



# Jordan

**Assessment: Poor**

**Trend:** ⇔

Capital: Amman

Type of Government: Constitutional Monarchy  
Chief of State: King Abdullah (since 7 February 1999)

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Marhuan Muasher

Population: 5,153,378

Human Development Index Ranking: 99



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jordan has a **poor** record of support for democracy abroad. While Jordan has consistently voted in favor of resolutions supporting democracy, participated in international fora on democracy promotion, and spoken in favor of freedom and human rights, it has failed to apply these principles at home or when democracy was challenged in a neighboring country. The Hashemite monarchy remained silent when democratically elected governments were overthrown or electoral processes manipulated, and followed a policy of appeasement towards entrenched dictatorships.

Amman has pursued a non-interference approach when responding to challenges to democracy abroad, seeking to maintain cordial relations with all countries in the region. The threat from Islamic extremists often has been cited by the regime as justification for suppressing domestic freedoms and for not supporting democracy in the Middle East. In fact, Jordan has refrained from condemning undemocratic practices abroad regardless of whether Islamists were poised to gain power. This approach has been inconsistent with Jordan's rhetorical commitment to democracy in international fora.

## FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

Jordan identifies its short-term foreign policy objective as protecting the country's interests by "maintaining good relations with neighboring countries as well as global powers." The monarchy says its long-term objectives include promotion of democracy and human rights in the region, adding that these objectives have "sometimes conflicted with Jordan's immediate interests."<sup>1</sup> In fact, democracy promotion is not an issue in the policy debate regarding relations with other countries. The Arab-Israeli peace process and Jordan's economic well-being have been the prime concerns of Amman's foreign policy, taking precedence over all other issues.

Geopolitical, economic and internal vulnerabilities have limited Amman's capacity to directly influence events in other countries. Jordan is a small country surrounded by more powerful neighbors, and heavily dependent on foreign aid from oil-rich countries. It has tried to maintain good relations with these neighbors, and has avoided criticizing their undemocratic practices. It remains to be seen whether Jordan, as it shifts its economy away from dependence on Arab countries and more towards the West, will work more effectively towards promoting democracy in the region in the future.

Another factor that heavily influences the monarchy's foreign policy is the fact that Palestinians make up an estimated 60 percent of the population. For example, Jordan sided with Iraq in the Gulf War, in part to meet demands of the Palestinian population, but paid a high price in terms of its relations with the United States and the Gulf countries. However, Jordan's 1994 peace treaty with Israel allowed it to strengthen its relations with the U.S., but put the monarchy under heavy domestic pressure from both Islamists and Palestinians, who continue to demand that Amman break relations with Israel.

Faced with widespread opposition to Jordan's peace treaty with Israel, and to Israel's intensifying campaign against the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories, the monarchy has been trying to control



the internal democratic debate and to limit political freedoms, halting the process of democratization begun in 1989. Direct public criticism of the regime's foreign policy is not allowed in Jordan. Editorialists often criticize undemocratic trends in Arab countries, but there is a striking degree of self-censorship.

The regime believes that democracy can only be introduced in the region when peace is reached between Israel and all Arab countries. King Abdallah, who assumed the throne following his father's death in February 1999, has followed the late King Hussein's strategy of cautious diplomacy, building up and maintaining good relations with regimes in the region, regardless of how they acceded to power.

### **RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS**

Although Jordan's immediate neighborhood is hardly democratic, it has avoided condemning military coups or other forms of overthrow of democratically-elected governments wherever the opportunity has arisen. When condemnations have been made by a few Western countries or by regional organizations like the Commonwealth or the European Union, Jordan has remained silent.

The 1999 coup in the Comoros Islands is the exception that proves the rule. The Arab League, of which Jordan is a member, severed ties with the Comoros Islands when a military chief, Colonel Azali Assoumani, overthrew the government of Tajiddine Ben Saoud Massoude in a bloodless coup on 30 April 1999. The Arab League condemned the coup and refused to recognize the new regime. The 22-member organization sent a fact-finding commission to the small island state, which is one of its members. The commission called on the Arab League to authorize the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to supervise the Antananarivo Accord of April 1999 and to oversee the transfer of authority from the military regime to civilians.

