

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.



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 2022

- In March and April, hundreds of journalists, politicians, and activists involved in the country's *Hirak*, a broad social and political reform movement, were arrested under vague stipulations in the penal code and the Crime Prevention Law. Authorities carried out the arrests to prevent widespread antigovernment demonstrations and sit-ins planned to protest government corruption and the dissolution of the Teachers' Syndicate, as well as to commemorate the 2011 protest movement.
- In December, truckers and transportation workers in the south of the country went on strike to pressure the government to end price hikes on fuel and address the cost-of-living crisis. Authorities have deployed security forces with heavy weaponry and have arrested dozens of people. The strike actions continued through the end of the year.

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 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 most seats. The main opposition group, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the Islah Alliance, and the Muslim Center Party each won 5 seats. Voter turnout stood at 30 percent. Vote buying became more common during the 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 were held in March 2022. Voter turnout was just under 30 percent and the IAF boycotted the polls. The elections were dominated by local tribal politics; only 74 candidates formally announced affiliations to political parties. Al-Hayat Centre for Civil Society Development, a local nongovernmental organization (NGO), reported that a heavy security presence throughout the kingdom on election day compromised the secrecy of ballots. Violence broke out at 10 municipalities after the polling centers closed.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented

1/4

impartially by the relevant election management bodies?	
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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. However, 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 new national electoral law passed in April 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
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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 closed in 2016. The government licensed its offshoot group, the Muslim Brotherhood Society (MBS), all of which exacerbated preexisting divisions and weakened it politically. In 2020, the organization lost an appeal against the transfer of its offices to the MBS, with the Court of Cassation ordering its dissolution. The IAF participated in the November 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. The al-Hayat Center reported that only 12 percent of candidates relied on party-lists to earn votes. New electoral law enacted in March 2022 transferred oversight of candidates' partisan affiliations to the IEC, but it has been criticized for maintaining vague language that allows for arbitrary restrictions on the parties overall. 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
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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. 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
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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, and women candidates have seats beyond the legal quotas set for the parliament and subnational councils, 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. Women won 27 percent of all municipal, governorate, and Amman municipality council seats in the 2022 local elections.

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 June 2020, the government cracked down on businesspeople and politicians suspected of tax evasion, money laundering, and customs evasion after expanding the IACC's powers. By July of that year, authorities had 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 being targeted by the government. January 2022 constitutional amendments prohibit parliamentarians from obtaining state contracts through companies they own, directly or indirectly.

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

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. 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 2022, journalists were harassed or arrested repeatedly for reporting on a variety of topics that the regime deems taboo. Family members and friends of reporters who challenge the regime have been reportedly threatened with loss of employment and difficulties renewing work visas or other official documents.

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.

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 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. Jordan's Cybercrime Law, the Crime Prevention Law, and the penal code allow officials to detain citizens at will.

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. Human Right Watch investigated 30 cases between 2019 and 2022 in which activists and protesters were arrested and charged with defamation related to social media posts or views expressed in public gatherings. Pegasus spyware, created by the Israeli company NSO Group, was reportedly used to hack the phones of four human rights activists, lawyers, and journalists from 2019 through 2021; Jordanian government agencies are suspected of being behind these attacks.

Restrictions on other social media apps, some permanent, are common. Following violence at protests in December 2022, authorities suspended the social media platform TikTok.

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.

In March and April 2022, hundreds of journalists, politicians, and activists involved in the country's Hirak were arrested under vague stipulations in the penal code and the Cybercrime Prevention Law. Authorities carried out the arrests to prevent widespread antigovernment demonstrations and sit-ins planned to protest government corruption and the dissolution of the Teachers' Syndicate, as well as to commemorate the 2011 protest movement. Widespread protests against rising fuel prices and the cost-of-living crisis also occurred in December. Rioters and other violent actors were present during the demonstrations, and their actions resulted in the death of a police officer.

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. 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 a month later. However, in July 2020, the union claimed the government reneged on the deal, after which the government ordered a two-year closure of the syndicate, arresting its governing board. Over 250 people were subsequently detained during protests. In June 2022, the courts approved an appeal to cease the prosecution of the Teacher's Syndicate leadership council and convert their one-year prison sentences to three months, but it upheld a later decision to dissolve the association.

In December, truckers and transportation workers in the south of the country went on strike to pressure the government into ending price hikes on fuel and the cost-of-living crisis. Authorities deployed security forces with heavy weaponry and arrested dozens of people. The strike actions continued through year-end.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?

2 / 4

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

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.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various

2 / 4

Women face discrimination in law and practice. 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 do not routinely receive 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, which would place them at risk of torture, rape, and physical violence.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) counted 762,687 refugees and asylum seekers in Jordan representing the second highest refugee per capita share in the world as of October 2022. Syrians make up 676,621 of these. 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. In 2018, it prohibited refugees from accessing subsidized health care. Only one in four Syrian refugee children is enrolled in school by the secondary level and many non-Syrian refugees and asylum seeker children are prevented from enrolling in school altogether.

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
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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 without a special identity card that is difficult to obtain. 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.

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.

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. 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 increased the prevalence of child labor dramatically, according to local NGOs. Refugee children are particularly vulnerable, and the government and civil society groups have failed or are unable to provide adequate aid.

As of April 2022, 148,269 Jordanians were wanted to serve prison terms for unpaid debt, a practice that is widespread in Jordan and is in violation of international human rights law. The weak evidentiary basis required for decisions favor debt collectors.



On Jordan

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

33/100 **Not Free**

Internet Freedom Score

47/100 **Partly Free**

Other Years

2022

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