

Jordan

International observers considered voting in the November 2010 parliamentary elections a “clear improvement” over the 2007 elections, which were widely characterized as fraudulent. The elections were held under an amended voting system that continues to under-represent Jordanians of Palestinian origin.

On February 1, after demonstrators inspired by events in Tunisia and Egypt took to the streets in January to protest the slow pace of political reform and continued corruption, King Abdullah II replaced the prime minister after only three months in office, and again in October.

The king ordered Marouf al-Bakhit, the newly appointed prime minister in February, to implement political and economic reforms as protests spread. Reform initiatives included convening a national dialogue committee in March, and appointing a royal committee to revise the constitution in April. The committees proposed modest reforms to the electoral system, and significant reforms to the constitution, though they left out guarantees for gender equality. Parliament rejected proposed constitutional restrictions on the military-dominated State Security Court’s powers to try civilians.

The General Intelligence Department affirmed in May that its agents were no longer present on university campuses, in response to the king’s directives.

A committee established in April to restore nationality to Jordanians of Palestinian origin, from whom officials had previously arbitrarily withdrawn nationality, benefited only around 50 persons according to the National Center for Human Rights.

Enforcement of legal protections for approximately 70,000 migrant domestic workers in the country—including limits to working hours, a weekly day off, and criminalization of traffickers—remains negligible.

Freedom of Expression

Jordan criminalizes speech critical of the king, government officials and institutions, Islam, and speech deemed insulting to other persons. In 2010 a revision of the penal code

increased penalties for some speech offenses, and the 2010 Law on Information System Crimes extended these provisions to online expression. Following the protest resignation in June of government spokesperson Taher 'Udwan the government withdrew controversial proposed amendments to the Press and Publications Law, which would have allowed for the banning of local and foreign publications that violate the law. In September the government amended a draft anti-corruption commission law, replacing a six-month prison sentence on anyone who accused others of corruption without justification with a hefty fine.

In 2011 the legal aid unit of the Amman-based Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists assisted journalists with 70 ongoing criminal cases for speech in violation of articles 5 and 7 of the Press and Publications Law requiring journalists to be objective.

Attacks against journalists increased in 2011. In February unknown assailants attacked Basil al-'Ukur, and threatened Samir al-Hiyari, executives at online Ammonnews. In March Sami Zubaidi of the online Ammanpost said a prominent member of parliament threatened him with physical harm. In April relatives of Khalid al-Sarayira, retired armed forces chief of staff, ransacked the office of journalist Jihad Abu Baidar and threatened to kill him. Yahya Sa'ud, a member of parliament, led protesters who ransacked the Amman bureau of Agence France Presse on June 15, demanding that bureau chief Randa Habib be tried in the State Security Court over what Sa'ud claimed were false reports of attacks on the king's convoy. On July 15, police attacked 19 journalists covering a demonstration in downtown Amman, the capital. Despite recommendations for a police investigation to prosecute officers involved, this did not occur.

Freedom of Assembly

In March an amended Public Gatherings Law, which no longer required government permission to hold public meetings or demonstrations, took effect.

Since January hundreds of protests demanding political and economic reforms have taken place. Almost all remained peaceful. In February pro-government protestors in downtown Amman attacked peaceful opposition demonstrators with clubs, unhindered by nearby police. There was no investigation into police conduct. On March 25, pro-government protestors approached Amman's Interior Circle, a busy roundabout opposition protesters had occupied, and attacked the protesters. Police at one point formed a protective cordon around the opposition demonstrators, but also allowed pro-government protestors free access to the area and later joined pro-government protestors in beating the opposition demonstrators, one of whom died as a result. No investigation of police conduct has taken place.

On April 15 several hundred persons demonstrated in Zarqa for the application of Islamic law and the release of prisoners. In an ensuing brawl with government supporters, in which police participated, numerous police and demonstrators were injured. The police arrested around 100 demonstrators and charged 150 others, though no government supporters or police, with “carrying out terrorist acts,” “assault,” “rioting,” and “unlawful gathering.” No evidence of terrorist acts beyond the brawl was presented at the State Security Court.

On July 15, police attacked opposition protesters in Amman, including journalists wearing distinctive media vests.

Labor Rights

Hundreds of migrant workers working in the Qualified Industrial Zones, agriculture, and domestic work complained about labor violations, including unpaid salaries, confiscation of passports, and forced labor. In July the government mandated that migrant domestic workers’ salaries be paid directly into verifiable bank accounts and in September proposed lifting restrictions on the freedom of movement of migrant domestic workers. A Ministry of Labor committee charged with solving labor disputes failed consistently to secure unpaid salaries of domestic workers, or to adequately protect workers from working long hours and from remaining trapped in abusive households. Jordan has no shelter for domestic workers who escape abusive conditions.

NGOs repeatedly presented domestic workers who had suffered a range of abuses to investigators who almost never classified them as trafficking victims, sometimes even detaining them for “escaping” employers.

Women's and Girls' Rights

In September the Royal Committee on Constitutional Review proposed amendments to Jordan’s constitution, including an amendment (to article 6) which prohibits discrimination based on race, language, or religion. The Royal Committee promised women’s rights activists that it would include the term “gender” in the new revised article. The final draft handed to King ‘Abdallah did not include this.

Article 9 of Jordan’s nationality law denies women married to foreign-born spouses to pass on their nationality to their husbands and children. Women’s rights activists called on the government to amend the law in accordance with its obligations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

There were four reported “honor” crimes in 2011. In June a court sentenced a father who murdered his daughter to 15 years in prison, later reduced to 10 years because her husband dropped private claims against him. A February 2011 study by the National Council for Family Affairs concluded that perpetrators in 50 “honor” crimes between 2000 and 2011 received reduced sentences because of dropped private claims.

Jordan’s personal status code remains discriminatory despite a 2010 amendment. A Muslim woman is forbidden from marrying a non-Muslim. A non-Muslim mother forfeits her custodial rights after the child reaches seven-years-old.

Torture, Arbitrary Detention, and Administrative Detention

Perpetrators of torture enjoy near-total impunity. The redress process begins with a deficient complaint mechanism, continues with lackluster investigations and prosecutions, and ends in police court, where two of three judges are police-appointed police officers.

In April officers of a special unit arrested scores of suspected participants in a demonstration in the town of Zarqa, northeast of Amman, and beat them for hours before delivering them to Amman’s criminal investigation unit. No investigation into the police abuse took place. At the demonstrators’ trial, police witnesses testified that they “did not remember” whether a demonstrator complained about ill-treatment, although at least one had been brought to custody from a hospital for injuries sustained during police beatings, defense lawyers claimed. The Public Security Directorate did not respond to a request submitted in August under the Law on the Right to Freedom of Information for the number of deaths in custody, their reasons, and results of any investigations.

Interior Minister Mazin al-Sakit in September recommended changes in the Crime Prevention Law, under which provincial governors can detain people administratively. The suggested changes, if approved by the Council of Ministers and parliament, would restrict administrative detention to a non-renewable 15-day period, require the detainee’s release or referral to the judiciary thereafter, and prohibit use of administrative detention for “protective custody” of women whose family members threaten them with violence.

Key International Actors

Saudi Arabia was Jordan’s largest donor in 2011, announcing a grant of US\$400 million in January, and a further \$1 billion in July. Saudi Arabia also supported the initiative by the

Gulf Cooperation Council to invite Jordan and Morocco to join, in what analysts described as an exchange of Gulf financial support for Jordanian military expertise and manpower.

The United States has a memorandum of understanding, going into effect in 2010, to provide Jordan with a minimum of \$360 million in economic assistance, and \$300 million in foreign military financing annually. In October 2010 the US Millennium Challenge Corporation committed \$275 million to Jordan over the coming five years.

The European Union in October 2010 upgraded its relations with Jordan to “advanced status,” indicating closer ties in all areas, as well as more funding. The EU will provide Jordan with a €223 million (\$310 million) aid package over three years until 2013. The EU was developing a three-year plan designed to provide more support for human rights reform.