

Monarchical Pluralism or De-democratization: Actors and Choices in Jordan

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the purpose of democratization in Jordanian politics is not only a political co-optation policy to cope with the negative effects of the country's economic recession, but also to ensure the survival of the Hashemite monarchy. The process of democratization in the region has been closely tied with the notions of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. This is due to 'incomplete' national identity-building formation in most parts of the Middle East. For that particular purpose, the main objective of this paper is not to re-assert the uniqueness of politics in the Arab world, but rather to engage in how politics of regime survival in the case of Jordan shape the process of democratization in the post – 1989 era. Thus this paper will examine the period following the normalization of relations with Israel in 1994, the Palestinian question, the repercussions of current social upheavals in the Arab world, and how these specific circumstances affect Jordan's democratic opening.

Given the nascent democratization efforts of the Hashemite Kingdom that have been underway since 1989, the case of Jordan epitomizes one of the most striking examples of the Arab world in demonstrating the case of *controlled* and/ or *defensive* liberalization. The demographic imbalance, 'ethnic' division, and processes of identity-building constitute the main local dynamics in circumscribing and mostly restricting democratization efforts of the Hashemite regime particularly in the post 1994 era. The peace process with Israel since 1994 pushed the regime to take pre-emptive measures in coping with the growing opposition in resisting normalization of relations with Israel. In this respect, at the first stage i.e. the years between 1989 and 1993 – the regime inaugurated the necessary laws to abolish political repression. However, at the second stage of political liberalization, the period after

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1993, the Kingdom began to pursue a policy of *controlled* liberalization in the name of regime-survival strategy, which became clearly apparent with the re-formulation of the electoral law in 1993. Similarly, Jordan has found it difficult to handle the imperatives of the state and the preferences of its society in the aftermath of the Al-Aqsa *intifada* (Second Palestinian *intifada*). The regime has sought to de-liberalize the political landscape through re-defining the demarcations of a Jordanian citizen under the “Jordan First, Arab Second Campaign” particularly in the aftermath of Amman Bombings in 2006.

Looking at the emergence of the current social upheavals in the Arab world, the Kingdom demonstrates an exceptional case in the region in coping with the growing opposition in the name of more political and economic reforms. In this respect, the incomparable position of the Kingdom – as compared to Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya – is derived from the discourses and the demands the protestors articulated in the rallies. When the effects of the Arab Spring and the public

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rallies in Jordan are taken into consideration, it is evident that the case of Jordan is dissimilar to Egypt or Tunisia. The reason behind this dissimilarity derives from the criticism of the public demonstrations which were not directed against the very *existence* of the monarchy, but rather organized on the grounds of demands

for more political freedom and problem of unemployment. In brief, Jordan symbolizes one of the main examples of the Arab Spring in the region where the ‘protestors ask little’¹ and did nothing to end the monarchical rule.

Under the effects of demographic imbalance and regional challenges, Jordan is being urged to pursue two vital and at the same time controversial necessities. On the one hand, the durability and longevity of the monarchy is highly dependent on the viability of future democratic reforms, and on the other hand, the Kingdom’s regime-survival approach necessitates retreat from political reformation.

Thus, first, this article aims to explore the efforts of political liberalization in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan by formulating the main local and regional determinants behind this very process. Second, this article will articulate the impacts of these determinants on Jordan’s ongoing democratization endeavor. In addition, the article will analyze the trends towards democratization in Jordan with a specific reference to the opportunities and the pitfalls of democratization in re-addressing the role and future position of the main opposition in the country – the Muslim Brotherhood Society (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*). The reason behind these objectives derive from the main character of the political wing of the

Ikhwan, i.e. the Islamic Action Front (IAF, *Jabha al-Amal al-Islami*) – which is imperative to demonstrate the implications of growing Jordanian Islamist activism on the processes of regime-led political reformation.

From an ‘Old Style’ Monarchical Authoritarianism to a ‘Newly Constructed’ Monarchical Pluralism

The political history of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan – as a separate entity – dates back to 1921 when British Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill raised the issue of establishing a *corridor* emirate between the Arab world and Palestine that would continue to assist the Hashemites to fulfill their *incomplete* Arab nationalist goals. Given the long-standing historical ties that have bound both Palestinian and Transjordanian territories, political and socio-economic aspects of Jordan would be then overlapped with that Palestinian struggle for national liberation.

Established as a British mandate on Palestinian lands, the Emirate of Transjordan (later Jordan) was created, and is the ‘most’ artificial entity in the Arab Middle East.² Given that Jordan was *not* the ancestral land of the Hashemite family, the Jordanian state as well as its nation-building processes has been considerably precarious.³ The precarious position of Jordan – since the very beginning – has been stimulated by the incorporation of the West Bank Palestinian territories in 1950, which led the country to acquire the name of Jordan – through the merging of the two sides of the River. Because Palestinians and Jordanians both live on the same land, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is considered to be a *bi-national* society. The Palestinian presence is due to the huge Palestinian influx following the Arab-Israeli wars and the presence of a population of Palestinian descent, which today comprise the majority of the entire population.⁴ Although the Jordanian monarchy has launched the policy of *controlled* integration of Palestinian-Jordanians (or the West Bank Palestinians) into the prevailing system⁵, with measures such as, detaching the word ‘Palestine’ from official documents and misrepresenting people of Palestinian descent and restricting them to gain political power, it has backfired. Eventually, this strategy has led Palestinian-Jordanians to call for reform and seek more public space for political contestation.

Actors and Their Choices in Shaping Jordanian Processes of Political Liberalization

The Palestinian-Jordanians

Someone can argue ‘why did Jordan not formulate its political system on the basis of equal representation of Palestinian-Jordanians and Jordanian-Jordani-

ans?’ The answer is actually very simple. Establishing a Jordanian state on the grounds of a *democratically* inspired power-sharing mechanism could introduce the debate through the framework of ‘Jordan is Palestine’ and ‘Palestine is *in reality* Jordan.’ Although the Kingdom pursued the policy of *hybrid* Jordanian identity-formation, based on the assumption that “Jordanians and Palestinians derive from the same familial bonds and form one *Arab nation*”⁶ following the unification of the two Banks in 1950, the *Bedouins* (East Bank Jordanians) have been considered as the native population of Jordan.⁷ The devastating effects of

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the civil war were detrimental in reshaping the policies and the approach of the throne toward the Palestinian national movement in the post – 1971 era.⁸ Due to the existence of the Palestinians’ quest for a viable, sovereign state, the Kingdom’s politics of identity – specifically under King Hussein’s rule – was obscurely centered

on the political rhetoric of *Jordan is Palestine*.⁹ However, Israeli Likud Party’s discourse on the basis of ‘there is no need to set up a sovereign state of Palestine, Jordan is Palestine,’ led the Kingdom to devise a new policy towards Palestine on July 31, 1988, *inter alia*, i.e. disengagement from the West Bank territories.

Severing ties with the West Bank, therefore, represented a watershed in Jordanian political history, as it was closely associated with Jordan’s threat perception posed by the Israeli state to its *very* existence in the region. The Hashemite Kingdom suddenly gave up the rhetoric of ‘Jordan is Palestine’¹⁰ replacing it with ‘Jordan is Jordan.’ Moreover, the outbreak of the first Palestinian *intifada* in 1987 did not only alarm the country with an increase in popular discontent in the form of a pro-Palestinian stance, but also could damage Jordan’s capability to cope with public outcry against regime’s policy with respect to Palestinian-Jordanians in the near future. To contain the growing Palestinian dissent and protests in Jordan, King Hussein launched a series of political reforms as a regime-survival strategy.¹¹

Thus, the goal of disengaging itself from Palestine can be seen in a larger framework of building a more ‘Jordanized’ and less ‘Palestinianized’ Jordan. To do so, Jordan dissociated itself from the ideals of supra-state Arabist loyalty and its commitment to Palestinian liberation.”¹² All these facets of the tension between Jordan’s *Palestinian population* and its desire to establish itself with a clear *Jordanian identity* explain why the Jordanian regime did not opt to formulate its political mechanism on the grounds of consociational democracy.

Democratization Trends & Election Politics in Jordan: Preferences and Obstacles

The trend toward political liberalization goes back to 1989. Analysts have viewed this choice by Jordan as a regime-survival strategy of the monarchy. Moreover, the democratic opening during the late 1980s was for the most part connected to the economic crises. Thus, the regime's policy of liberalization in the post-1989 era had a dual purpose. It was not only a strategy of co-opting Palestinian-Jordanians, but it was also a pre-emptive measure to contain the popular discontent among Jordanian-Jordanians. As Glenn Robinson argues; political reforms launched after 1989 are largely tied to the maintenance of internal stability and regime survival.¹³ Likewise Laurie Brand posits to a similar approach on Jordanian democratic transition in which it can be defined as a state-led process "aged from above, part of a strategy intended to ensure the continuation of the monarchy."¹⁴

The political parties in Jordan had been banned in 1957 immediately after the Abu Nuwwar Plot, which was aimed to overthrow the monarchy during the heydays of Arab nationalism in the region. After 35 years, the regime-sponsored the National Charter, which was inaugurated in 1992, it permitted a pluralist political space with legalized political parties in Jordan. Jordanian political groups have afterwards been granted the opportunity of public contestation and the ability to run in the subsequent 1993 elections. Nevertheless, the Kingdom accomplished its goal of monarchial pluralism by launching a political opening. Hence, this very process of monarchial survival led to the empowerment of political parties and the opposition groups in the country. One of the fundamental groups crystallizing and strengthening its role of opposition has been the political wing of the *Ikhwan*, the Islamic Action Front (IAF).

In this context, one of the major legal instruments of the Kingdom's regime-survival strategy was the amendment of the electoral law. The electoral law of Jordan – which is still in force – was implemented in 1993. It allocates the seats in accordance with proportional representation on the grounds of twelve governorates. With religious communities in Jordan represented by 92 percent Muslim, 6 percent Christian, and 2 percent Shiite Muslim and Druze,¹⁵ the public debates on Jordanian demographic structure and representation of these groups has been built on the *limited* and inadequate portrayal of Palestinian-Jordanians in the national politics.

Following the disengagement from Palestinian lands, in 1989 the Kingdom re-formulated the electoral law disassociating West Bank seats, previously allocated to the Lower Chamber, and restoring these seats to the East Bank districts. In redrawing the electoral districts, the Kingdom saw the necessity to devise the electoral law on the basis of proportional representation where the majority

of the seats have been assigned to those provinces predominately populated by *native* Jordanians (i.e. East Bankers) at the expense of citizens of Palestinian descent.¹⁶ Jordan's first electoral law – formulated in 1928 – stipulated that the appointment of electoral constituencies should be based on geographical divisions rather than proportional representation. In the aftermath of the annexation of the West Bank, this law was revised to incorporate Palestinian lands. In responding to internal unrest triggered by the economic crisis of 1988 – 89, the updated Jordanian electoral law was devised based on the formula of 80 seats from 20 electoral constituencies.¹⁷ As Russell Lucas indicates;

“Under the distribution of the seats in the 1989 amendments, Christians, Circasians, Chechens, and Bedouins were again all overrepresented in comparison to their proportion of Jordan's population... Given the malapportioned distribution of seats in geographically determined constituencies, the factor in determining the makeup of the Parliament elected in 1989 was the fact that voters were able to cast multiple votes under an open-list plurality system... a Muslim voter in Irbid could select up to *eight* Muslim candidates and one Christian.”¹⁸

The opposition candidates had the opportunity to run in the parliamentary elections held in 1989. In this period, the lack of multi-party campaigns actually benefited the Muslim Brotherhood Society rather than the pro-regime protagonists allowing the Islamists to acquire 34 seats – 26 of them Muslim Brotherhood candidates – in the Lower Chamber. Following the legalization of political parties in 1992, the Kingdom amended the electoral law in 1993. It replaced the formula of multiple votes by a “one-person one-vote” formula, as a response to the victory of the Islamists in the 1989 elections. In this regard, the main group who resisted the amendment of the electoral law was the Muslim Brotherhood and its political wing, the IAF. Given that the IAF has been legalized with the inauguration of the National Charter in 1992, since then the Front represented inarguably not only the symbol of opposition, but also the leading party of Jordan having the largest organizational and ideological base.¹⁹

Given the legalization of the political parties in Jordan, the 1993 parliamentary elections was the first *litmus* to test its trend toward democratization. The Kingdom has sought to amend the electoral law immediately holding the national elections, which gained criticism from the opposition, the Front in particular. The Abdul Hadi Majali government devised the new electoral law, which was then known as ‘Majali's Law.’ Meanwhile, 16 out of 22 political parties including the IAF, leftists, and Arab nationalists – all decided to boycott the elections if the government approved the law. The key impetus for the government to devise a new law was mainly derived from the fear of the monarchy that the



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peace rivals, i.e. Islamists and the Palestinians might lead the new parliament. Unlike in the 1989 elections, where the voters could cast as many votes as the number of seats in their districts, the new law gave one vote for each district, i. e. *one man – one vote*.²⁰ As the tribal linkages and the communal affiliations are important in Jordan's political culture, each voter would then vote in favor of his/ her own tribal candidate instead of casting their votes for an ideological or political party. The winners of this new electoral formula would definitely be the independent and tribal candidates in the eyes of the regime. According to Tahir al-Masri – a former prime minister of the Kingdom of Palestinian descent – the regime's main strategy in devising a new law was associated with curbing ideological affiliations and to undermine the role of Islamists at the eve of peace making with Israel.²¹ In this context, the most striking outcome of the electoral law was its instrumental ability to empower pro-regime loyalists and tribal candidates in the forthcoming legislature.

The results of the 1993 elections allowed the IAF to become the largest political party in Jordan, winning 16 seats in the Lower Chamber.²² However, the new election formula had weakened the Islamists and favored the independent tribal candidates. Among 80 seats, independents were allotted 45 seats in the legislature. The 1993 elections and the new electoral law has clearly illustrated

that the regime was caught between two significant trends; i.e. the trend toward democratization had begun to be considered as an anti-thesis to the trend toward normalizing ties with Israel.

Given the relative decline of popular support in the 1993 elections, the IAF boycotted the 1997 parliamentary elections on the ground that the prevailing ‘controversial law’ undermined their position in the Lower Chamber. Based on the assessment of the Director of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies Oraib al-Rantawi, “it [election boycott of 1997] was the first protest of the Front against the controversial election law, they were optimistic to change the law.”²³ Likewise, the former head and one of the current leaders of the IAF, Zaki Ben Irsheid evaluates the electoral boycott of the Front in 1997 as: “The Kingdom at first wanted to see the Ikhwan and the Front as balancing the Arabist and leftist forces in the country, but this perception of the throne has changed afterwards.”²⁴ Then the 1997 parliamentary elections resulted in bringing independent and tribal candidates to the legislature, which was also conducted under the 1993 electoral law.

Although the forthcoming elections in the country were supposed to be held in 2001, King Abdullah II postponed the elections due to the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Palestinian *intifada*. Looked at from this perspective, the Kingdom of Jordan opted to freeze the ongoing political opening by re-formulating the electoral law and revising the Political Parties Law and Press and Publications Law in 1998 and later on postponing the elections to an unspecified date in 2001.²⁵

A Stalemate Process: The Regime’s Reponses to Regional Challenges

In responding to regional challenges, the Jordanian regime has sought to *re-construct* its regional approach in the post-2000 era. One major solution was King Abdullah’s stress on restoring relations with Palestinian-Jordanians by articulating a *two-state solution* for the settlement of the Palestinian problem. The main divergence between King Abdullah II and his father King Hussein over Palestine was Abdullah’s objective to diminish any kind of internal unrest through a ‘Jordan First, Arab Second’ campaign and policy of containing any source of domestic opposition. From this view-point, King Abdullah’s politics of re-forming Jordanian identity is two-fold: shifting Jordanian domestic agenda away from Palestine and debates over Palestinian identity and *intifada* and as corollary to this policy re-constructing a *watani* (territorial) *identity* to move beyond the supra-national identities in the form of Arabism and Islam.

Nevertheless, Jordan has historically embraced both *Arabist* and *Islamist* loyalties to unite West Bankers and the East Bankers during the early years of

independence; distinguishing the Palestinian element from the Jordanian ‘newly formulated’ interests would allow the regime to redefine the meaning and the scope of how to be a *pure* Jordanian *loyal* national. King Abdullah’s assessment regarding the post-*intifada* period can be summarized as:

“...The Jordanian position has been made very, very clear that we do not accept an exodus of Palestinians out of the West Bank into Jordan. Firstly, it is detrimental to the Palestinian cause. If there are no Palestinians in the West Bank, how can they secure a future homeland for themselves? And again the limitations of Jordan – it is not just the economy – it comes simply down the amount water that Jordan can provide its citizens and so any increase of numbers or exodus from the West Bank into Jordan is a red line for our country.”²⁶

During this period, King Abdullah underlined the need to refer to the Jordanian *watani* identity and use it as a symbol to counter the *Arabist* and *Palestinianness* identities, which expressed themselves in the form of anti-Israeli public outcry. In line with this policy, a step forward in the direction of re-constructing Jordanian identity was exemplified by the ‘Jordan First, Arab Second Campaign (*al-Urdun Awal*)’ launched in October 2002. The fundamental objective of *al-Urdun Awal* was to re-construct the very definition and limits of Jordanian identity via consolidating the Jordanian *watani* identity. In other words, the Campaign offers a state-led project to strengthen the *national unity* and preferences on the East Bank territories. In this sense, the Jordan First motto is in parallel with the ‘East Bank First’ trend of Transjordanian nationalists adopted in the aftermath of the civil war dating back to the early 1970s. However, the “Jordan First” idea is not entirely associated with the East Bank First trend given the change in policy direction, as the Kingdom had given up on its official claims on Palestine, i.e. the West Bank territories. The Campaign embraces the following ideas:

“A working plan that seeks to deepen the sense of national identity among citizens where everyone acts as partners with the Kingdom... Jordan is for all Jordanians and we appreciate the role of the opposition when it is for the interest of Jordan and its political development and when it works to improve citizens’ standards of living and developing Jordan.”²⁷

Meanwhile, the minister of Planning, Bassam Awadallah, stated that, “... new national motto is meant to encourage candidates and voters to concentrate on ... domestic change, rather than focusing the whole debate and spending all energies on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Iraq crisis.”²⁸

The Jordan First campaign was thus aimed to make Jordanian identity more *Jordanized*, less *Palestinianized* as well as less *Arabized*. In this regard, as Curtis Ryan suggests, some movements among the domestic opposition, including the secular left and religious right, have come to be perceived as *un-Jordanian* in the eyes of the ruling elite. In view of this policy, the regime has sought not to foster nationalism, but to *contain* the growing opposition of its population of Palestinian descent, the growing impact of Islamist activism and East Bankers by disassociating the internal political agenda from the supra-national Arabist and Islamist discourses. The detachment of the Islamist supra-state goals has become an integral part of the regime's agenda, specifically after the 'US war on terror' strategy in the post – September 11th era.

At this very moment, King Abdullah's "Jordan First" campaign can be regarded as more of a "Security First" approach to counter-balance the dissemination of supra-state and supra-national elements in the domestic agenda of Jordan. The key pillars in the Campaign's official document clearly demonstrate 'how far Jordan First initiative is a national re-construction project.' For instance, one of the pillars in the Campaign asserts the social and political integration of *all* Jordanians – irrespective of their ethnic or religious background. Under "Jordan First," the regime re-assures its population of Palestinian descent of their legal status and their rights. Given that all Jordanian citizens have the same rights under the Constitution, the Campaign implicitly focuses on the displaced West Bank Palestinians living on the East Bank and gives them the choice between either being full Jordanian citizen or maintaining their Palestinian national identity. This pillar of the Campaign clearly calls upon Jordanians to choose a 'single citizenship.'

A National Committee was formed to pursue and institutionalize the objectives of the "Jordan First" initiative. In turn, the Committee created a National Agenda that categorized the reforms into three main areas: political, administrative, and social. Among other objectives, the Agenda's priority was to address the amendment of the Political Parties Law. In 2002 Prime Minister Ali Abu Ragheb introduced a draft proposal to amend the 1992 Political Parties law; however the law has not been revised until 2008.²⁹ Moreover, despite efforts of the IAF created a debate over the reform of the electoral law (on the basis of reallocating the seats in the legislature in accordance with the population size), it has not been placed on the agenda of the National Committee yet.

Behind the "Jordan First" strategy of King Abdullah is the perception that internal unrest could be steadily subdued by the policy of demographic and territorial detachment from Palestine. However, it's highly questionable to what extent the "Jordan First" initiative with the formation of the National Agenda will be instrumental in encompassing the Jordanian nation as a whole. For Ad-

nan Abu Odeh, former advisor to King Hussein and Abdullah II, theoretically speaking the “Jordan First” initiative could bring ‘unity’ to the Jordanian nation, but practically it cannot integrate and address all levels of Jordanian society. According to Abu Odeh, “to achieve that objective [national unity] the people need to have confidence and trust [in Jordan First initiative]. This does not exist.”³⁰ Similarly a Jordanian from the city of Jerash once said, “We don’t believe that the “Jordan First” campaign will favor all Jordanians. It will only benefit those people close to the throne.”³¹ According to Toujan Faisal - a former member of Parliament - if Jordan needs to envision a new identity for itself, it should be *Urdustini* (a hybrid of Jordanian and Palestinian identities) under a democratic Arab state given the fact that the majority of Jordanians feel that they are both Jordanian and Palestinian.³²

Similarly, the Maani incident in 2002 brought back to the surface the growing public discontent with the regime’s policies not only among the Jordanians of Palestinian descent, but also among Transjordanians as well. Given that Maan has been the stronghold of the Hashemite monarchy since the establishment of the Emirate in 1923, the event of 2002 illustrated the fact that there is a growing Islamic armed activism in Jordan, including in the southern provinces.

The 2003 and 2007 National Elections

The outbreak of al-Aqsa *intifada* and the Maani incident re-ignited the phenomenon of the clash of expectations and goals between the regime and Jordanian society. This antagonism has partially replaced the long-standing tension between Jordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian descent in the country. As Russell Lucas argues, there is a continuous *gap* between Jordan’s foreign policy and public opinion, which was reinvigorated during and after the onset of the al-Aqsa *intifada*.³³ In order to cope with this dichotomy between the choices of the throne compared to that of every day Jordanians, the monarchy has sought to amend the press, publications, and also electoral laws before holding the upcoming elections. As Curtis Ryan indicates:

“After the [peace] treaty, the deliberalization trends continued and even showed few signs of abating after the succession in the monarchy from King Hussein to his eldest son King Abdullah II in 1999. Given this context, the 2003 elections were deemed especially important by both government and opposition ... The new Jordanian elections represented yet another test case regarding the degree of democratization within Jordanian politics. The regime had postponed them for more than two years, initially over a new voter card system that would take some time to prepare. The more pressing reason, however, may have been the

return of the Palestinian Intifada, or uprising, against Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Yet, after the Intifada began, regional politics only destabilized further with U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. In each case, new electoral delays were announced.”³⁴

Thus, the Kingdom decided to hold elections with a two-year delay in 2003. However, the elections took place in the context of the Palestinian uprising and growing opposition in the form of pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli sentiments. There were two major outcomes of the 2003 elections regarding the trend towards democratization in the country. One of the main consequences was the representation of the IAF in the legislature, as it became the main opposition bloc in the parliament. Although the “controversial” electoral law was still in force, the Front this time decided to participate in the elections with a specific aim of re-building its difficult ties with the monarchy. The second outcome of the elections was the amendment to the existing election law that increased the number of seats in the parliament from 80 to 104, reserving 6 seats for women candidates. Actually adding 30 new seats to the parliament with the revised law in 2003 “did not rectify the problem of underrepresentation [of Amman, Zarqa and Irbid governorates], despite long-standing complaints by the opposition,” as Ellen Lust-Okar indicates.³⁵

Likewise, the 2007 elections were conducted under the lasting effects of the Amman Bombings in 2005. A coordinated terrorist attacks on the Grant Hyatt, the Radisson, and the Days Inn Hotels left 67 people dead and more than 150 wounded. It was allegedly claimed that it was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi who organized suicide bombings.³⁶ Thus, Jordan’s 9/11 – Amman bombings – show to

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what extent the Kingdom of Jordan was caught between the objectives of the opposition – reforms – and the regional pressures and economic necessities – in line with US policy in the Middle East.

Although before holding the elections King Abdullah stated the Kingdom’s ambition of “a strong legislature that includes representatives of all political and social currents,” the

2007 parliamentary elections have been the most controversial elections in Jordan’s history due to alleged corruption.³⁷ Having felt the ramifications of the terrorist attacks, the vast majority of the seats in the Lower Chamber were captured by pro-regime candidates at the expense of the main opposition bloc, the

IAF. The Front lost in 2007 its parliamentary majority that it had gained in the previous elections. In this context, the allocation of the seats in the legislature, following the elections, has clearly manifested the security first approach of the regime by revising the electoral law that resulted in bringing regime loyalists into the Lower Chamber.³⁸

Growing Islamist Opposition and Regime's Outlook: Where to Go?

Representing the most stable monarchical regime in the Middle East, Jordan epitomizes a case where moderate Islamists were considered as loyal opposition as well as an impetus for political liberalization in the region as a whole.

Since its very establishment, as an independent state, the Kingdom was caught between pro-regime and opposition forces. Precisely the Jordanian monarch – throughout the 1950s and 1960s – was under the overriding influence of Pan-Arabist, Nasserist, and socialist opposition groups. With the decline of Arab nationalist (*qawmiyya*) goals and ideals, the opposition bloc in Jordan has, primarily in the post – 1990 era, turned towards movements of an Islamist character. Behind this variation in Jordanian opposition there are internal, regional, and international dynamics to discover. At the domestic level, the first Palestinian *intifada* (in 1987) and the resurgence of Islamist forces simultaneously coincided with the decline in Arab leftist movements on the Jordanian political landscape. Additionally, the state-led democratic opening gave power to the various political groups in the parliamentary elections in 1989.

