



Jordan

Last update:	19 October 2011
Author:	
Population:	6,508,271 (July 2011 est.)
Prime minister:	Awn Shawkat Al-Khasawneh (since October 2011)
President:	King Abdallah II (since February 1999)
Governemental type:	Constitutional monarchy
Ruling coalition:	-
Last election:	Parliamentary November 10, 2010
Next election:	Early parliamentary 2012
Sister parties:	None



During the last two years King Abdallah II has changed the government three times. The latest appointment of Awn al-Khaswaneh as the new Prime Minister was the result of increased dissatisfaction over the slow pace of reforms conducted by the dismissed government of Marouf Bakhit. The new Prime Minister has cordial ties with the opposition, including Jordan's powerful Muslim Brotherhood. Appointing Awn al-Khaswaneh, King Abdallah II called him to form a new government, to establish a constitutional court to review laws, to make a new electoral law his priority, and to launch a constructive dialogue with opposition figures. Analysts believe the measures undertaken by al-Khaswaneh could include decentralization, fighting corruption, giving more independence to parliament, and inviting the opposition into the government.

INTRODUCTION

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan holds a strategic location in the Middle East, sharing borders with Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Israel and the West Bank. Since Hussein bin Talal became King of Jordan in 1952 democratic institutions were introduced. After his death in 1999, Hussein's oldest son, Abdullah, succeeded the throne. In his position as Chief of State, Abdullah has followed a policy of continuing his father's paternalistic style of rule from a moderate, pro-West political viewpoint, claiming to gradually evolve the political landscape in Jordan from an autocratic state into a democracy with political pluralism. However, this notion is fiercely contested by the opposition, which regards the king's policies as anti-democratic and speaks of a deteriorating political situation. The extensive history of clans and tribes that traditionally comprise the majority in the parliament, the amended Political Parties Law that has raised the barriers to establish political parties, the controversial election law, and lack of freedom of press are among the main challenges that hinder a democratic reform in Jordan. At the same time, the protracted people's unrest against rising prices, corruption, and unemployment, inspired by the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and calling for the genuine constitutional reform, has challenged the Hashemite Monarchy's order.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL SITUATION

Jordan is a constitutional monarchy, and the laws are based on Islamic law and French codes. The constitution was first proclaimed on 8 January 1952, and has since been amended several times to meet the Kingdom's changing needs. The government consists of Chief of State (the King), the executive Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, and the legislative National Assembly with two chambers: the House of Deputies and the Senate.



The King

The King has the main power in Jordan and the monarch's function is hereditary. The monarch has the power to appoint the Prime Minister and the Senate, and dissolve the House of Deputies at any time. Furthermore, the King is not obliged to appoint a Prime Minister or form a government from either the majority party or the Parliament, and currently prefers to rely on his own loyal supporters instead. Besides, the King signs and executes all laws. He appoints and may dismiss judges by decree, approve amendments to the constitution, declare war, and command the armed forces. His veto power can only be overridden by a two-thirds vote of both houses of the National Assembly.

Current King Abdullah II [1999–present] is a son of King Hussein [1953–1990], who was the longest serving executive head of state in the world, governing the constitutional monarchy for 47 years until his death in 1999. King Hussein was disliked by his other fellow Arabs for his moderate, pro-Western stance, as he tried to combat internal radical nationalism with the help of the United States and Great Britain. Although Hussein was criticized for the new electoral law that led to the Islamic Action Front's boycott of the 1997 elections, yet he converted Jordan into a model state for the region, by building up a democratic state and raising living standards. During Hussein's governing Jordan was leading the Arab's peace process with Israel, which was sealed in 1994 by a partnership between Israeli Prime Minister Rabin and King Hussein. King Abdullah II has been challenged to continue the work of his father by investing in peace building; however, so far his reign has been a mixed success.

There has been sharp criticism levelled at Abdullah that he and his Jordanian regime restrict freedom of speech due to his amendment to the Jordanian Penal Code, to ensure the legislation of the punishment of all those who express dissent. Human rights organizations have criticized Abdullah and his regime for several human rights violations and acts of torture committed against Islamic radicals and those who express dissent and criticism over his policies. The 2011 people's unrest characterized by relatively peaceful demonstrations have challenged the power of the throne by calling, in particular, on the King to relinquish his power to appoint prime ministers and to provide the parliament with more functions.