In most other cases, Jordan did not take a public stance. For example, it did not join the Commonwealth and European Union condemnations of the crackdown by the Abacha regime in Nigeria in 1995. Nor did it condemn the 1996 coup in Niger led by Col. Bare Ibrahim Mainassara, which resulted in the overthrow of the country's first democratically-elected President. Jordan did not support efforts to impose sanctions on the new regimes, nor efforts to facilitate transitions back to democracy.

When Pakistani army chief Gen. Pervez Musharraf toppled Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a bloodless coup on 12 October 1999, there was a

great deal of criticism from much of the international community. However, Arab countries, including Jordan, refrained from denouncing the action, despite the concern in many Gulf countries that the coup would thwart Sharif's planned crackdown on Afghanistan's Taliban rulers.

### **RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

Jordan has abstained from condemning attempts by foreign governments to manipulate electoral processes and has always recognized the winners of elections in the region, even when the elections were widely viewed as flawed. Amman has not responded to pre-electoral malpractice abroad, but it has been willing to monitor elections in other countries. It participated in monitoring the 1996 legislative elections in Gaza in the Palestinian territories, as well as the 1993 elections in Cambodia.

Jordan's unwillingness to condemn manipulation of electoral processes is partly due to the fear that fair elections in an Arab country would lead to a sweeping victory by Islamic groups and thereby empower Jordanian Islamists. At a time when many countries were condemning Algeria's military-backed government for canceling the country's first free parliamentary elections (1992) to prevent a victory by the Islamic Salvation Front, Jordan accepted the situation, although not without comment from the King. A few days after the elections, Hussein told *Le Figaro* that he hoped the Arab world "will understand that it has to move toward democracy and the end of oppression," but added that religion should not be used as a political tool. "No one can pretend to monopolize the truth and Islam does not belong to a small group."<sup>2</sup>

King Hussein remained silent when Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak manipulated parliamentary elections in November and December 1995 to maintain a rubber-stamp assembly that could be trusted to re-elect him in 1999 for another six-year term. Throughout Egypt, police officers stuffed ballot boxes and harassed opposition candidates, human rights activists and election observers. Leaders of opposition parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested and



prosecuted before military courts for peaceful political activities while hundreds of their supporters were detained in the run-up to the election. The election was described as “the worst we have ever had in Egypt” by lawyer Negad el-Borai, secretary-general of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after the elections, Hussein called Mubarak, not to discuss elections in Egypt, but to exchange views on the Middle East peace process. Two days later, Hussein met with Mubarak to discuss the peace process and praised his role in “making peace and solving Arab problems.”

During that time, Hussein was undertaking his own campaign against opposition figures, arresting dozens of suspected members of Islamic and leftist groups opposed to the peace treaty with Israel. Scores of people were held in detention and frequently not told the charges against them. For example, Leith Shubeilat, president of the association of Jordanian engineers, was arrested on 9 December 1995 on charges that included lese-majesty after a speech the previous month in which he criticized King Hussein.

## **PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY**

The policy of the Jordanian government has been to participate actively in international fora on democracy, though it has not undertaken any initiatives on its own. In addition, Jordan’s commitment to the principles and agreements developed in these fora is often rhetorical, at best.

Jordan endorsed the Warsaw Declaration at the Community of Democracies ministerial conference in June 2000, and voted in favor of the 4 December 2000 UN resolution (A/RES/55/96) calling on states to promote and consolidate democracy. It has also ratified a number of important human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its First Protocol, the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights, and the Convention against Torture. In addition, Jordan has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, although with reservations that reflect Islamists’ interpretation of the Koran. Jordan is the only Arab country that has ratified the International Criminal Court (ICC) treaty, which is intended to hold accountable and bring to justice individuals responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

While Jordan has a good record of ratifying international human rights treaties, it also has a good record of breaching them. In the last few years, the

regime dissolved Parliament, postponed elections several times, and issued new laws expanding the scope and definition of “terrorism,” further restricting freedoms of expression. The “laws were promulgated by royal decree after [the attacks of] 11 September without passing through the Jordanian parliament...and came on the heels of additional new laws introduced in August 2001, limiting the rights of assembly and the right of political opponents to legal counsel.”<sup>4</sup>

While democracy has been practiced in the breach, it has been a rhetorical cornerstone of Jordan’s foreign policy. The speeches of the Jordanian monarchy are replete with references to democracy, freedom and human rights. In his address to the United Nations General Assembly on 22 October 1995, the late King Hussein referred to the plight of people “living under dictatorship and tyranny, deprived of freedom, democracy and human rights,” adding that it was “high time that the international community and the human conscience moved to lift their suffering.”<sup>5</sup> King Abdullah has continued along this rhetorical line; references to democracy are frequent in his speeches. Mostly, they revolve around claims about an internal democratization process in Jordan. There is an explicit allusion to democracy and human rights related to foreign policy that states that while Jordan cannot yet be considered a democracy, its “success on [the] democratic path” presents it “as a model for others to emulate.”<sup>6</sup> However it clearly affirms that Jordan believes non-democratic countries should democratize from within and that it does not intend to impose their experience on other nations.