The peace process with Israel in 1994 symbolized a new beginning in reconstructing nascent political pluralism in Jordan.³⁹ After the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993, Jordan opted to normalize its ties with the Israel, which caused public discontent particularly in the streets of Amman. Large scale demonstrations erupted, encompassing various Jordanian political movements, including the Islamists, leftists, liberals, socialists and even former public officials such as Ahmad Obeidat.⁴⁰ The change in the nature of the Jordanian opposition is for the most part connected to the normalization process as well as the deterioration of the Oslo Peace Accords by the late 1990s as well as the outbreak of the second Palestinian *intifada* (*Al-Aqsa intifada*) in 2000.

The *Islamization* of the Palestinian national movement in the Palestinian Occupied Lands and in Jordan was caused both by regional and international dynamics. At the international level, the “war on terror” campaign initiated by the USA in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks alarmed Jordan. It commenced strict monitoring policies and pre-emptive measures to contain the Islamist forces in the country, namely those affiliated to *al-Qaeda* and *Jihadi* Islamist groups. As Curtis Ryan and Jillian Schwedler argue, “... [the] political

de-liberalization in Jordan is largely the result of *regime insecurity* and perceived need to *placate* what it sees as essential allies: the United States and Israel.”⁴¹

The Islamist movement, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood Society, had been a long-standing neutral ally of the monarchy. One of the main reasons of this close relationship between the regime and the *Ikhwan* is linked to the Brotherhood’s tacit support to the Hashemite Kingdom due to the threat posed by Arabist and leftist camps throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Given the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood represented the primary group having an organizational basis, after the banning of political parties until 1992, they were allowed to work as a charity organization and thus, were able to attract new members. In addition, the loyalty of the Jordanian branch of the *Ikhwan* to the Hashemite monarchy dates back to the 1950s when it supported the Kingdom’s policy of “unification of the two Banks.” Precisely, the *Ikhwan*’s viable position as a deterrent to anti-regime forces during the heyday of Pan-Arabism as well as during the bleak days of Black September and its aftermath caused the regime to rely on the *Ikhwan*.

Due to the long established strategic bond between the Kingdom and the *Ikhwan*, it is possible to argue that the Islamist movement in Jordan has a special character – i.e. moderate, non-violent in nature – in comparison to other countries of the Middle East. Curtis C. Ryan defines the position of the Islamist movement in Jordanian politics as, “overwhelmingly reformist, rather than revolutionary, democratically-minded rather than militant, there nonetheless remain alternative Islamist forces that focus on *Jihadi* ideas.”⁴²

Moreover, lately the Kingdom has felt obligated to both monitor Salafis⁴³ and other Islamist activists by providing a political safe haven for the Muslim Brotherhood to act. Those opposing *Salafi* and *Jihadi* groups have recently found themselves in the position of needing to divert the IAF away from the political arena so they could gain nation-wide support. However, this was conducive to reducing the impact of militant Islamist groups that had taken on the form of *Jihadism* in the country.

The Electoral Law, Islamist Activism, and a Delicate Case for Monarchial Pluralism: The 2010 Parliamentary Elections

Jordan has devised a new electoral law to convey the Parliament that was suspended only 24 months after its election in November 2009.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the new law maintains the one-man one-vote system. But the electoral districts were revised with a new formula dividing each electoral zone into single-seat sub-districts, with the total number of seats for the electoral zone equivalent to the number of seats controlled by the old districts, and with the exception

of four electoral zones where seats were added.⁴⁵ According to Dima Toukan Tabaa:

“Some political analysts reject the government’s contention that the new system will curb tribalism. Instead, they predict that with smaller sub-districts, candidates will now rely more on their tribal affiliations and campaign among a smaller pool of core familial voters than before. Meanwhile, tribes are expected to try to divide seats among themselves prior to the election, potentially inflaming tensions within and among tribes. Emboldened by the government’s long-time policy of appeasement, some of these tribes have been acting as though they are above the law. Other analysts contend that the Muslim Brotherhood’s Islamic Action Front, Jordan’s strongest and best-organized political party, is also well positioned to work the system to its advantage.”⁴⁶

On the contrary, the Jordanian journalist Jamil Nimri suggests that the revised law “would have given political parties and tribal leaders alike an incentive to work collectively on policy platforms ... [that] would not have altered the demographic makeup of parliament but would have been a positive step toward supporting a democratic culture and matching the government’s reform rhetoric with concrete action.”⁴⁷ Although civil society organizations, women’s organizations, and reform-oriented political groups call for the revision of the prevailing electoral law who are merged under the name of National Coalition to Reform the Legal Framework Governing the Electoral Process, their congregation were not capable to reform this controversial law. Similarly, the Jordanian National Center for Human Rights (NCHR) initiated a nation-wide campaign demanding the amendment of the electoral law in 2009. However, their attempt has coincided with the suspension of the Lower House by the King.⁴⁸ In demanding the revision of the electoral law, the above groups centered their recommendations on the basis of replace one man – one vote system adopted in 1993 and redistributing seats and redrawing districts to enhance equality.⁴⁹

In comparison to the 2003 parliamentary elections, the rift in the Muslim Brotherhood, the 2005 Amman Bombings that was said to have an affiliation with *al-Qaeda*, and *Ikhwan*’s close ties with Hamas (Palestinian Resistance Movement, an outgrowth of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza) during the 2007 elections resulted in a relative decline in the popular support given to the IAF.⁵⁰ The Hamas’s parliamentary victory in 2006 was also central in reshaping the position of *Ikhwan* in Jordan. Given that the majority of the Jordanian population is of Palestinian origin and the support of Palestinian-Jordanians for Islamist movements in the country, the regime had to pursue a policy of containment vis-à-vis the Islamist activists in the aftermath of the 2005 bombings.

Jordan is a key example illustrating how the social upheavals in the region can swiftly be taken under control by opening the doors with the aim of negotiating reforms while maintaining one red line: the survival of the monarchy

⁵¹ Exerting strict surveillance on the Islamists weakened the IAF's public space for political contestation causing the Front to acquire only 6 seats in the Parliament. Nevertheless, the Kingdom moved towards limiting the public space of Islamist movements. The ruling elite remains aware of the power and capability of the Brotherhood in encompassing various Islamists in the country. In other words,

the *Ikhwan* and its political arm – the IAF – are the key Islamist groups that can work and benefit from Jordan's political landscape and their radicalization or moving out of the system could signal their ultimate end.⁵² As Shadi Hamid suggests, "... most Islamists see this [regime's reach out to Brotherhood] as yet another round of tactical maneuvering. The Jordanian regime is not necessarily acting in good faith; it is acting in its own self-interest. So too is the Islamist opposition."⁵³

Thus, under the existing system the IAF represents the only political party that could have the competence to win the elections under the prevailing electoral law.⁵⁴ However, the sudden move made by the IAF on the basis of "the likelihood of electoral fraud" has lately led the Brotherhood to boycott the upcoming parliamentary elections.⁵⁵ According to Oraib al-Rantawi, who is a Jordanian writer and also the director of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies, "if the 2010 elections are run according to the same law and roughly the same mechanisms, we can expect to see more of the same, even if some of the names and faces change."⁵⁶ Actually it's not the first instance that the Brotherhood decided to withdraw from the electoral process. Previously, the IAF, under the leadership of Abdul Latif Arabiyyat, boycotted the 1997 elections. Similarly, the Front decided to not to take part in the 1997 national elections exactly on the election day, as it accused the government for fraud and systematic underrepresentation of the opposition. Thus, it has become apparent for the Jordanian opposition and the IAF in particular, that withdrawing from the electoral campaign and the elections themselves can be a good strategy to put pressure on the government to revise the controversial electoral law.

Thus, parliamentary elections held on November 9, 2010 represented another case of regime-survival strategy of the Kingdom. The elections resulted in the formation of a Lower Chamber comprised of pro-regime and mostly independent members. Given that the IAF and the *Ikhwan* boycotted the elections, the Jordanian Parliament now lacks the country's main opposition. The turnout,

which was reported as 50 percent throughout Jordan was only 34 percent in Amman⁵⁷ – the capital city, demonstrates that there is a contentious public debate over the trustworthiness of the national elections in the country. Accordingly, the decrease in the reliability of the political reforms has become more salient following the Arab Spring as of December 2010 onwards.

The Repercussions of the Arab Spring: Why is Jordan an Exception?

The outbreak of social uprisings in the Arab Middle East distinguishes the optimism of Jordanians in the pursuit of the political liberalization of their regime. The overthrown Zeynel Abidin Bin Ali of Tunisia and Housni Mubarek of Egypt will markedly transform the politics of the Arab Middle East. Analyzing the internal and external ramifications of the social movements in the Arab world now occupy a central place in exploring the trend towards democratizing the regimes in the region.⁵⁸ The main motive behind the social movements in the region should be interpreted not only in economic terms but also requires a deep analysis on state re-building and the decline of the legitimacy for the incumbent regimes.

When the social upheavals first began in Tunisia, it has been argued that this would certainly bring repercussions to the other parts of the Middle East. These social movements then expanded to Jordan, Algeria, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, and Syria. However, certain of these countries, Jordan in particular, rapidly shifted to take pre-emptive measures to cope with the increased opposition. For instance, King Abdullah II quickly replaced the incumbent government led by Samir al-Rifai with Marouf al-Bakhit on February 1, 2011.⁵⁹ The motive behind this attempt is closely associated with the increased tension within Jordanian society, in the form of public demonstrations, calling for the removal of the government from office. In fact, the Lower Chamber of Parliament in Jordan was recently elected on November 9, 2010. The protests were centered on an increase in staple food prices, which then turned into a call for more public freedom. In this respect, the social upheaval in the country demonstrates the very fact that, the multi-party national elections held a few months before had lost credibility in the eyes of the Jordanians.

One of the major domino effects of the Arab Spring in Jordan occurred when a pro-reform group of demonstrators protested the government for violence that took place in previous rallies.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, Marouf al-Bakhit evaluated this protest as: “The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan has received instructions from Islamist leaders in Syria and Egypt, and that despite its leaders’ denial that they had no part in organizing the Interior Ministry Circle, the government has evidence that they are the organizers.”⁶¹ In coping with the internal opposition and

the growing influence of Islamists, King Abdullah II reiterated the Hashemite Kingdom's priorities on March 31, 2011 as:

“We are moving ahead with the reform endeavor to build upon achievements, bring about development and realize Jordanians’ aspirations for a better future ... we want all to participate in the modernization process that serves Jordanians’ future and their ambitions.”⁶²

King Abdullah promised to support the reformation process in order to build a constructive dialogue mechanism, but also expressed the throne's position that they will stand “firm against non-democratic moves that threaten the country's national unity.”⁶³ It is actually the regime's ‘balanced-strategy’ that has maintained both the stability and the continuity of the Hashemite monarchy.

Thus, Jordan is a key example illustrating how the social upheavals in the region can swiftly be taken under control by opening the doors with the aim of negotiating reforms while maintaining one red line: the survival of the monarchy. In other words, the regime may initiate an open-ended dialogue with the opposition with the exception of negotiating on the monarchy. This regime-survival approach of the Kingdom was even embraced by the main opposition camp, i.e. the IAF. The *Ikhwan* and the leaders of IAF, since the post-independence period, consistently reiterated that their movement does not threaten the monarchy, but aims at establishing a constructive dialogue with the Kingdom. This very policy of the *Ikhwan* has led the group to sustain its long-standing position as a neutral ally until the finalization of the peace treaty with Israel. Given that the *Ikhwan* has been the key mechanism to curb the Arabist, socialist, and leftist forces in the country throughout the Cold War years, the Muslim Brotherhood has never been considered as a threat to the regime. After lifting the ban on the political parties in 1992, the IAF (the political arm of the *Ikhwan*) had the opportunity to switch its social support to political power in the upcoming multiparty elections in 1993. Although the *Ikhwan* and the IAF resisted the normalization of relations with Israel and participated in anti-normalization campaigns with other opposing groups, the Hashemite regime took this policy of Islamists as an integral part of rivalries in a democratizing country. Likewise, the regime's perception with regard to the IAF's boycott of the 2010 elections has been centered on the same historical analogy that the *Ikhwan* is an indispensable part of Jordan's growing tradition of democracy and it is their democratic decision not to join the elections.⁶⁴

When the social upheavals in the Arab Middle East are taken into consideration, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan offers an exceptional case due to three main aspects. First of all, Jordan is the only monarchy, which remains

standing in the Fertile Crescent area. Being very close to Israel and having a close partnership with the Western world have led the Kingdom to be perceived as a pivotal country in the region. Secondly, the influx of Palestinian refugees into Jordan has duplicated the central role of the country due to the irresolution of Palestinian-Israeli dispute. Given the fact that, Jordan is the only country in the region granting the Palestinians citizenship, the longevity of the Hashemite monarchy has become a common concern for Israel and the West – the USA in particular. Finally, the incorporation of the Muslim Brotherhood Society to the internal political arena has been central in maintaining the continuity and the stability of the regime. Nevertheless, the *Ikhwan* and the IAF have spilt over the issue of the peace treaty with Israel and the Palestinian quest for statehood. The IAF is still the main opposition in the country, which has never been banned. This is an exceptional case in the Middle East despite the eruption of social movements for more political liberalization.

Conclusions

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan offers the most significant case in the Arab world due to its twenty-year commitment to democratic opening. Jordan has been considered one of the most democratized states in the area owing to its political liberalization efforts that have been underway since 1989. The Jordanian endeavor towards democratization is both a *political co-optation* strategy to contend with the negative effects of internal discontent caused by economic recession and the presence of an overwhelming Palestinian majority within its borders. Moreover, this strategy of regime survival met the challenges of the changing nature of domestic opposition and the repercussions of growing nation-wide demand for political reformation as well as Islamist activism in the country.

The key dynamic behind the political opening, is not based on a Western-inspired democracy model, rather it has evolved from Jordan's *new* West Bank strategy and re-construction of its own identity politics. The point of departure was the severing of ties from the Palestinian territories in 1988. Since Jordan's representation of the West Bank Palestinian-Jordanians was formally terminated by its disengagement from the West Bank and Palestine in 1988, the regime opted instead to change the allocation of seats in the Parliament to be more inclusive of its Palestinian population. In this respect, the 1989 elections even now symbolize a watershed in the country's political history representing the political and legal detachment of Jordan with that of Palestine. The first sign of King Hussein's new policy was the change in the election law, as applied to both elections 1989 and 1993. Although King Hussein's decision to disengage from the Palestinian territories did not mean giving up on Palestinian-Jordanians,

from this point on they began to be regarded as Jordanian citizens. However, the election law that was amended in 1989 has become, for the most part, a policy of limiting the political representation of Jordanians of Palestinian origin to the national legislature. In addition, the regime itself previously worked towards reinforcing the political reformation process in the country. Today, the opposition, the IAF in particular, is the leading actor in behind efforts to amend the controversial electoral law as well as calling for more political pluralism.

The “Jordan First” motto and the National Agenda, which was launched in 2002, are part of the monarchical rule over Jordan. It is the Regime that still sets the rules of the democratic opening and shelters pro-regime loyalists to ensure their electoral win. As Ellen Lust-Okar states “electoral politics under authoritarianism are both systematic and shaped by institutions, even if they are fundamentally different from electoral politics in democratic regimes.”⁶⁵ In this context, the fundamental objective of the Kingdom is to contain the growing opposition demanding further political reform.⁶⁶ The contradiction in Jordan is that its political system epitomizes a democratically-*inspired* monarchical regime, while the regime’s top priority is to survive, which compels the Kingdom to slow liberalization efforts down. The 2010 elections were an illustration of Jordan’s political duality: reform versus survival of the monarchy.

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