The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister is appointed by the King and does not serve a fixed term. After the King's mandate, the Prime Minister has the highest executive role. The Prime Minister has one or two Deputy Prime Ministers under his lead and forms the Cabinet in consultation with the monarch. As Jordan lacks organized political parties which enjoy Parliamentary majorities or form coalition governments, the monarch usually picks up PMs out of people with distinguished records in the public life to form the cabinet.

During the last two years the King has changed the government three times. Samir Rifai was appointed as Prime Minister on 2 December 2009. In January 2011, following large popular street protests, organized by Islamic and leftist groups and inspired by similar demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt, Samir Rifai resigned from the government. The protesters accused PM Rifai of being insensitive to their economic hardships. Rifai was replaced by Marouf Bakhit, a former Prime Minister (2005–2007), who was also a prominent figure in the peace process between Israel and Jordan, which led to the 1994 peace treaty. However, his government failed to tackle a number of important domestic policy areas, including the organization of municipal elections that are due to be held in the end of 2011.

Recently (on 16 October 2011) Awn al-Khaswaneh, a former royal court chief and legal adviser to Jordan's peace negotiators, was appointed as Prime Minister.

The Senate

The Upper House (Majlis al-Ayan) forms one half of the national legislature, the other being the House of Deputies. The Senate consists of 60 seats, and members are appointed by the monarch from designated categories of public figures and long-serving politicians. The required age for membership is 40 years. The Senate advises the House of Deputies on general policies, and together the two chambers can curb the King's powers. It is in general a respected institute, with a large influence in the public domain. The Senate serves for a four-year term, and was lastly



renewed in November 2010. Current president of the Senate is Mr. Zeid Rifai.

The House of Deputies

The House of Deputies (the House of Representatives) is the only political organ that is directly elected by the Jordanian citizens through universal adult suffrage. It is elected for a 4 years term, unless the monarch dissolves it earlier.

From a total of 120 seats, 12 seats are reserved for women, 9 for Christians and 3 for Circassians, according to the newly enacted electoral law of 2010. The Parliament has the right to approve, reject or amend legislation proposed by the cabinet. However, it is limited in its ability to initiate legislation and it cannot enact laws without the assent of the senate. Most of the representatives in the house of deputies are not affiliated to a party. This is a result of the clan history of the country, combined with the long period in which political parties were illegal. Political parties were abolished in April 1957, following an alleged attempted coup by pan-Arab militants, and only in 1992, with the new Political Parties Law, did Jordan return to multi-party representation. Furthermore, the single-member-district system which was introduced in 1993 favours tribal and family ties over political and ideological affiliations. The current house of deputies consists of a majority of independent and tribal representatives and several MPs from the coalition of socialists and communists who secured their representation at the parliament through the women's quota. The Islamic opposition party, the Islamic Action Front, is not represented in the parliament due to its refusal to take part in the elections.

Electoral law

After a period of 22 years, in 1989 the first free elections were held in Jordan under King Hussein's rule. The official ban on political parties from 1957 remained, but candidates ranged ideologically from the extreme left to the extreme right. Most of these independent candidates formed loosely organized blocs. Analysts state that these blocs were predominantly organised along tribal and family ties, instead of along political or ideological affiliations. Nevertheless, Islamists won 22 out of 80 parliamentary seats in the 1989 elections, the fact that motivated the King to initiate a policy of electoral de-liberalization with the aim of decreasing the influence of Islamists on Jordan's politics. Thus, a new 2001 Election Law introduced a controversial 'one man, one vote' electoral system, known as 'single non-transferable vote system'. This system envisaged the redistribution of parliamentary seats, meaning that citizens vote for one candidate in their own district, with seats being awarded to the highest-polling individual candidates compatible with the number of seats in the district. The new Law also included some significant changes: it lowered the voting age from 19 to 18, it raised the number of parliamentary seats from 80 to 110, it reserved a quota of 6 seats for women, increased the number of constituencies from 21 to 44. All these changes were implemented during the elections in 2003 and in 2007.

The opposition harshly criticises the single non-transferable vote system, which is widely regarded as being disadvantageous to the development of political parties, as it tends to result in votes being cast for individual candidates or those who represent specific tribal groups in a district instead of those who stand for a specific political party platform. In those regions where tribal culture is dominant, voters tend to cast their vote for those candidates connected to their tribe or family.

