



FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2022

Jordan

NOT FREE

33
/100

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

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

34 /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 puts the opposition at a disadvantage, and 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 2021

- In April, King Abdullah II ordered the arrest of a group of former officials and members of the royal family, including the king's half-brother Prince Hamzah bin al-Hussein, who the king claimed had plotted a coup. Their trials were swift, key witnesses were denied testimony, the evidence presented was weak, and the charges against them were vague.
- In March, the social media application Clubhouse was shut down in what is widely seen as an attempt to subdue free expression. Citizens criticized this restriction on other social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, where they also threatened to defy the move by downloading Clubhouse onto their smartphones through virtual private networks (VPNs).

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 and may dissolve the bicameral National Assembly at his discretion. Constitutional amendments adopted in 2016 empowered the king to make a number of other appointments, including the crown prince and a regent, without a royal decree countersigned by the prime minister or other cabinet ministers.

Abdullah II dissolved the parliament in September 2020, and the prime minister Omar al-Razzaz, a former World Bank economist and education minister, resigned in early October. Al-Razzaz was succeeded days later by Bisher al-Khasawneh, a veteran diplomat and royal adviser.

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 115-seat House of Representatives, is elected for four-year terms or until the parliament is dissolved. 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 district seats are reserved for religious and ethnic minorities.

The royal court announced its intention to trigger an election in a July 2020 statement, and Abdullah II dissolved the parliament in late September. However, uncertainty over the early-November 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 133 seats. The Islamic Action Front (IAF), the Islah Alliance, and the Muslim Center Party each won 5 seats. Voter turnout stood at 29.9 percent, down from 36 percent in 2016. Vote buying, which was observed in 2016, became more common during the November 2020 contest, partially due to the dire economic situation caused by the pandemic.

Elections for mayors, local and municipal councils, and 12 new governorate councils created under a 2015 decentralization law were last held in 2017. However, 15 percent of the governorate council seats are appointed, and the councils have no legislative authority. A quarter of the seats in the Amman municipal council are also appointed by the government.

A3 0-4 pts

TOP

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 so as to mitigate acute malapportionment that has long placed urban voters at a severe disadvantage. However even after these changes, rural and tribal voters, who make 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.

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. 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.

TOP

While the IAF has been tolerated, it suffers from the electoral system's malapportionment, which affects its urban support base. Its parent organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, was deregistered in 2015 when the government licensed its offshoot group, the Muslim Brotherhood Society (MBS). The Muslim Brotherhood's offices were forcibly shuttered in 2016, after the regime prevented it from holding internal elections, exacerbating preexisting divisions and weakening it politically. In July 2020, the organization lost an appeal against the transfer of its offices to the MBS, with the Court of Cassation ordering its dissolution. The Muslim Brotherhood vowed to appeal, and the IAF participated in the November 2020 poll 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 October 2020, the al-Hayat Center for Civil Society Development, a local nongovernmental organization (NGO), reported that only 12 percent of candidates relied on party lists to earn votes.

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 ally the Islah Alliance, won a combined 8.7 percent of lower-house seats in the November 2020 election. Moreover, 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

TOP

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, and female candidates previously won seats beyond the legal quotas set for the parliament and subnational councils, but cultural prejudices remain an obstacle to women's full participation in practice. Four women won off-quota seats on governorate councils in 2017. Women performed well at the municipal and local levels that year, but none won mayoral posts. No women won parliamentary seats beyond the 15-seat quota in the November 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 a majority 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 June 2020, the government launched a crackdown targeting businesspeople and politicians suspected of tax evasion, money laundering, and customs evasion, after expanding the IACC's powers. By July, authorities raided 650 firms and were reportedly examining the tax records of 70 individuals. While Jordanians cautiously welcomed the crackdown, observers warned that political opponents were also targeted by the government.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

1 / 4

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^{TOP}

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?**1/4**

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. Government gag orders and informal instructions to media outlets 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.

Journalists faced severe restrictions under COVID-19-related measures. In March 2020, the cabinet halted the publication of all newspapers for two weeks. In April, the government issued a vaguely worded decree prohibiting the dissemination of pandemic-related information that would "cause panic."

The government has restricted media coverage of important political issues in recent years. Immediately after the July 2020 closure of the country's Teachers' Syndicate, the attorney general issued a wide-ranging gag order prohibiting discussion of the subject. In April 2021, a gag order was placed on news about Prince Hamzah and the alleged coup plot against the regime.

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

TOP

faiths but face disadvantages stemming from their lack of legal status. Atheists and agnostics are required to list a religious affiliation on government documents.

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.

D4 0-4 pts

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

2/4

Open discussion of topics such as 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 are allowed to order surveillance of people suspected of terrorism. Many Jordanians believe that government agents routinely listen to their phone calls and monitor their online activities.

Under cybercrime legislation, internet users can face fines or prison terms of up to three months if they are convicted of defamation for online comments. Several activists and protesters arrested in 2020 and 2021 were charged with offenses related to social media posts in which they criticized the government.

Prince Hamzah was placed under house arrest in April 2021 under charges of sedition and was not seen publicly until a week later, in the company of Abdullah II. Some believe Hamzah's arrest stemmed from his publicly expressed sympathy for the Jordanian public's hardships, though others claim that evidence exists that he was plotting a coup.

TOP

The social media application Clubhouse was shut down in March 2021 in what is widely seen as an attempt to curb free expression. Citizens criticized this restriction on other

social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, where they also threatened to defy the move by downloading Clubhouse onto their smartphones through virtual private networks (VPNs). Restrictions on other social media apps, some permanent, are common.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

0/4

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.

The government further restricted the right to assemble in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, even after other measures were rolled back in June 2020. Several dozen protesters were arrested in an Amman demonstration held several days after the Teachers' Syndicate was closed in late July. Some protesters were physically attacked by police and others were later pressured to sign pledges promising to refrain from further activity, under penalty of hefty fines.

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 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.

TOP

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 (FITU). 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 governmental bodies to cease their activities and shut down.

The Teachers' Syndicate began the longest public-sector strike in Jordanian history in September 2019, which ended after a deal was struck that October. The union accused the government in July 2020 of reneging on the deal, after which the government ordered a two-year closure of the syndicate, shuttering offices and arresting its 13-member board. Over 250 people were subsequently detained as protests continued. In late December 2020, a court handed one-year prison sentences to five syndicate leaders and ordered the organization's permanent dissolution. In August 2021, the deputy head of the syndicate, some members of the Teachers' Syndicate's council, and about 30 teachers were arrested for continuing protest activities against the government. In November, the country's court of appeals dismissed one of the cases brought against the syndicate, which is awaiting a positive ruling on a second case in order to resume operations.

TOP

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?

2/4

The judiciary's independence is limited. Under 2016 constitutional amendments, 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. The Ministry of Justice has the power to monitor judges, promote them, and determine their salaries, further weakening the branch's autonomy.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?

1/4

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.

In April 2021, King Abdullah II ordered the arrest of a group of former officials and members of the royal family, including the king's half-brother Prince Hamzah, who the king claimed had plotted a coup. Their trials were swift, key witnesses were denied testimony, the evidence presented was weak, and the charges against the men were vague. Many in the group were sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment. Sixteen other high-ranking officials were also arrested but subsequently released.

F3 0-4 pts

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

**TOP
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. In November 2019, Jordanian authorities said they had disrupted a plot to attack US and Israeli targets in the country earlier in the year; two suspects who were allegedly inspired by the Islamic State (IS) militant group went on trial that month.

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 in practice. For example, women's testimony is not equal to men's in Sharia courts, and certain social benefits favor men over women. Discrimination against LGBT+ people is prevalent and includes the threat of violence. Authorities have denied registration to NGOs that support equal rights for LGBT+ people.

Refugees and asylum seekers have not historically received permanent settlement in Jordan, though individuals residing in the country are usually allowed to remain while UN agencies seek their placement in third countries. 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, such as the Rubkan camp near the Syrian border; refoulement would place them at further risk of torture, rape, and further physical violence.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) counted 759,745 refugees in Jordan as of mid-December 2021, with 672,599 hailing from Syria. The government, which claims to host nearly double that number, agreed to issue 200,000 work permits in return for a loan-and-investment package in a 2016 compact, and reached the 190,000-permit mark in July 2020. In 2018, it legalized the status of several thousand Syrian refugees living outside of camps, but also prohibited refugees from accessing subsidized health care.

TOP

Jordanians of Palestinian origin who are citizens 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, though some international flights are restricted due to public health measures intended to prevent the spread of COVID-19. 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 without a special identity card that is difficult to obtain.

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?

4

TOP

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. Women are not allowed to pass citizenship onto their children.

In recent years, the parliament has adopted laws that better regulate the processing of domestic violence complaints and that 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.

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, particularly in certain sectors like agriculture and construction, and among migrant workers. Syrian refugees are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and, as many are without work permits, often work in the informal sector for low wages.

Economic hardships brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has likely increased the prevalence of child labor dramatically, according to local NGOs. Refugee children are particularly vulnerable and the government and civil society groups, such as UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), have failed or are unable to provide adequate aid.

The number of Jordanians imprisoned for debt, in violation of international human rights law, rose 11-fold between 2015 and 2019, and has remained a challenge since. ^{TOP} The weak evidentiary basis required for decisions favor debt collectors, according to a Human Rights Watch report.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to a multiyear rise in problems including debt-related imprisonment, child labor, and the exploitation of Syrian refugees.



On Jordan

See all data, scores & information on this country or territory.

[See More >](#)

Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

33/100 Not Free

Internet Freedom Score

47/100 Partly Free

Other Years

2021

Be the first to know what's happening.

Join the Freedom House monthly newsletter

Email

[Subscribe](#)

[TOP](#)

ADDRESS

1850 M St. NW Floor 11
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 296-5101

GENERAL INQUIRIES

info@freedomhouse.org

PRESS & MEDIA

press@freedomhouse.org

@2022 FreedomHouse

TOP