

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Jordan (2006)

Overview

Polity:

No polity available

Political Rights:

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Civil Liberties:

4

Status:

Partly Free

Population:

5,800,000

GNI/Capita:

\$1,850

Life Expectancy:

72

Religious Groups:

Sunni Muslim (92 percent), Christian (6 percent), other (2 percent)

Ethnic Groups:

(98 percent), other [including Armenian] (2 percent)

Capital:

Amman

Additional Info:

[Freedom in the World 2005](#)

[Freedom of the Press 2005](#)

[Nations in Transit 2004](#)

[Countries at the Crossroads 2005](#)

Bolstered by strong economic growth and an informal understanding between the government and opposition over the boundaries of acceptable public discourse, Jordan's limited expansion of civil liberties continued in 2005. Little progress was made in advancing political reform, however, and the bloody November 9 suicide bombings in Amman instigated the drafting of new antiterrorism legislation likely to erode some public freedom.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, known as Transjordan until 1950, was established as a League of Nations mandate under the control of Great Britain in 1921 and granted full independence in 1946. Following the assassination of King Abdullah in 1951, the crown passed briefly to his mentally unstable eldest son, Talal, and then to his grandson, Hussein. King Hussein's turbulent 46-year reign witnessed a massive influx of Palestinian refugees (who now comprise a majority of the population), the loss of all territory west of the Jordan River in 1967, and numerous assassinations and coup attempts by Palestinian and Arab nationalists. Although the 1952 constitution provided for a directly elected parliament, political parties were banned in 1956, and parliament was either suspended entirely or emasculated by government intervention in the electoral process for over three decades. While political and civil liberties remained tightly restricted, Hussein proved adept at co-opting- rather than killing, jailing, or exiling-his political opponents. As a result, Jordan avoided the legacy of brutal repression characteristic of other authoritarian regimes in the Arab world.

As a result of declining oil prices, which translated into reduced aid and worker remittances from the Arab Gulf countries, Jordan was forced to implement economic austerity measures in the late 1980s. These developments led to widespread rioting and mounting internal pressure for greater freedom and representation. In response, the government launched a rapid process of political liberalization and progressively eased restrictions on civil liberties. However, the reform process ground to a halt in the mid-1990s and suffered some reversals.

By the time of Hussein's death in 1999 and the ascension of his son, Abdullah, the kingdom was again faced with severe economic problems. The "peace dividend" expected to follow from Jordan's 1994 peace treaty with Israel, in the form of improved trade with the West Bank and increased investment from Western Europe, had not filtered down to the population at large. Faced with a

crippling public debt and 27 percent unemployment, Abdullah launched a series of major economic reforms and signed one of the Arab world's first free-trade agreements with the United States.

The September 2000 outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada (uprising) in the West Bank and Gaza inflamed anti-Israeli sentiments among Jordanians of Palestinian descent, leftists, and Islamists, who dominate much of civil society. As the violence next door continued unabated, the Professional Associations Council (PAC) formed an antinormalization committee to spearhead mass demonstrations demanding the annulment of Jordan's peace treaty with Israel. The government reacted by suppressing criticism of Jordanian relations with Israel and banning all demonstrations. In 2001, Abdullah dissolved the parliament, postponed parliamentary elections scheduled for November, and replaced elected municipal councils with state-appointed local committees. For more than two years, Abdullah ruled by decree, issuing more than 200 "temporary laws" that weakened due process protections and imposed new restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly.

Although the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq further inflamed popular opposition to the kingdom's foreign policy, Abdullah quickly moved to restore the country's limited democratic institutions and relax restrictions on freedom of expression. Reasonably free and transparent, though not fair, parliamentary and municipal elections were held in 2003. An informal understanding was reached between the palace and dissident leftist and Islamist groups: in return for limited freedom to express themselves and participate in the political system, the latter reportedly agreed to curtail their efforts to mobilize public opinion against Jordan's pro-U.S. alignment as long as progress was being made at the economic level. Buoyed by an infusion of "oil grants" from the Arab Gulf states and a dramatic increase in economic assistance from the United States, Jordan's economy picked up steam.

