

Mona Christophersen



Protest and reform in Jordan

Popular demand and government response
2011 to 2012



Mona Christophersen

Protest and reform in Jordan

Popular demand and government
response 2011 to 2012

© Fafo 2013

ISBN 978-82-324-0064-5 (paper edition)

ISBN 978-82-324-0065-2 (web edition)

ISSN 0801-6143

Cover photos: Mona Christophersen

Printed in Norway by: Allkopi AS

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	5
Summary	7
Jordan map	9
Introduction	11
Protests in Jordan	11
Opportunities for change.....	14
Social unrest in 2010.....	16
Protests	21
Limited protests	21
Protest movements.....	24
Tribal protest groups	28
Local protest groups	30
The Islamist force	37
Coalitions.....	41
Regime response	45
Change of governments – a well-used strategy	45
Repeated promise of reform.....	49
Amended laws, but no change	51
Limitations for the reform process	54
Conclusion	63
References	67

Acknowledgements

This research report was commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) to gain knowledge about the political dynamics related to the reform process and popular uprisings in Jordan. This study would not have been possible without the generous grant from the NMFA. Fafo takes this opportunity to show our appreciation and thank the NMFA for their support.

The author would also like to express her gratitude to all the Jordanians who spent time sharing their views and experience on a political sensitive topic, as well as to Eman Abdallah Alassaf, Hind Cecilia Dabbagh, Alia Hatough and Tala Kayaly for excellent assistance as fieldwork organizers and interpreters during the three fieldwork trips. Thanks also go to Fafo colleagues, Akram Atallah Alayasa for his assistance during a practical crisis in Amman and Kjetil Selvik and Jon Pedersen for useful advice and support during the fieldwork and writing of reports.

Summary

This report investigates political dynamics related to Jordanian protesters' call for political and economic reform and the regime's efforts to move the reform process forward. A main question is how the reform process corresponds to protesters' demands. Data has been collected through in-depth qualitative interviews during three field trips to Jordan in December 2011, March 2012 and June 2012.

The main finding is that the protests in Jordan still engage limited segments of the population and so far have failed to mobilize the masses unlike protests in other Arab countries. The regime continues to enjoy considerable support and is trusted and viewed by the majority of the population as competent to govern the country. While many in this majority support some kind of change, they are keen to maintain the regime and the King. They prioritize stability and safety for the country and its people. The regime's non-violent approach towards protesters is appreciated, and the hope is that the change will come at a reasonable pace generating controlled reforms instead of an uncontrollable revolution.

The protest movement in Jordan did not start with the Arab Spring in early 2011, but developed out of labor protests in 2010 demanding better workers' rights and improved economic conditions. New groups of independent labor unions emerged, often promoting social democratic values demanding more equal distribution of wealth. There is an ideological conflict between workers with social democratic values and Islamists, involving competing for control and influence over the new unions: with one group focused on economic conditions and the other seeking political influence.

Further findings suggest that many proposed reforms are appreciated by protesters, simultaneously the reforms are also perceived to be too little, too late to quell protests. The overdue and insufficient reforms implemented in the aftermath of the protests, reflect both unwillingness from the Hashemite King to implement substantial reforms, but also the conflicting demands from different protest groups - making it difficult to satisfy the main stakeholders and move forward with the reforms.

Conflicting interests derive from the main fault line in Jordanian society, namely between: East Bank Jordanians, coming from the original tribes residing on Jordanian territory; and Jordanians of Palestinian background. The latter are mainly refugees and their descendants displaced from the Palestinian Territories after the Israeli-Arab wars. Partly due to the civil war between the Jordanian army and Palestinian fighters in 1970, the Jordanian of Palestinian origin have been politically marginalized and are first of all calling for political reform through the largest and best organized opposition party, the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamic Action Front. The East Bank Jordanians however have experienced economic decline for which they blame the current King's

neo-liberal economic policies over the last decade. East Bankers are mainly demanding economic reform and development benefitting tribal areas.

Although this fault line is experienced as real by both East and West Bankers, others suggest it is mainly a product of the regime's divide and rule politics to maintain power. This division further conceals a more important conflict of interests between social classes since there are rich and poor among both East and West Bankers. These dynamics complicate and hinder alliance building across social divides around common values and interests, a key to successful protest movements.

Since the popular demonstrations began in 2011, the King has responded to the protests by changing governments four times – a commonly-used tactic to quell disgruntlement.