Solicitation of donor assistance for democratization programs in Jordan is mainly carried out by nongovernmental organizations, many of which are affiliated with the royal family. Jordanian laws, however, prohibit research centers from soliciting funds from abroad except for specific activities approved by the government. This is further complicated by the fact that many Islamists in Jordan consider the donations as western attempts to control the country. The controversy reached a climax in September 2000 when Jordan’s journalists union expelled Nidal Mansur, the editor of the independent weekly Al-Hadath, for allegedly accepting foreign donations for his Center for the Defense of the Freedom of Journalists.

## **POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS**



Jordan has pursued a policy of appeasement toward undemocratic regimes, trying to maintain cordial relations.

The strategic position of Jordan as a small state surrounded by bigger and stronger countries weighs heavily on the Jordanian government, which has been building good relations with dictatorships in the Middle East. "Our relations with each Arab brethren state are based upon compassion, brotherhood, respect, trust, cooperation and non-interference with others' internal affairs," said King Abdallah at the opening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ordinary Session of Jordan's 13<sup>th</sup> Parliament in 1999.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to its geo-strategic position, Jordan's economic dependence on the countries of the region has made it unwilling to isolate dictatorships. Iraq, for example, is Jordan's primary source for fuel oil, and a special exception to UN sanctions permits it to continue buying oil from its neighbor. In return, Jordan exports humanitarian goods, which Iraq is allowed to buy. Another key factor underlying Jordan's relationship with Iraq is the risk that Palestinian anger toward Israel, and toward the West's treatment of Iraq, could turn quickly into hostility toward the regime.

Nonetheless, the late King Hussein at times criticized the Iraqi regime and supported efforts to change it. He permitted anti-Saddam media activities in Amman and welcomed Iraqi defectors in 1995. He hosted a prominent Iraqi defector, Lt. Gen. Hussein Kamel Hassan Majeed, Saddam Hussein's son-in-law, who later returned to Iraq only to be executed. There were, however, reports of forcible return of asylum seekers to Iraq where they were at risk of serious human rights violations.

Jordan and Libya have experienced decades of tense relations after Amman accused Tripoli of supporting Palestinians opposed to King Hussein. In March 2000, Jordan deported seven Libyan Islamists to Libya despite warnings by Amnesty International and other NGOs that their lives would be threatened. Relations have improved recently, and the two countries have exchanged high-level official visits and signed a cooperation agreement in 2000, which provides for Libyan financial assistance in bringing water from Southern Jordan to Amman.

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Jordan. The Hashemite Vision. 2 October 2002. <[http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/f\\_affairs4.html](http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/f_affairs4.html)>.

<sup>2</sup> AD-Doustour 28 January 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Marlowe, Lara. "Dying For Change; A Badly Flawed Election Will Not Ease the Spreading Conflict Between Mubarak And Rebel Muslims." Time 11 December 1995, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> "Jordan: New security measures violate human rights." Amnesty International. 2 October 2002. <<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/MDE160032002?OpenDocument&of=COUNTRIES>>.

<sup>5</sup> King Hussein of Jordan "Address to the United Nations General Assembly on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations," speech to the United Nations, 22 October 1995. <[http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/speeches\\_letters.html](http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/speeches_letters.html)>.

<sup>6</sup> Government of Jordan. About Jordan-Foreign Affairs - The Future is in the Balance- Democratization and Human Rights. 2 October 2002. <<http://www.kingabdullah.jo/about%5Fjordan/decoration%5Fhum.html>>.

<sup>7</sup> King Abdullah III of Jordan. "Opening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ordinary Session of the Jordanian 13<sup>th</sup> Parliament," speech to the Jordanian Parliament, 1 November 1999. <<http://www.jordanembassyus.org/HMKASpeech110199.htm>>. Address to the United Nations General Assembly on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations.