protest of Jordan's use of a single nontransferable voting system, which it and other parties had criticized for favoring progovernment tribal elites. The IAF-led coalition won just 16 seats of the 130 contested; most of those elected were independent candidates considered loyal to the monarchy. Turnout was low, at 31 percent, with analysts attributing the apparent lack of enthusiasm to popular frustration with the overall weakness of the parliament, which rarely initiates legislation, and instead approves, rejects, or amends bills proposed by the cabinet. The official count of participating voters was also depressed because the new reforms made registration for elections mandatory, thus increasing the number of eligible voters on the rolls by over one million people compared to the 2013 elections. Domestic and international monitors praised the elections as well-administered, and more inclusive than past polls.

Separately, in April, the government approved a set of constitutional amendments that gave King Abdullah II absolute power to appoint constitutional court and Senate members, as well as the chief of the parliamentary police; in the past the king formally consulted the prime minister and cabinet on such key appointments. The amendments also permitted Abdullah to unilaterally name a crown prince and deputy king. The opposition and others criticized the changes as a weakening of the separation of powers between the executive, legislature, and judiciary. The changes were approved two weeks after being introduced to the parliament, leaving little opportunity for public debate.

The presence of over 600,000 refugees from neighboring Syria continues to strain Jordan's public services. In 2016, Jordan sought to curb the influx of refugees by sealing two key checkpoints on the Syrian border in the wake of an June attack there by the Islamic State (IS) militant group, which killed seven border guards. The move left approximately 85,000 people stranded in a desolate strip of land between the Jordanian and Syrian borders, with limited access to food and basic services.

The kingdom continued to restrict civil liberties in 2016 in response to the security threat posed by regional and local militants. Those who made public statements perceived as supportive of the militants were detained on several occasions. In its efforts to set strict parameters for religious discourse, the state also charged Nahed Hattar, a well-known Christian writer and commentator, with blasphemy and inciting sectarian strife over a cartoon that depicted God as in the service of an IS militant. In September, Hattar was shot to death outside the court where he was facing charges.

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Jordan, see [Freedom in the World 2016](#).

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