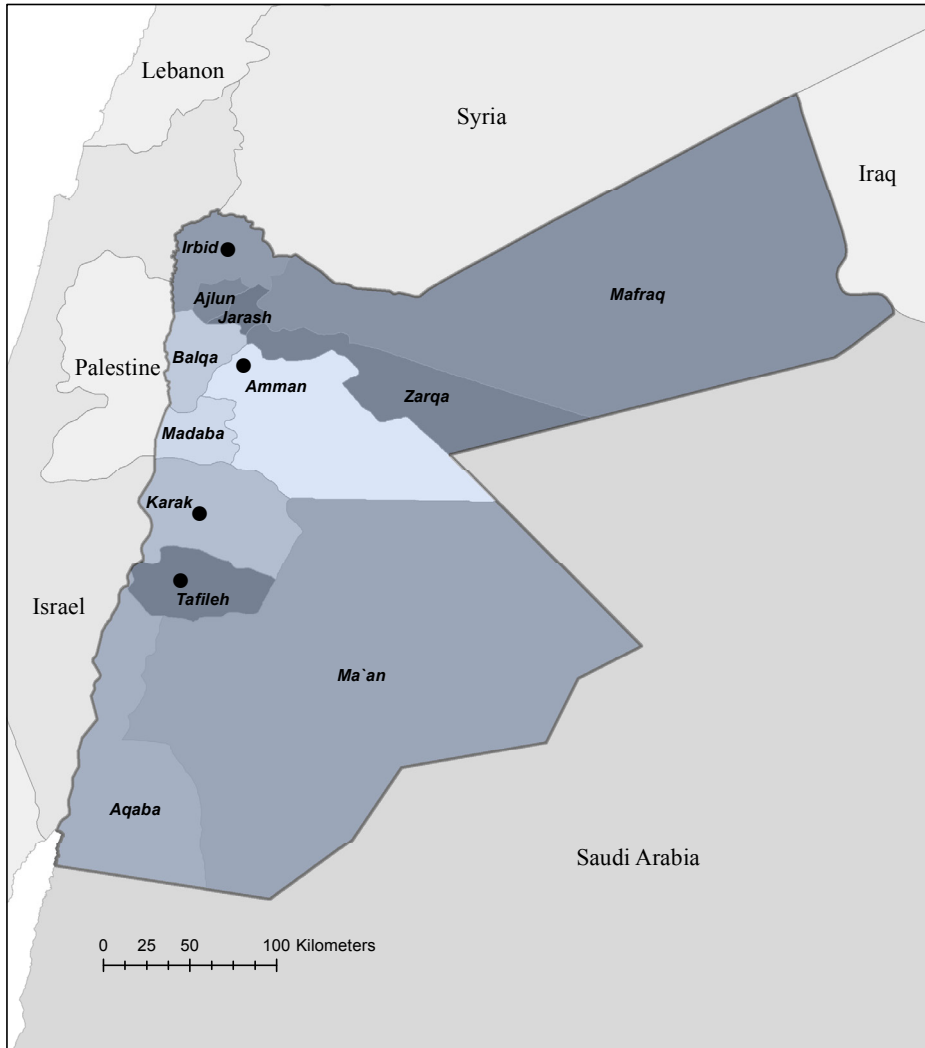
Successive governments have alternately focused on political or economic reforms, agreeable to one protest camp but not the other. To most protesters, the changes after nearly two years of protests fail to significantly respond to their demands. The January 2013 parliamentary elections are a good example - based only on superficial amendments to the old, much-criticized election law. A large block of political parties with the Islamist party at the forefront, have decided to boycott the election, undermining the political legitimacy the election is calling for.

While protests have continued, there are few signs that the fragmented protest movement will be able to unify, or to mobilize larger segments of the population. The protest movement can roughly be divided into three groups. Firstly, the Islamists calling for constitutional changes that can give them more political power. The second group is comprised of left-leaning political parties, anxious that political reform will lead to Islamist dominance in politics. Hence, this group focuses on economic development, accompanied by limited political reform; fearful of regime change and chaos, this group wants reform and stability. The third group is made up of politically-independent groups of urban and tribal youth. Politically inexperienced, this group makes bold demands for change and thus represents a major challenge for the regime. They have flat organizational structures and are able to mobilize rapidly using social media, unlike the two other more traditional and hierarchical groups with slower decision-making processes.

Jordan is experiencing a political stalemate between the Islamists, the leftist groups and the regime, with the independent groups hovering in the background. Without signs of alliances or common ground between the three main protest participants, the reform process is unlikely to proceed. In addition Jordan serves as a 'playground' for several competing and even contradictory foreign interests. As an aid-dependent country, Jordan is under conflicting pressure from Saudi Arabia to limit democratic reforms and from the USA and EU to pursue democratic changes.

With so many internal and external contradictory forces and diverging interests, Jordan as a stable island in a troubled Middle East is at risk. Should the King prove unable to manage these tensions, then, Jordan's stability will be seriously undermined. In a country so fundamentally divided, the road to violent conflict can be short.

Jordan map



Introduction

In 2011 and 2012, Jordan was shaken by weekly popular protests - inspired in part by protests in Arab countries like Tunisia and Egypt, but also stunned by the developments such protests took in Libya and Syria. The developments in Jordan took their own distinct direction. As in neighboring Arab countries, unrest had been brewing for some time over rising food prices and high youth unemployment. However, in Jordan protests did not turn against despotic leaders with demands for regime change. Jordanians called for reform. Seeing the danger all around him, the Jordanian King quickly responded by dismissing the government and initiating a reform process. This report seeks to explore the nature of the protest movement in Jordan, as well as the developments in the reform process. The data for this report was collected during three successive fieldwork trips to Jordan in November 2011, and March and June 2012. The repeated fieldwork missions made it possible to monitor the protest movement and reform efforts over time, and arrive at a more in-depth understanding of the characteristics and consequences of these processes.

Protests in Jordan

According to the International Crisis Group (ICG 2012), Jordanians took to the street in 2011 echoing the events in the region. In contrast, protesters in Jordan claim that the Jordanian protests started before the mass demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt. They contend that the protests started in a small town called Deeban on 7th January 2011. In 2006, a youth group had been formed in Deeban to address poverty and marginalization in the area, which had developed over a long period of time. Prompted by rising food and petrol prices, this group organized the first demonstration against Prime Minister Rifai. The protesters were workers, university students, poor people and unemployed youth.¹

Encouraged by the success in Deeban, the organizers called for a new demonstration in Amman a week later. Despite warnings from experienced politicians of stronger government reactions towards protests in Amman, the young organizers pursued their plans. On Friday 14th January more than 7,000 people marched to demand the Prime Minister be replaced and measures introduced to halt soaring prices.² Although the King quickly responded by replacing the Prime Minister and (re-)starting a reform process, Friday protests have become a weekly event in all the major Jordanian cities throughout 2011 and 2012.

¹ Author's interview in Amman, 31st March 2012.

² Author's interview in Amman, 28th March 2012.

Protests and demonstrations are not novel to the Jordanian kingdom. Over the past twenty years, waves of protests have been sparked both by economic conditions and political events. Since 1950 when the late King Abdullah annexed the Palestinian West Bank and incorporated it into Jordan, the potential for tensions and conflict increased. Jordan had become a homeland for two major social groups: the East Bank Jordanians and the West Bank Palestinians. In the 1950s the King's powerbase was weakened by 'Pan-Arabic' ideas sweeping the region, and after discovering plans for a coup d'état in 1957, martial law was implemented, repressing all political opposition (Butenschön 2008). After Jordan lost the West Bank to Israel in the 1967 war, Palestinian guerilla groups established bases in the Jordan Valley to launch attacks on Israel. As such attacks were always followed by Israeli retaliation; the situation soon became unbearable for both people and authorities in Jordan. In 1970, the Palestinian *Fedayeen* (freedom fighters) challenged the sovereignty of the Jordanian state by threatening the state's monopoly over the use of force (Lucas 2008). The conflict soon developed into a full-fledged civil war (Abu-Odeh 1999, Farah 1999, Schulz 2003). Earlier attempts of creating a unified Jordanian identity for all people living in the kingdom were derailed, and power was centralized around the Hashemite King. Of particular relevance for this report, was the enforcement of martial law severely restricting political activity in the years following the conflict with the Palestinian fighters. As a result, an economic separation between East Bank Jordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian origin was virtually institutionalized – a process Abu-Odeh (1999) has called a 'de-Palestinianization process' along a public/private sector divide.

The Jordanians of Palestinian origin also became a political minority by means of the electoral law and other regulations. In the years following 'Black September' in 1970-71 until the new uprising in 1989, all political parties were forbidden, and political activities were severely repressed and restricted (Al Quds Center 2009). An important exception was the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, at the time registered as a charitable organization. Allowing space for Islamist activities was thought to counterbalance pan-Arabism's influence. When I interviewed Palestinians about their attitudes to the right of return for Palestinian refugees in 2010, I was repeatedly told that opposition political activity was subject to surveillance and punishment during those years. Several former East Bank political activists told me how they were arrested, their passports confiscated and how they were denied access to work (Christophersen 2011).

In 1989, the 'April Rebellion' uprising started in the Southern city of Maan and quickly spread to other cities. The protests were sparked by revoked subsidies and economic hardships following IMF-related economic restructuring programs designed to improve the country's economy. Since economic concessions to meet the protesters' demands were impossible, the conflict was resolved by conceding some democratic

reforms. Restrictions on political parties and media were lifted, and parliamentary elections were reinstated. Democratic reforms were used as a means to calm the streets. This proposal worked since the discontent was not entirely economic, but included political grievances as well. The political freedoms were however tightened again when the Islamists won the largest block in the parliamentary elections in 1989.³ Political restrictions were enforced for the 1993 elections by restructuring the election law into a 'single-non-transferable-vote system' (SNTV), also known as the 'one-man-one vote' law. In addition the electoral districts were reorganized in a way that gave preference to East Jordanian tribal candidates.