New Electoral Law 2010

The new temporary electoral law, unveiled in May 2010 and designed to set the ground rules for the parliamentary elections of November 2010, was supposed to strengthen the political parties and to introduce proportional representation. However, it preserved the 'single non-transferable vote system' and also changed the current electoral districts to electoral "zones," each of which is broken down into multiple subdistricts. Among the minor changes, the law has increased the number of parliamentary seats to 120. The quota for women's representation increased from 6 to 12 parliamentary seats; nine seats were reserved for Christians and three more for Jordan's Circassians; and four more seats were added in major cities with large Palestinian population – Amman, Irbid, and Zarqa. The 2010 Electoral Law was implemented for the first time during the 2010 parliamentary elections.

The electoral law is currently under revision and is expected to be amended before the municipal elections of December 20, 2011 and to be implemented in the parliamentary elections of 2012. The 'single non-transferrable



vote system' is to be replaced with the proportional representation system. This system would create a new electoral culture because each voter will be able to pick a list of five candidates in his/her constituency. Newly appointed Prime Minister Awn al-Khaswneh was instructed by the King to make a new parliamentary election law a priority for the government and establish an independent council to supervise parliamentary elections.

Political Parties Law 2008

The Constitution is being amended at the moment and reforms in the Political Parties legislation are also anticipated. Recently King Abdullah said the key challenge is to create a political culture based on political party platforms – left, right or centre.

Under the current Political Parties Law each party must have at least 500 founding members from a minimum of 5 different governorates with equal representation, which is a significant increase compared to the previous law, which set the number of founders at 50, without any requirement concerning their place of residence within Jordan. Although new introductions, as government claims, furthermore paved the way for official funding to parties and were aimed at larger parties' consolidation and development, the changes have been criticised by the opposition. Most opposition parties were against the amendments to the old law, arguing that the new law would be detrimental to the development of the political party system in the country, as most parties would not be able to re-register. Indeed, surveys consistently show the increase of political apathy among Jordanians, which severely hinders the ability of parties to lure new members in order to comply with the new regulation.

On 15 April 2008, when all parties had to reregister with the Ministry of the Interior under the new regulations, it appeared that 23 out of 37 political parties had failed to meet the new requirements and, therefore, were officially considered dissolved. Amongst them, 17 parties, mostly of Pan-Arab and leftist inclinations, had ceased to exist altogether, while 6 merged into other parties. In 2011 only 14 political parties are registered. The opposition continues to voice its outrage over the new requirements.

Parliamentary elections 2010

On 10 November 2010 Parliamentary elections were held. The majority of seats went to loyalists and tribal-linked candidates likely to continue King Abdullah's pro-Western policies. The official results from the vote show 34 former deputies, including at least 20 cabinet deputies and former Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez, won seats. 78 politicians and businessmen new to Jordanian politics and loyal to the King also secured a seat in the parliament.

Female representation

13 female candidates won seats in the Parliament. Reem Badran, one of the elected women, was elected from a general constituency in the capital of Amman, and is now the second woman in Jordan to become MP defeating male candidates. Other female candidates were elected under the state-set quota for women. Only one woman was elected to Parliament in the 1989, 1993, and 1997 elections, and in 2003 and 2007 six women took the seats reserved for them by a 2003 Elections law.

Representation of opposition parties

Opposition parties failed to win a seat through direct competition, and only secured a representation in the parliament through the women's quota. A total of eight nominees from a coalition of opposition parties ran in the elections, representing the Hashed Party, Jordan Baath Party, the Jordan Communist Party and the National Unity Party. Only Abla Abu Olbeh, secretary general of Hashed Party, won through the women's quota after securing 10.2 per cent's of the vote in Amman's First District. She said the results were a "great disappointment" for opposition parties. The Islamic opposition party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), refused to take part in the elections citing concerns of rigging, the lack of political reforms, and a deficient election law, claiming that the 'single non-transferable vote system maintains discriminatory over-representation of the rural districts and under-representation of the urban areas, which, according to the IAF Secretary-General 'makes no point of elections'. Jameel Abu Baker, spokesperson of the Muslim Brotherhood, claimed that the Elections Law is to blame



for opposition figures' inability to enter the Parliament. "This is not a failure of party members, this is a failure of democracy and political reform," he said. Political analyst Fahed Kheitan said, however, the result was "expected" due to the candidates' lack of competitiveness. "Leftist candidates were not competitive in their districts and this is why they only managed to win through the quota system," he told reporters.

The results of the elections of 1989, 1993, 1997, 2003 and 2007 show a clear downfall in the representation of the IAF and the leftist, nationalist parties, reducing their representation in the Parliament to 'zero' after the 2010 elections. The highest share of parliamentary seats was obtained by IAF and leftist parties in 1989.

Reported violence

Fifty-three incidents of violence were reported across Jordan during the polling. In one of the post-election riots, a young man was shot dead and two others were wounded. Riots were mostly organised to protest the election results.

International observers

Yet despite the violence and the opposition boycott, Jordan's pro-Western government hailed the turnout which was set at 53 percent, which is however lower than the turnout in 2007 (54%) and the 2003 (58%) parliamentary elections. A preliminary report of the election released by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) called the elections "credible" and "a significant improvement for the Middle East", however it criticized Jordan electoral law. It highlighted that the international observer missions had reported that they were granted access to every level of the election administration, enabling them to successfully complete their mission. The U.S. government has praised the Jordanian people for exercising their constitutional right to elect a new Parliament and for welcoming international observer missions for the first time.

Latest developments

Popular uprisings 2011

On 14 January 2011 demonstrations broke out in Jordan. These been relatively small and peaceful in comparison with the revolts in other Arab countries. But, the protests, inspired by the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, have challenged the political status quo by calling for a political reform, limitation of the power of the throne and measures for the high unemployment, rising cost of living, and corruption. The protesters have also demanded the revision of the electoral law and free and fair elections. The most violent rally took place on 25 March, in which one person reportedly died and 60 people were injured. The protest of the 22nd of July among other demands called for the ouster of the government and its replacing with a unity government.

Expected political reform

Several steps have been taken by the Jordanian authorities in response to the demands of the demonstrators. In April 2011 the Royal Committee on Constitutional Review was appointed by the King within the aim to prepare the recommendations on the constitutional amendments. The establishment of the Committee and the King's speech on June 12, in which he promised to initiate constitutional changes, raised big hopes for political reform. A long-awaited package of proposed future constitutional amendments was unveiled in mid August (2011). Among the new implications it includes the creation of a high constitutional court and a new independent commission to oversee elections, a lowering minimum age for parliamentary candidacy from 35 to 25, a requirement that the cabinet resign within a week after the king dissolves parliament, and amendments to the Public Gatherings Law.

Another institution – the National Dialogue Committee – was also formed to work on the recommendations of the new reforms. The Committee, which comprises of representatives of political parties, professional associations, the economic sector, civil society, and youth and women's societies, was tasked with opening extended dialogues with all citizens to arrive at a consensus over legislation governing political reform, including the Electoral and the Political Parties laws. The set of the draft laws on elections, political parties and constitutional court, concluded by the Committee is to be submitted to the parliament for revision. For the Electoral Law amendments the National Dialogue Committee proposed two proportional representation lists at the levels of the governorate and nationwide as a substitution to the 'non-transferrable vote system'. At the plenary session of the 66th United Nations General Assembly in New York the King said that the Jordanian Parliament is currently putting the final touches on



amendments of the Constitution for ratification and called the creation of an independent constitutional court and an independent elections commission.

However, the proposed plans failed to satisfy the citizens' demand for a more representative government as they do not curb the king's core powers, appointing of the cabinet in particular, and no popular referendum is envisaged for the proposal approval. BBC's Dale Gavlak in Amman said Jordan's young activists want greater government accountability and new economic policies.

King dissolves the Government

On 16 October 2011 King Abdullah II dissolved Prime Minister's Marouf al-Bakhit cabinet and appointed Awn al-Khaswaneh, a former royal court chief and legal adviser to Jordan's peace negotiators, to form and lead a new government. Bakhit's cabinet was criticized for slow pace of reforms and failing to tackle a number of important domestic policy areas, particularly elaboration of a new electoral law.

New Prime Minister has cordial ties with the opposition, including Jordan's powerful Muslim Brotherhood. Appointing Awn al-Khaswaneh, King Abdullah II called him to form a new government, to establish a constitutional court to review laws, and to swiftly open dialogue with opposition figures who have grown dissatisfied with the pace of reforms. The analysts believe the measures undertaken by al-Khaswaneh could include decentralization, fighting corruption, giving more independence to parliament, and inviting the opposition into the government.

Among other changes, the head of the country's powerful intelligence agency, Gen. Mohammed Raqqad, has also been replaced as pro-reform activists accused him of trying to intimidate them from staging protests. Faisal Al Shoubaki was appointed to serve as a new head of the intelligence agency.

IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUES

Human rights

The international organization Freedom House rated the country in 2010 with a 2,8 on political and civil rights and a 2,4 on non-discrimination and access to justice, both on a scale from 1 to 5 (in which 1 represents the lowest level of freedom). Freedom House considers Jordan to be a partly free country. Reports of torture and other ill-treatment of security detainees and criminal suspects continue and the authorities failed to institute adequate legal and other safeguards against such abuses.

In 2011 Human Rights Watch recommended Jordan to enforce the legal protections for migrant domestic workers it has put in place over the past three years. New laws and regulations since 2008 give domestic workers the right to regulate working hours and a weekly day off, and criminalize people trafficking, but enforcement remains negligible. The death penalty is still in force in Jordan. Nine people were sentenced to death in 2010, according to Amnesty International's sources. In December 2010, Jordan abstained on a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on executions.

Women's issues

The first Arab Women's Union was founded in 1954, but became politically active only in 1974, when the women's right to vote was achieved. The Women's Union worked on taboo issues such as domestic violence, honour crimes, and discrimination against women. However, despite the efforts of King Abdullah, punishment for honour crimes is still relatively light.

The Election Law of 2003 introduced a quota for women of 6 seats and the 2010 Election law increased this quota to 12. The quota for women is an important step towards increased female political participation, however, now many women candidates emphasize messages of change, ending corruption, creating jobs and increasing women's rights, rather than relying simply on their identity as women to win seats mandated by the quota. In the 2010 parliamentary elections female candidates enjoyed record level of success by winning all 12 seats reserved for them. A woman candidate from Amman won her seat outside of the quota system by getting the largest number of votes in her district. Myassar Sardiya became the first Bedouin woman ever to be elected to parliament in Jordan. For the first time, small tribes took advantage of the quota system by selecting women candidates to represent them, which also had the effect of increasing support for women across Jordan.



An important struggle for women's right nowadays is the amendment of article 340 of the Jordanian penal code, which offers exemption or reduction of penalty in the case of family honour crimes. Regarding the Personal Status Law, temporary amendments introduced by the government, failed to address adequately discrimination against women, including failing to ensure sex-equality in joint financial or property settlements following divorce. The amendments raised the minimum marriage age for girls to 18, but allow exceptions so that in some cases girls as young as 15 can marry. Protesters have been demanding full rights for women and calling for gender equality.

Religious minorities

According to Minority Rights Group International, 92% of the Jordan citizens are Sunni Muslim (report of 2010). Next to the Sunni Muslim, there is a minority group of Christians (6%). The remaining 2% include Shia Muslims, Small Circassian Muslim, Baha'is and Druze. Christians are best represented in political life – they have the seats reserved in both the Lower and Upper Houses of Parliament, and regularly serve as cabinet ministers. The 1952 Constitution stipulates that the King and his successors must be Muslims and sons of Muslim parents. The state religion is Sunni Muslim. Jordan's Constitution guarantees freedom of religious beliefs and freedom to exercise all forms of worship, but the guarantee is provided if they do not violate public order or morality. Conversion from Islam is prohibited. The government does not recognize converts from Islam as falling under the jurisdiction of their new religious community's laws and continue to consider them Muslims.

Refugees and internally displaced persons

Jordan has gained the reputation of being a safe haven for many displaced persons. According to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, there are 2 million registered Palestinian refugees (data of December 2010). All Palestine refugees in Jordan have full Jordanian citizenship with the exception of almost 140,000 refugees originally from the Gaza Strip.

The Government estimates that between 450,000 and 500,000 Iraqis live in Jordan. However, only 46,500 are registered with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). 45 % of those registered are Sunni Muslim, 35 % are Shia Muslim and 125 are Christian. Other refugees and asylum seekers are from Somalia, Sudan, Syria.

Freedom of speech and media

The Jordanian media have traditionally been under tight state control. In 2010 Jordan ranked 120 out of 178 countries in the World Press Freedom Index. The government continues to own significant amounts of shares in the printed media, television and radio, even though the newspapers officially belong to the private sector. The most important magazines are 'The Opinion', 'People's Voice', 'The Constitution', and the English 'Jordan Times'.

All in all, Jordan made several improvements toward greater media freedom. The 2003 Audio Visual Law ended the government monopoly on broadcasting and the country's fifth private radio station aimed at local audiences was launched in 2010, all the radio stations worked together toward establishing an independent federation of community radio broadcasters. The clause that would have allowed warrantless police searches at online media outlets was dropped from the law on internet.

But still many concerns regarding the freedom of speech and media remain. The core of the problem is that censorship does not exist formally in Jordan and sometimes it is difficult to define what should be said and what should be not. Government authorities still practice a form of informal censorship upon the diverse media in Jordan. Among other concerns are the recent court decisions to ban coverage of a corruption trial, that the government controls the appointments of the editors at some news outlets, and that the television remains under state control. However, the access to satellite television and other international media is generally not restricted. Although laws were enacted to ensure greater press freedom, journalists are still prosecuted for expressing their opinion or for comments considered insulting of the king and the royal family. The talks about the monarchy, religion, the state institutions are all 'red lines' that journalists should not cross – the Press and Publication Law introduced a fine of almost ,000 for speech that denigrates the government or religion. Still, Jordan's freedom of expression record is generally considered most open in the region. Although some critics of the king are prosecuted, they frequently are pardoned.

The Internet has opened up possibilities to share information and the government supports access to the internet, but many websites are blocked, particularly independent news portals. About 500 websites reportedly remained



blocked in 2010. The internet usage reached 38 percent of the population (2/3 of the users are males under the age of 30) in 2010. It is also a very helpful mean for women's associations.

Corruption

Corruption is a profound problem in Jordan's economy. The Corruption Perception Index 2010 of Transparency International marks a decline compared to 2009, with Jordan having a mediocre score of 4.7 (5.0 in 2009) on a scale from 0 'highly corrupt' to 10 'highly clean'. Jordan holds the 50th place out of 163 countries. With this rate Jordan scores better than countries such like Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia, and is above its Arab neighbours, with the exception of Israel.

Jordan possesses two anti-corruption organizations: the Higher Committee to Fight Corruption, established in 2000 by royal decree, and the Anti-Corruption Directorate, a branch of the intelligence service. Jordan has been praised for maintaining a fair standard of transparency in public tenders under a World Bank sponsored privatisation effort in 2001. However, major banking scandals in early 2002 tarnished the reputation of the country when dozens of prominent businessmen obtained sizeable loans without collateral. Some even accused the Anti-Corruption Directorate of involvement. A thorough inquiry followed, but few convictions resulted.

On 27 September 2011 the House of Deputies endorsed the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) draft law that allows heavy fines for publishing information on corruption (from ,000 to ,600). The analysts say the act comes in contradiction with the reform efforts called by the King as it undermines the freedom of press and diminish the anti-corruption role of media – a key player in fraud exposing. The draft law will have to be also approved by the Senate before it is submitted to the King for endorsement. The journalists have called on the upper chamber not to approve the draft.

Jordan's relation with the United States

Jordan has always had strong ties with the United States (U.S.); it is partly the reason why its territory is still intact. The peace process with Israel and Jordan's opposition to terrorism indirectly assist U.S. interests. Since 1952, the U.S. has provided Jordan with economic assistance totalling more than billion for different economic programs that strengthened the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Jordan. However, the political opposition stands for the decrease of American influence on Jordan economic and political life. The nationalist, leftist and Islamist parties generally comprise of coalition of parties that oppose American intervention in internal governmental affairs, whereas they support interaction with Western civil society institutions. The popular rally against Jordan's relationship with the US, in which a replica of the American flag was burnt, gathered nearly 400 protesters in the streets of Amman this summer (22nd of July 2011).

Economy and Economic dependency

Jordan's economy has slightly slowed down since 2008 (3,1% of GDP growth in 2010 in comparison to 7,6% in 2008). The unemployment rate has decreased to 12,5% in 2010 from 12,9% in 2009, although unofficial statistics claims it approaches 30%. Although Jordan's economy has been relatively growing faster than its neighbouring countries, in December 2010 the inflation has risen by 1.5% to 6.1%, poverty have become rampant estimated at 25%, and the budget deficit reached billion. Jordan has insufficient supplies of water, oil, and other natural resources, which makes the government to heavily rely on foreign assistance.

Since 1967, when the West bank was occupied, Jordan's future existence was heavily threatened. But, due to subsidies from the U.S. and help from Arab neighbours, Jordan recovered from the loss of the West bank. Subsidies from the United States, neighbouring countries and the IMF are needed to secure a progressing Jordan wealth system, but due to the slow pace of political and economic liberalization the proceedings from foreign aid have significantly shrunk in recent years.