Jordan's economic prosperity and relaxed restrictions on civil liberties continued in 2005. While dozens of Jordanians were jailed during the year for security offenses, only a handful of people were detained for peaceful expression of dissent, and only briefly. However, a further expansion of political and civil liberties remained stalled. In February, Abdullah appointed a 26-member National Agenda Committee to draft a framework for political, economic, and social reforms, but the committee's domination by palace loyalists indicated that its purpose was mainly to strike a consensus within the political elite, not the population at large. In March, Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez introduced a bill that would strictly curtail the independence of professional associations; the move set off a storm of criticism from the associations, whose members in turn put pressure on parliament.

After returning from a visit to Washington, where his political reform program met with negative reviews from government officials and members of Congress, Abdullah replaced Fayez with Adnan Badran, a liberal academic. Badran withdrew the draft associations bill in the face of parliamentary opposition. Other draft laws pertaining to the electoral system, political parties, and the media were circulated during the year, but they were also stalled by

parliamentary opposition. In June, Finance Minister Bassem Awadallah resigned after 49 members of parliament threatened a no-confidence vote. The vibrancy of public debate over the reform process and the assertiveness of parliament are positive indications that political liberalization is advancing.

On August 19, three rockets were fired at a pair of U.S. Navy ships in the port of Aqaba. On November 9, triple suicide bombings in Amman left 60 dead and more than 100 wounded. Two weeks later, King Abdullah appointed a former general as prime minister, Marouf al-Bakhit, and urged him to address security concerns while preserving the economic and political reform process. The new government began drafting antiterrorism legislation that will reportedly allow for the indefinite detention of terrorist suspects and establish severe penalties for publicly condoning acts of terrorism.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Jordanians cannot change their government democratically. King Abdullah holds broad executive powers and may dissolve parliament and dismiss the cabinet at his discretion; the king appoints members of the cabinet, led by a prime minister. The 110-seat lower house of the National Assembly, elected through universal adult suffrage, may approve, reject, or amend legislation proposed by the cabinet, but is limited in its ability to initiate legislation and cannot enact laws without the assent of the 55-seat upper house of the Assembly, which is appointed by the king. The lower house refused to ratify several major pieces of legislation in 2005. Regional governors are appointed by the central government, as are half of all municipal council members.

The electoral system is heavily skewed toward the monarchy's traditional support base. The single-member-district system, introduced in 1993, favors tribal and family ties over political and ideological affiliations, while rural districts with populations of Transjordanian origin are overrepresented relative to urban districts, where most Jordanians of Palestinian descent reside. (According to the Financial Times, Amman has a National Assembly member for every 52,255 voters, while the small town of Karak has a member for every 6,000 voters.) In 2003, only 27 percent of registered voters went to the polls in Amman, a possible indication that many Palestinian Jordanians still feel excluded from the political system.

Corruption in the executive and legislative branches of government is widespread, though the government has made progress in combating corruption in recent years. Several high-profile cases of embezzlement and abuse of authority by government employees were prosecuted in 2004. Jordan was ranked 37 out of 159 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of expression is sometimes restricted. Vaguely worded articles of the penal code and other legislation criminalize certain areas of peaceful expression, such as criticism of the royal family, slander of government officials, and speech that harms Jordanian foreign relations, enflames religious sensitivities, or undermines the state's reputation. In December 2004,

prominent political activists Ali Hattar and Riyadh Nuwaisa were arrested after criticizing the United States at a conference in Amman; Hattar was later sentenced to three months in prison or a \$254 fine (he paid the fine). Although the government has officially relinquished its monopoly on television and radio outlets and issued several private broadcasting licenses, all broadcast news media remain under state control. Satellite dishes are widespread, however, giving most Jordanians access to foreign media. There are dozens of private newspapers and magazines, but the government has broad discretionary powers to close print publications and ban books. In April 2005, the government refused to license the publication of a book by political activist Ali Sanid recounting his experience in prison. In July, the government banned a book by Saddam Hussein.

There is no official advance censorship in Jordan, but the authorities are routinely tipped off about the contents of potentially offensive articles by informers at printing presses, and editors frequently come under pressure to remove such material. In April, the authorities forced the weekly Al-Wihda to remove an article criticizing the selection of the new cabinet as undemocratic. In May, the government forced the weekly Al-Majd to remove an interview with an Assembly member who expressed support for the Iraqi insurgency. Government intelligence agents frequently telephone Jordanian journalists with warnings about their writing. In March, a journalist and two editors of the daily Al-Ghad were briefly detained and questioned after the newspaper reported that a Jordanian citizen had carried out a suicide bombing in Iraq. In July, the government submitted a draft Law on Journalism and Publications that relaxes some restrictions on press freedom, but it was not ratified by year's end. While the Jordanian government denies restricting access to the internet-and in fact actively promotes it-websites airing critical views have been blocked in the past.

Islam is the state religion. The government appoints Islamic clergy, pays their salaries, and monitors sermons at mosques, where political activity is banned under Jordanian law. Sunni Muslims constitute 92 percent of the population, but Christians and Jews are officially recognized as religious minorities and allowed to worship freely. Baha'is and Druze are allowed to practice their faiths, but are not officially recognized. Academic freedom is generally respected in Jordan.

Freedom of assembly is heavily restricted. The Law on General Assemblies bans public demonstrations lacking written authorization from the regional governor. Although opposition groups complained that most of their requests were denied, the government allowed several licensed anti-Israeli and anti-American demonstrations to take place during the year. The government rejected at least four requests by professional associations to hold demonstrations in 2005.

Freedom of association is limited. While dozens of licensed nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) addressing political and social issues are allowed to operate freely, the government occasionally withholds licenses from NGOs deemed subversive. Workers have the right to bargain collectively but must receive government permission to strike. More than 30 percent of the workforce is organized into 17 unions. The judiciary is subject to executive influence

through the Justice Ministry and the Higher Judiciary Council, whose members are appointed by the king. While most trials in civilian courts are open and procedurally sound, the State Security Court (SSC) may close its proceedings to the public (though this did not happen in 2005). A temporary law promulgated in 2001 allows the prime minister to refer any case to the SSC and denies the right of appeal to people convicted by the SCC of misdemeanors, which can carry short prison sentences.

Jordanian citizens enjoy little protection from arbitrary arrest and detention. Under the constitution, suspects may be detained for up to 48 hours without a warrant and up to 10 days without formal charges being filed; courts routinely grant prosecutors 15-day extensions of this deadline. Even these minimal protections are denied to suspects referred to the SSC, who are often held in lengthy pretrial detention and refused access to legal council until just before trial. At least 19 defendants standing trial for security-related offenses in 2005 claimed to have been tortured in custody.

Jordanians of Palestinian descent face discrimination in employment by the government and the military and in admission to universities. Labor laws do not protect foreign workers. Abuse of mostly South Asian domestic servants is widespread.

Women enjoy equal political rights, but face legal discrimination in matters relating to inheritance and divorce, which fall under the jurisdiction of Sharia (Islamic law) courts, and to child custody, as well as in the provision of government pensions and social security benefits. Marital rape is not illegal. A 2002 temporary law granting women the right to initiate divorce proceedings has been rejected repeatedly by the legislature, but remains in effect. Although women constitute only 14 percent of the workforce, the government has made efforts to increase the number of women in the civil service. Women are guaranteed a quota of six seats in parliament. The number of female cabinet ministers dropped from four to one following the appointment of Bakhit in November 2005. Article 98 of the penal code allows for lenient treatment of those convicted of "honor crimes" (the murder or attempted murder of women by relatives for alleged sexual misconduct). In 2005, at least 15 honor-crime murders were reported, and several defendants received short prison sentences (in two cases, only six months) for murdering female relatives.