Protests over prices broke out again in 1996 starting initially in the medieval town of al-Karak and spreading to other cities, including Amman. The protests took root against a backdrop of widespread poverty, a stagnant economy and a growing gap between rich and poor. The protests were forcefully and efficiently stopped by the army.

The next round of protests started when the second intifada erupted in the Palestinian Territories at the end of September 2000. Ottaway and Hamzawy (2011) reported that 203 marches and 73 demonstrations took place during the first week of October 2000 alone. While the protests in 1989 started and were organized in East Bank territory, the protests in 2000 mainly occurred in Palestinian refugee camps, focusing on Palestinian national demands.

Jordanian protests usually revolve around a mixture of political and economic demands, such as price hikes on fuel, electricity and basic food staples, aggravated by unemployment. The state resources in Jordan are however limited, and there is a boundary both to the capacity for economic concessions and to further relaxing political control.

After the 1989 protests, political activists felt that the country was moving in a democratic direction, although an Islamist leader I interviewed in 2010 argued that the country had stagnated and that Jordan was less democratic in 2010 than it had been in 1990.⁴ This trend is confirmed by studies of political freedom in the region which shows that the Middle East in general was freer in the 1980s than by 2010.⁵ My study (Christophersen 2011) found a general distrust of politics and politicians based on two causes. First, there remains a fear related to being politically active. Although people had more political freedom after 1989, they continued to experience surveillance from the intelligence system. Many people have been brought to the police station to be questioned or arrested for political activity. The other aspect of distrust relates to the connotations of politicians being very negative,

³ As political parties were not yet legal for the 1989 elections, all the candidates ran as independents. However, the Muslim Brotherhood is considered to have won 22 of 80 seats in the Parliament. The Muslim Brotherhood's Islamic Action Front party was established in 1992.

⁴ Author's interview in Tafleeh, 8th June 2012.

⁵ See the "Political and Empowerment Index" by Cingranelli and Richards, cited in Diwan 2012a.

particularly among young people. Youth generally do not trust political leaders, often feeling that politicians are inherently corrupt and only concerned about personal interests, such as enriching themselves and securing votes. Many felt the politicians were neglecting the interests of Jordan and the Jordanian people. These two factors have led many young to find alternative ways to express political interest and engagement. This could be by volunteering in social or environmental work, or by expressing opinions through art or in the social media, rather than through traditional political activities and parties.

This historical overview and perspective forms the background and context in which the Jordanian protest movement and reform process after the Arab revolutions in 2011 must be understood.

Opportunities for change

The historic context

When the Arab protest spread from Tunisia to Egypt and further to Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria in 2011, many were struck by the size and force of these protests. With new means of electronic communication, protesters claimed they could organize activities more efficiently than they had been able to do before. In an effort to understand what took many people by surprise, explanations were offered from similarities in the grievances people in these countries were experiencing. The causes cited were often autocratic forms of government, despotic leaders, and economic stagnation resulting in high unemployment, particularly among youth. Youth unemployment is nothing new in the Arab world, but earlier many could find work opportunities in the rich oil states in the Gulf, which has become more difficult during the last years.

Lisa Anderson (2011) argues that this understanding is too simple; instead she claims that we have to explain current Arab popular protests in the historic and cultural context of each nation state. She points to Tunisia where the protests started in poor and neglected areas in the countryside, but gained momentum when they reached the cities and teamed up with a powerful labor union. In Egypt though, Anderson states that the protests started among disappointed urban cosmopolitan and upper class youth. To succeed with their aim of toppling the regime, they were dependent on the support they eventually got from the Egyptian Army. As long as the army was reluctant to get involved, she claims that the outcome of the revolution remained uncertain. In Jordan, the protests have taken a different and slower path. This too has to be understood in the particular context of Jordan with its political and economic history creating specific fault lines determining current developments. A quick retrospective glance is needed for this contextualization.