King Abdullah, since his advent to power in 1999, has implemented several significant economic reforms, such as opening the trade regime, privatizing state-owned companies, eliminating fuel and agricultural subsidies, and starting the series of tax overhauls. The aims to eliminate the structural unemployment have yet to be reached. The global economic slowdown immensely impacted Jordan's export-oriented sectors, making the budget deficit relatively high – 7% of GDP in 2010. However, the country's financial sector remained almost intact due to its limited exposure to overseas capital markets.



European Neighbourhood Policy

In November 1995, Jordan materialized their relation with European countries in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, and established a policy, with ambitious and long-term objectives, which has become known as the Barcelona process. Among the objectives were: the creation of an area of peace and stability based on the principles of human rights and democracy, the creation of an area of shared prosperity and the improvement of mutual understanding between the partners. After the success of the Barcelona agreement, Europe saw the chance to enlarge cooperation with Jordan in 1997, by creating an Association Agreement, in line with the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The Association Agreement, which came into force in 2002, prepares the ground for North-South trade, sustainable economic growth within Jordan, and sets as a plan the creation of a free trade area before 2014. For the Jordan government, cooperation with Europe is welcomed for the economic possibilities, yet their relation with the U.S. remains to be more important due to the bilateral programs of financial assistance and peace cooperation.

In its evaluation of the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy of 23 April 2009, the European Commission praises the progress that is made in Jordan so far, and the positive role the country plays in bringing stability in the region. The EC greets the progress made in the fight against corruption with the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Commission in January 2008 and the adoption of an Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2008-2012, the progress made in the field of transparency and accountability, and in improving the business environment. However, the EC also remains highly critical of the state of democracy in the country and social policies, calls for greater reforms regarding the rights of women and for more freedom of association and freedom of expression.

In October 2010 Jordan and the European Union agreed on the ENP Action Plan, under which the Kingdom enters into an "advanced status" partnership with the EU to be based on the objective of promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the EU neighbourhood, and building on the core values, such as rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights. Catherine Ashton, the EU high representative, called Jordan an increasingly significant regional actor and 'a key interlocutor for the European Union in the Middle East'.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Political party life has developed since the new Political Party Law of 1992, when parties were allowed again after an impasse of 30 years. A ban leaving the Communists and the Islamists out of politics was lifted in 1991. Both parties have been strongly represented in the parliament since then. Political branches became more various than the old traditional political parties in the 1950s. Concerning the leftist oriented parties in Jordan, most of them originated from the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which were present on the Jordanian scene, however, many failed to continue political activity after the Political Parties Law of 1992 that prohibited political parties. Some leftist parties are still Leninist or Marxist in their orientation, whilst others have moved away from sheer communist thoughts, some evolving into social democratic parties.

On September 2011 there are only 14 registered parties which is a significant decrease in comparison with previous years (e.g. in 2003 there were 30 registered parties). Most parties still adhere to traditional Islamist, pan-Arabist, centrist and conservative orientations. Of these the most influential are:

The Islamic Action Front

Leader: Jabhat al-'Amal al-Islami

This party (IAF) was founded in 1992, at the very beginning of the renewed political party life in Jordan. It is the country's largest party, and since 92% of the Jordan population is Sunni Muslim, it relies on a large grassroots support. The party has always had strong ties with the Muslim Brotherhood, the only political segment that was operating legally during the period of martial law. The Islamic Action Front's principles are equal to those articulated in the Islamic law: the Sharia. Since its foundation it has always had many seats in the parliament, except for 1997, when they boycotted the elections. In 2006 a massive fragmentation of the IAF took place, which led to internal divisions. During the parliamentary elections in 2003, the party gained 18 out of 110 seats, in 2007 - 6 out of 110. IAF did not get any seats in the 2010 election as it boycotted the elections calling for the abolishment of 'one man, one vote' electoral system. The party maintains its social basis and influence in the professional associations and university councils.



National Constitutional Party

Leader: Ahmed al-Shunag

Founded in 1997, this centrist party aims to stress that national belonging is not restricted to any particular group, region or ethnicity. Yet they do think Jordan is an indivisible part of the Arab nation, and that the Arab unity is a firmly established reality for the protection of the nation and the guarantee for its development. In this the Islam can play a significant role, yet democracy will be their method to strive for the sovereignty of the people. The party had 2 seats in the parliament of 1997–2001.

The Islamic Center Party

Leader: Marwan al-Fauri

This party, more moderate in its ideological position than the IAF, was founded recently in 2001. It includes former members of the IAF as well as independent Islamists. The party believes in dialogue as the basis of political activity within the party and in political and ideological pluralism.

