

[EN](#) | [DE](#)**Source:**

Freedom House

Title:

Freedom in the World 2013

Publication date:

January 2013

ecoi.net summary: Annual report on political rights and civil liberties in 2012 [ID 245318]**Countries:**

Jordan

[Original link](#)**Recommended citation:**Freedom House: Freedom in the World 2013, January 2013 (available at [ecoi.net](http://www.ecoi.net))http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/245318/355272_en.html (accessed 24 April 2013)

Freedom in the World 2013

Overview:

The harassment of opposition activists continued in 2012, with the government cracking down on demonstrators protesting a new electoral law and the political status quo, as well as fuel subsidy reductions. A new press law was also widely criticized for limiting freedom of expression on the internet. Meanwhile, the threat of instability spreading from neighboring Syria remained throughout the year.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, then known as Transjordan, was established as a League of Nations mandate under British control in 1921 and won full independence in 1946. The 46-year reign of King Hussein, which began in 1953, featured a massive influx of Palestinian refugees, the occupation of the West Bank by Israel in 1967, and numerous assassinations and coup attempts. Nevertheless, with political and civil liberties tightly restricted, Hussein proved adept at co-opting his political opponents. Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994.

Crown Prince Abdullah II succeeded his father in 1999, implementing major economic reforms to alleviate severe economic problems. Meanwhile, additional restrictions on the media, public protests, and civil society were imposed after Islamists, leftists, and Jordanians of Palestinian descent staged demonstrations to demand the annulment of the 1994 treaty and express support for the Palestinian uprising (*intifada*) that began in 2000. Beginning in 2001, Abdullah ruled by decree for two years, and due process and personal freedoms were curtailed. The king allowed reasonably free and transparent—though not fair—parliamentary and municipal elections in 2003. The relationship between the government and political parties remained strained, however, as the 2007 elections were marred by irregularities and the arrest of members of the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the main opposition party. A 2008 law requiring parties to have broader membership bases led to a drop in the number of registered parties from 37 to 14.

The king unexpectedly dismissed parliament in November 2009 and ruled by decree until November 2010. International observers deemed the November 2010 polls to have been technically well conducted, but the IAF boycotted them, citing structural biases that guaranteed the success of the king's traditional supporters.

Jordan largely avoided the widespread political unrest that swept the Middle East in 2011. Calls for reform escalated late in the year, however, resulting in the October resignation of Prime Minister Marouf al-Bakhit and all but four Cabinet ministers. The king replaced Bakhit with Awn Khasawneh, a former judge at the International Court of Justice considered friendly to reform.

In 2012 Jordan saw further cabinet reshuffles and the promise of elections in early 2013 in response to ongoing popular discontent. Prime Minister Khasawneh resigned in April, and was replaced by Fayez El-Tarawneh, who himself resigned in early October. The king then appointed Abdullah Ensour as interim prime minister of a caretaker government tasked with overseeing the elections. In June, parliament passed a new electoral law at King Abdullah's urging. Many regime opponents, including the IAF, criticized the law and vowed to boycott the upcoming elections. Critics said that the new law continues to encourage voting based on tribal ties, rather than political and ideological affiliation, by allocating relatively few seats based on proportional representation. In protests against the electoral law, opponents also argued that the electoral weight granted to representatives from each of Jordan's governorates disadvantaged urban-based groups less likely to be loyal to King Abdullah. The government's decision to reduce fuel subsidies also touched off protests involving thousands of people in late October and early November. Dozens were injured, at least three people killed, and several hundred protesters were arrested. King Abdullah pardoned most of the protesters arrested in these demonstrations in early December.

Meanwhile, the conflict in neighboring Syria continued to impact Jordan, as an influx of refugees, cross-border fighting, and a thwarted Al-Qaeda plot raised fears of insecurity. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that there were more than 160,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan by the end of the year, with steady increases in arrivals straining Jordan's resources and social services. The difficult conditions in Zaatari refugee camp, the main facility for Syrian refugees in northern Jordan, contributed to fears of unrest.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Jordan is not an electoral democracy. King Abdullah II holds broad executive powers, appoints and dismisses the prime minister and cabinet, and may dissolve the bicameral National Assembly at his discretion. The members of the lower house of the National Assembly, the Chamber of Deputies, are elected through universal adult suffrage. The Chamber of Deputies may approve, reject, or amend legislation proposed by the cabinet, but it cannot enact laws without the assent of the 55-seat upper house, the Senate, whose members are appointed by the king. Members of both houses serve four-year terms. Regional governors are appointed by the central government.

The electoral law passed in June 2012 increased the total number of seats in the Chamber of Deputies from 120 to 150 and the quota of seats for women from 12 to 15. Each voter was given the right to cast one ballot for a national party list in a proportional representation system and another for a local candidate in single non-transferable vote system. Only 27 of the 140 seats are to be determined by proportional representation. The law also permits members of the security forces to vote for the first time. Constitutional amendments approved by the king in September 2011 called for the creation of an Independent Electoral Commission, which was established in May 2012.

Parliament adopted legislation in May 2012 making it easier to create new political parties, but discouraged the creation of parties founded on religious or tribal affiliations.

The Chamber of Deputies is heavily imbalanced in favor of rural districts, whose residents are generally of Transjordanian (East Bank) origin. Christian and Circassian minorities are guaranteed nine and three seats, respectively.

Efforts to combat corruption in recent years have yielded mixed results, and investigations and arrests rarely lead to serious punishment. In February 2012, former intelligence chief Mohamed al-Dahabi was arrested on charges of embezzlement, money laundering, and abuse of power, and stood trial in June. He was convicted in November, receiving the maximum sentence of 13 years in prison. Jordan was ranked 58 out of 176 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of expression is restricted, and those who violate unwritten rules, or red lines, regarding reporting on the royal family and certain societal taboos face arrest. While imprisonment was abolished as a penalty for press offenses in 2007, journalists can still be jailed under the penal code. Self-censorship is common. Several people were arrested in 2012 for insulting or criticizing the king, his cabinet, or Jordan's system of government. Most broadcast news outlets remain under state control, but satellite dishes and the internet give residents access to foreign media. While there are dozens of private newspapers and magazines, the government has broad powers to close them. Websites are subject to similar restrictions, and police have considerable discretion in monitoring and sanctioning online content. Newspapers faced pressure in 2012 to delete or retract material critical of the government, and satellite television station JOSAT faced suspension after it aired a program on corruption.

In September 2012, parliament amended the Press and Publications Law, which further restricts the freedom of expression of electronic publications, requires journalists to join a union, requires that websites register with the government, and holds website owners responsible for all content posted to their sites, even by visitors. Activists from Jordan and international human rights organizations argued that the law was an unprecedented assault on

freedom of expression and could lead to greater persecution of regime critics.

Islam is the state religion. Christians are recognized as religious minorities and can worship freely. While Baha'is and Druze are not officially recognized, they are allowed to practice their faiths. The government monitors sermons at mosques, and preachers cannot practice without written government permission. Only state-appointed councils may issue religious edicts, and it is illegal to criticize these rulings.

Academic freedom is generally respected, and Jordanians openly discuss political developments within established red lines. However, there have been reports of a heavy intelligence presence on some university campuses.

Freedom of assembly is generally restricted, though a March 2011 amendment to the Public Gatherings Law allowed demonstrations without prior permission. In 2012, police forcefully dispersed protests against the political status quo and the detention of protesters in prior demonstrations around the country, especially in Amman, Tafilah, and Mafraq, detaining demonstrators on charges of disturbing public order, insulting the king, or incitement against the regime. In July, police used violence to disperse a protest against the press law amendments. The government also used a provision prohibiting unlawful gatherings for the purpose of committing crime as a way to penalize peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. In late October and early November, police violently dispersed protests against cuts to fuel subsidies in multiple cities, arresting over 300 people and trying them in state security courts. Freedom of association is limited. The Ministry of Social Development has the authority to reject registration and foreign funding requests for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and can disband organizations it finds objectionable. NGOs supporting associations with political purposes are prohibited. State security must approve all NGO board members. In June 2012, the government banned the legal assistance group Tamkeen for allegedly accepting unauthorized foreign funding, an accusation international rights groups criticized as unfounded.

Workers have collective bargaining rights but must receive government permission to strike. More than 30 percent of the workforce is organized into 17 unions. Labor rights organizations have raised concerns about poor working conditions and sexual abuse in Qualifying Industrial Zones, where mostly female and foreign factory workers process goods for export. In 2012, the Ministry of Labor issued new guidelines that further restricted migrants' mobility by conditioning their exiting the country on the permission of their employers.

The judiciary is subject to executive influence through the Justice Ministry and the Higher Judiciary Council, most of 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. The prime minister may refer cases to the SSC, and people convicted of misdemeanors by the SSC lack the right of appeal. In 2012, numerous people arrested during demonstrations against the government were charged under terrorism provisions, which placed them under the jurisdiction of the SSC. Groups including the IAF continue to call for the SSC to be dissolved altogether. Provincial governors can order indefinite administrative detention. Constitutional amendments approved in 2011 called for the creation of a Constitutional Court, which was established in October 2012. International human rights groups continued to express concern over the use of torture in Jordanian prisons in 2012. Prison conditions are poor, and inmates reportedly experience severe beatings and other abuse by guards.

Women enjoy equal political rights but face legal discrimination in matters involving inheritance, divorce, and child custody, which fall under the jurisdiction of Sharia (Islamic law) courts. Women are guaranteed 15 seats in the lower house of parliament under the new electoral law and 20 percent of municipal council seats. The upper house of parliament currently has seven female senators. Men who commit "honor crimes" against women often receive lenient sentences. In July 2012, a man was accused of stabbing to death and running over his divorced sister; between 15 and 20 such crimes occur in Jordan each year. Jordan is a destination and transit country for human trafficking for forced labor and, to a lesser extent, sex.

Trend Arrow:

Jordan received a downward trend arrow due to the repression of widespread protests against a new electoral law and the lack of meaningful political reform.

2013 Scores

Status

Not Free

Freedom Rating

5.5

Civil Liberties

5

Political Rights

6

published on