Jordanian Democratic Popular Unity Party

Leader: Sa'ed DIAB

The party was formed in 1993 and proclaims socialism and liberation of Palestine as its strategic goals. The party fights against religious, sexual, racial, ideological, tribal or regional discrimination in Jordanian society and stands for deepening the progressive social content of the social revolution, especially gender equality and release of women from social and legal oppression.

Arab Baath Party (Socialist/ Progressive)

Leader progressive: Fu'ad Dabbour

Leader socialist: Taysir al-Himsi

Established in 1950s, the party was strongest in Syria and Iraq. The party split into two competing branches, as it was re-formed in 1993. The Baath Party was from the beginning a secular Arab nationalist party. This ideological branch advocates pan-Arab nationalism and Arab unity. The party's economic dogma "Unity [Arab], Freedom [from colonialism], and Socialism" are still the keywords. "Unity" refers to Arab unity, "freedom" emphasizes freedom from foreign control and interference in particular, and "socialism" refers to what has been termed Arab Socialism rather than to Marxism. The party held 1 seat in the parliament of 1997–2001.

Jordanian United Front

Leader: Amjad al-MAJALI

The party was established in 2007 and sets as its objective preserving the sovereignty of the country in line with the directions of the King, safeguarding the national Arab identity of the state, achieving the political pluralism, justice and equality for all Jordanians, freedom of expression, and acknowledging the political rights for women in line with Jordanian constants stemmed from the Jordanian Constitution.

National Current Party

Leader: Abd al-Hadi al-MAJALI

The party was founded in 2009 and emphasizes strengthening the values of national belonging, political loyalty, equality, moderation, and tolerance as its goals. The party stands for a greater political reform via developing governance mechanisms. National unity is stressed as the main objective.

Jordanian Democratic People's Party (The Hashed Party)

Leader: Ablah al-ULBAH

The party was formed in 1989, when the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine separated their branch in Jordan to become a separate party. The party promotes as its goals enhancing democracy that is based on partisan,



political and intellectual pluralism and which allows the circulation of executive power, organizing and mobilizing the working class and protecting its interests and rights, equality between women and men, as well as safeguard women's rights.

Communist Party of Jordan
Leader: Munir Hamarana

The party was founded in 1948. Its ideology is Communism and Marxism–Leninism. The party faced harsh repression from the Jordanian state in 1950s, when its leader was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. In 1953 the party was banned but continued to work in clandestine until 1993, when it was officially licensed. Meanwhile, the Party participated in the elections through the National Front in created in 1954.

The Hashed Party, Jordan Baath Party, the Jordan Communist Party and the National Unity Party formed a coalition to participate in the 2010 parliamentary elections, but failed to win any seats.

The only leftist oriented party that had an observer status in the Socialist International was the Jordanian Democratic Left Party, which was dissolved in 2009. Its leader was Hizb al–Yasar al–Dimuqrati.

Other registered parties

Call Party
Leader: Mohammed Abu BAKR
The party was founded in 2010.

Jordanian National Party
Leader: Mona Abu BAKR

Life Party
Leader: Thaher 'Amrou

Message Party
Leader: Hazem QASHOU

National Movement for Direct Democracy
Leader: Mohammed al–Qaq

BIOGRAPHIES

Awn Shawkat Al–Khasawneh
Prime Minister

Awn Shawkat Al–Khasawneh is Jordan's Prime Minister since 17 October 2011. He is current deputy chief of the Hague–based International Court of Justice, serving already his second term there. Previously Al–Khasawneh, a liberal, held senior legal posts in the Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1980–1990), was Legal Adviser to the Jordanian delegation to the peace negotiations between Israel and Jordan (1991–1994), and served as Chief of the Royal Hashemite Court (1996–1998).

Abdullah II bin al–Hussein
King

Abdullah II bin al–Hussein, born on 30 January 1962, is the reigning King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. He ascended the throne on 7 February 1999 after the death of his father King Hussein.



European Forum
for Democracy and Solidarity

King Abdullah is of half-British and half-Hashemite descent. He was decreed Crown Prince on 24 January 1991. Given his mixed heritage, this was a contested decision. Nevertheless, Abdullah, who claims to be the 43rd generation descendant of the prophet Muhammad, became King Abdullah II, and is continuing the work of his father by investing in peace building. In 2010, King Abdullah was chosen as the 4th most influential Muslim in the world. King Abdullah is married to Queen Rania of Jordan and they have four children.