When the Ottoman Empire dissolved after the World War I, the former Ottoman colonies were divided amongst the new rulers of the area: France and Great Britain

according to the secret Sykes-Picot plan of 1916.⁶ The area we know as Jordan used to be administered together with Syrian territory under the Ottomans, but were divided when Syria came under French control and Jordan fell under the British mandate. Further, Jordan was separated from the Palestinian territory as a British wartime gesture to the Hashemite family for supporting the ally forces against the Ottomans. However, according to the confidential Balfour Declaration of 1917, Britain also aimed to create a national homeland for the Jewish people on Palestinian territories, thus promising some of the same lands both to the Jews and the Arabs generating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The (problematic) Palestinian mandate area was to be established west of the Jordan River, while a separate Arab entity was created east of the Jordan River.⁷

Jordan in the 1920s was poor after years of neglect under Ottoman rule. The social organization was tribal with local affiliations, which made the country rather ungovernable. As part of the regional security plan, Emir Abdullah, a Hashemite and son of the leader of the Arab uprising against the Ottomans, was welcomed as leader of Jordan in 1921 (Abu-Odeh 1999). Transjordan's independence from the Ottomans went step by step and was first recognized as an emirate in 1923 before it reached full independence in 1946 as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

What complicated the building of a Transjordanian nation state was the Arab-Israeli war in 1948 (Abu-Odeh 1999, Abu-Rish 2012). Scores of Palestinian refugees fled hostilities and sought protection in neighboring countries. When the hostilities ceased, Transjordan in addition annexed most of what was left of the Palestinian territories, and the West Bank became a part of Jordan. In 1950 most Palestinian refugees were granted Jordanian citizenship with full citizenship rights (Jamjoum 2010). Jordanians with Palestinian origins, often referred to as West Bank Jordanians, became the majority population group. When Jordan lost the West Bank in the 1967 war, the demographic balance became blurred as a new wave of refugees crossed the Jordan River, and West Bank residents came under Israeli control. Lack of public census data makes it difficult to give accurate aggregated demographic figures, but many continue to anticipate that the West Bank Palestinians still are a majority in Jordan.

Giving Palestinian refugees and other West Bankers full citizenship was part of an ambitious plan by the Emir to expand the Jordanian territories to include both Palestine and Syria in a confederate kingdom of 'Greater Syria'. The civil war between Palestinian fighters and the Jordanian army in 1970-71 brought the process of integration of West Bankers as citizens to an abrupt halt. Accused of creating 'a state within the state', the Palestinian militias and the PLO were eventually driven out of Jordan in 1971 (Abu-Odeh 1999, Farah 1999, Schulz 2003).

⁶ The Sykes-Picot plan originally included Russia who was left out of the plan after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917.

⁷ http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf_ww1_british_mandate_jordan.php.

The conflict ruined the integration process between East Bank and West Bank Jordanians as East Bankers regarded West Bankers as disloyal to the King and accused them of attempting to topple the regime. In return for their loyalty to the King, the East Bankers claimed preference or a near monopoly over public sector jobs and other privileges. This started what Abu-Odeh (1999) has called a 'de-Palestinianization process', leaving the Palestinians to find livelihoods in the private sector. When the Jordanian economy was subject to neo-liberal reforms in the 2000s, the private sector bloomed and benefitted the mainly West Bank Jordanian business people and investors. Since the public sector simultaneously was downscaled and the rural, mainly East Bank Jordanian populated areas were lagging behind the cities in development, this led to a feeling of neglect from the East Bank population.

After decades of integration efforts where generous distribution of citizenships to Palestinians was the most significant, the relations between East Bank Jordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian origin continue to be the most significant fault line in the Jordanian society. Younger people often downplay the importance of this fault line, and young West Bankers often talk about carrying two identities: a Palestinian and a Jordanian, which are not necessarily in conflict. Young East Bankers repeatedly discussed this fault line as something created by the leaders of the country as a divide and conquer tactic. Still these and other divisions play a significant role in limiting the impact of the protest movement in Jordan.

Social unrest in 2010

Jordanians often say that Jordan's demonstrations started before the Arab Spring and specifically before the fall of the regime in Tunisia. These references are not only made to the first demonstration in Deeban on 7th January 2011, but also referring to workers' protests in several sectors and places in Jordan in 2010. An influential East Bank intellectual⁸ indicated that these social protests started at the end of 2009 with the strike of the workers at the Port of Aqaba, but soon spread to different sectors with both private and public sector workers joining in. Although the demands from these groups differed, the protests were all rooted in the deteriorating economic situation in the country. The port workers in Aqaba protested against an upcoming privatization that would result in worsening working conditions. Mohammad⁹ had worked at the port for several years and was a leading figure in the protest:

We started to protest against the privatization. We started this protest because the working conditions would be much worse after the privatization. The work hours would be much longer, and we would have the same pay. Also there would

⁸ Author's interview in Amman, 16th June 2012.

⁹ All names used in this report are changed for the purpose of providing anonymity for people that have contributed with their knowledge and experience.

be no pay for overtime. [...] Under the privatization, they also wanted to reduce the health insurance from first class to third class coverage. The new insurance did not cover all diseases, only some of them. It did not cover the major problems like heart disease and cancer. So we started to protest against this. It was 200 workers that protested. We chose to protest on certain days; it was not every day - so it did not interfere with our work. We protested like this for two months. [...] All the people that protested were threatened that they would be suspended. We were told that the protest was illegal and that we would be arrested for this. We consulted a lawyer, and he told us that it was our legal right to protest. So we continued. [...] We continued the protest for three months, but then the company was privatized.¹⁰

After a few more months of protests in 2010, most workers accepted the new contract and went back to work. Jordanian 'Labor Watch' has described how labor protests emerged in Jordan in 2010 and reached an all-time high in 2011. More than 800 labor protests took place in a variety of economic sectors, lasting from one day to several months. Most of these protests came as a result of declining employment conditions and deprivation of basic employment rights as stipulated in Jordanian labor legislation. In the process, many workers gained a renewed sense of awareness and confidence of being able to make change - triggering new initiatives to defend rights and demand better working conditions. More than half of Jordanian laborers earn incomes which fall under the stipulated poverty line. The majority of these protests took place in the public sector and lasted for only one day; however, some protests also occurred in the private sector, and a few protests lasted for several months. The protests were described in the 'Labor Watch' report as a milestone in the history of social transformation in Jordan and the change in the government response towards the protests are seen as a significant development (Jordan Labor Watch 2012).

While Aqaba's port workers made sure they protested and avoided strikes, Jordanian teachers chose to organize strikes in 2010. Where the port workers protested against privatization and deteriorating working conditions, the teachers first of all demanded the right to establish an independent teachers' union. A characteristic of this new wave of labor protests was the limited role of the 17 officially-recognized trade unions. Instead the protests were carried out by independent workers groups (Jordan Labor Watch 2012).

The teachers established an independent committee in July 2010 to work for teachers' rights. The initiative came after several teachers felt insulted by a statement from the Minister of Education declaring that the most important task for teachers was to dress modestly and be role models for the students. The main demand from the committee was the right to establish an independent union for teachers, but they also

¹⁰ Author's interview in Tafleih, 16th June 2012.

demanded better pay and a better teaching environment in the schools. The committee developed into the 'Free Amman Movement' and continued to organize strikes and protests to draw attention to teachers' plights. The political parties were initially absent from these actions. In February 2011, the teachers were granted permission to establish an independent union, and elections for the union were held in March 2012. I will elaborate on the election process and outcome of these elections later in the paper.

Teachers and others interviewed for this project have described how public salaries have not kept up with the price hikes on fuel and basic food products. They claimed that it is no longer possible to live and support a family on a teacher's salary. Many teachers were obliged to take on second jobs to supplement their incomes. In addition they claim that school budgets are limited, and new regulations for teachers have diminished the quality of the education. Iman, a 48-year-old teacher, explains how the teachers had been discussing the deteriorating situation for years, but in 2010, they started to do something:

The reason the teachers started with these protests was because we were suffering. Teachers had to have two jobs; if we could not find private lessons [to teach], we would drive a taxi, because our salary was not enough to live on. Our pride and dignity was crushed by the rules the government established in the name of benefiting the students. But this was not to benefit the students, nor the teachers or anybody. It was ruining the whole education system. It really went down.¹¹

The teachers' movement inspired people far outside the teachers' circles. A man working in telecommunications felt that the way the teachers started to organize themselves represented something totally new in Jordan.

Suddenly when the teachers started to strike two years ago, I think this was the best achievement we have done in Jordan. And it is not only the teachers; people are raising their voices for change. They have started to sit down and discuss courses of action, and that is something that has never happened before. But they are purely non-political [people]; they are mainly people that have rage and anger. The cause is the unjust situation.¹²

Protests have since spread to many other sectors, particularly to the public sector and mainly because of a salary restructuring program for public employees.¹³ Lee and Weinthal (2012) argue that the role of old-fashioned working class and independent

¹¹ Author's interview in Amman, 1st April 2012.

¹² Author's interview in Amman, 25th March 2012.

¹³ See, for example, <http://jordantimes.com/public-sector-nurses-to-walk-out-in-protest-against-salary-restructuring> and <http://jordantimes.com/engineers-protest-salary-restructuring-plan>.

trade unions is an overlooked factor in the unfolding of events in Tunisia and particularly in Egypt, where waves of strikes had started in 2004. As the formal trade unions failed to address increased exploitation and deteriorating life quality, independent protest groups organized strikes to send a powerful message to employers and the state about the worker's need for human dignity and improved standard of living. The authors conclude that worker's discontent is why many authoritarian Arab regimes remain fragile. In Jordan too, the organization of such new and independent groups of workers are seen by many of the people I interviewed as the most significant aspect of the Jordanian protest movement. They claim however that many protest groups missed this point when they focused too much on democratic and political reform. Such demands are mainly interesting for politicians and political parties, while ordinary people are concerned about their daily life and making ends meet. By turning the protest movement into discussions about the constitution and electoral reform, ordinary people's attention will fade and mobilization to demonstrations will dwindle. When the demands touch the heart of their matters, they will show their support. Hints of this potential were seen in November 2012, when people took to the street in record numbers to protest against cancelled subsidies on petrol and petrol related products. In these protests, the independent labor unions also demonstrated solidarity with ordinary people's difficult economic situation through sit-ins and strikes.¹⁴ This engagement hints at the political potential of the new labor unions.

¹⁴ <http://jordantimes.com/teachers-go-on-strike-to-protest-fuel-price-hikes>.

Protests

Limited protests

There is a wide spectrum of groups that support reform and change in Jordan, including the Islamists, leftists, nationalists and independents. Still the protest groups only mobilize small segments of the Jordanian population. After the protests started in January 2011, such protests and demonstrations became a weekly affair in the country's major cities. Two years later, there was no sign of momentum like that witnessed in Tunisia or Egypt. The majority of Jordanians do not support the protests by taking to the street. In discussions with representatives of this silent majority, the reasons for abstaining from protests vary. Some are loyal to the King and trust that the regime will find the best solutions for the country's problems. Others agree that the country needs change, but fear that protests easily can grow out of hand and create unwanted instability.

When the activists discuss their motives in the street protests, many point to the regime of fear where people stop themselves from expressing their opinions and engaging in political actions. They claim this is a result of a policy that the secret intelligence apparatus has implemented by effectively repressing all political opposition. Many activists claim this fear was broken with the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and that the freedom of expression in Jordan improved as a result of bold protests both abroad and at home. It might, however, be that this fear still remains for the majority of Jordanians. Continued fear of persecution might explain why the street movement continues to recruit only small groups of people. However, there might also be other explanations for the limited participation in Jordan's protest movement.

Some people might simply be against demonstrations targeting the regime. I spoke to one of the organizers of counter demonstrations in support of the regime, or what he called loyalist demonstrations for the King. He explained that he supported reform and campaigns against corruption, but not in a way that threatened the stability of Jordan. He claimed to organize the counter demonstrations out of his loyalty to the King, whom he believed was the best leader for Jordan. He appreciates what he called decency in the Jordanian society, particularly compared to many other regimes in the Middle East. He wanted to defend this society through his actions and pro-regime demonstrations.¹⁵ Some of his pro-regime colleagues are however viewed as thugs and criminal elements by both pro-reform activist and several politicians I spoke to. Frequent claims were made that these thugs were paid by the secret intelligence to make

¹⁵ Author's interview in Amman, 10th December 2011.

trouble. During one of the demonstrations, I stood together with the police, and several men in civilian clothes. We all waited for a demonstration of reform protesters to arrive at the scene. I happened to overhear some of the civilian dressed young men discuss whether their employer would allow them to leave since there were no signs of action or confrontation at the scene. These men were pointed out to me as part of a gang of thugs that often appeared at demonstrations. Such accusations might be correct, but do not exclude that other 'loyalists' sincerely support the King and engage to protect the stability of the kingdom.

The majority however continues to be silent. Army and secret service personnel constitute a major group of East Bank Jordanians and are not allowed to engage in political activity. They are thus absent from politics in general and protests in particular, although retired army officers recently have established a political party. An influential group of private sector business people are also absent from the political scene. Yusuf, a businessman in his forties from a well-established business family said his main worry for the country was the economy. He claimed that Jordan's economy was in the worst state he had ever seen, with the combination of increasing state debt, an unbalanced state budget, high rates of subsidies and a swelling public sector that is over-employed and very inefficient. These combined factors made him worried for the country. Should the government fail to pay the public employees for a month or two, for instance, he feared that street protests would explode. He claimed to be thinking a lot about how Jordan's problems could be solved and first of all suggested more cash to ease the pressure in the short term.

The street movement - how do I see it? I guess that their concerns are legitimate. Corruption - yes, I think enough is enough. On the other hand people want more democracy I guess. So I guess the street movement, a lot of it has to do with the bad economic situation where they are poor. [...] but there is one thing I would like to say. Economically speaking, Amman is a very expensive city [...] and the salaries are low. That is one issue. So I think the demonstration is because people are becoming poorer and poorer. [...] So I guess they have legitimate concerns and legitimate demands.¹⁶

Yusuf thinks the government is doing a good job with the reform issues. He likes the non-violent approach and praises the wisdom of the royal family for keeping the situation calm by changing the constitution and holding new parliamentary elections. He also appreciates tough measures against corruption. He supports democratic development to a certain extent, but admits his worry for such development. He is particularly worried about potential dominance of the Islamist

¹⁶ Author's interview in Amman, 14th June 2012.

movement and underlines that what makes Jordan a nice country to live in for him, is that there is a balance between what he calls a 'liberal' and a 'conservative' culture. Most important, he admits that he and other people in his circles are watching what is happening with some concern, but that they are not acting to steer the development in a more preferable direction.

[A] lot of people like our friends and stuff they keep on talking. The people who are liberal and secular, we should organize ourselves into a party, at least to have some kind of setup. But this is not really happening. [...] So yes me and my friends as a group in the society, we are just watching all this happening. [...] You know every time we go out to dinner with other friends, we discuss this issue. How come if the system now is being molded to cater to the protesters, I feel oh my God we are an important part of this country, we should be doing something.¹⁷

This group of rich business people lives comfortable lives and most of all hopes to keep the stability since the political alternatives are not good for their businesses. As they acknowledge the need for a democratic process, they hope it will proceed slowly and take time to mature in a balanced way. This perspective differs considerably from the approach of the elite in Egypt, where they saw benefits from a regime change and joined the protests. This decision from the Egyptian elite also probably prepared the ground for the army's decision to stand against the old regime.

As Yusuf so clearly expressed, the main challenge in Jordan is the economy. The regime needs urgently to secure funds to sustain the economy over the short term; otherwise the situation can easily get out of control. The riots which ensued after petrol subsidies were lifted in November 2012 are a clear indication and warning of what to expect should the economic situation of ordinary people further deteriorate. Being rather aware of the potential for unrest, it is perhaps surprising that this group of influential business people remains passive and detached towards the challenges in their country.

The people engaged in protests thus represent limited segments of the society. In addition, these groups are fragmented and hold disparate views on which reforms they are demanding. Even though they fail to represent large masses of Jordanians, the protesters feel that they have some impact on the political processes in their country, and they are determined to assert the pressure on the government to achieve the change they seek. Several admit though, that it will take time and patience to reach the reform goals.

¹⁷ Author's interview in Amman, 14th June 2012.

Protest movements

The protest movement can roughly be divided into three tendencies. The first tendency is comprised of small groups of independent activists unaffiliated to traditional political parties, and often characterized by a left-leaning political orientation. The second tendency consists of several leftist and nationalist political parties, while the last and largest is the Islamist activists affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Earlier on, this paper presented briefly on the historical formation of an independent youth group in Deeban, a town south of Amman and on the initial protest against Prime Minister Rifai in early January 2011. While political parties initially were reluctant to participate formally in the protests, the leftist and nationalist parties quickly found a role in the demonstrations. The Muslim Brotherhood, however, took some time before publicly supporting the new wave of protests. A surprise to me since in 2010, an Islamist leader already informed me that they were planning protests and sit-ins to promote democracy rather than participating in the parliamentary elections.¹⁸

Independent youth groups

The role of the independent political activists both in labor protests and protest groups calling for democratic reform is interesting. Particularly given Jordan's historical context where for years political activity was severely restricted and prohibited by martial law. As a result, being politically active often meant participating in clandestine activities and was risky for the participants. Additionally those engaging in legal politics were subject to traditional patron-client organization of relations, which necessitates funds and resources to maintain. Many ordinary people view politicians with suspicion and accuse them of mainly being motivated to engage in politics to benefit themselves only. These two experiences have created a general distrust of both politicians and political parties. Many found alternative forms of expression through social engagement, often highlighting that it was apolitical. These experiences partly explain the importance of the independent groups.

Yayeen

While not originally created as a protest group, the youth group in Deeban had been working since 2006 to highlight the area's marginalization over the last decades. In 2011, they formed the Yayeen ('We are coming') movement in response to arrests

¹⁸ Author's interview in Tafleeh, 8th June 2012.

and harassment of union leaders following the 2010 strikes (ICG 2012). They saw the need to find new ways to struggle and organized and coordinated the first protests in 2011. One of the group's founders described himself as a 'son of the tribe'. His family used to rely on agricultural farming and sheep rearing, and explains what motivated him to organize protests:

[Over] the last 15 years in Jordan, there was a lot of economic change. This led to a rise in taxes on agricultural products, particularly on animal feed. These governmental policies, combined with the lack of rain, affected the income from agriculture. After that people started to have other jobs, like in the military and in the city, so many people moved away from Deeban. [...] So now there are little towns that are ghost towns because everybody left them. [...] people just flew away because the government stopped giving assistance to the agriculture. [...] And we have to remember that agriculture and livestock farming was the livelihood of many poor people.¹⁹

He continues to describe how a new group of economic liberals came into power together with King Abdullah in 1999, and how the government had sold many of the state-owned institutions and companies in an effort to reduce Jordan's mounting debts. However, instead of paying down the obligations, the debts continued to rise along with prices of basic staples. The concerns and general feeling of neglect seemed to indicate that the time was right to mobilize people to improve their lives. After the January 7th success, the protest moved to Amman. Activists named the demonstration the 'Day of Anger' (January 14th), to protest against corruption and economic reforms they regarded as failed. Demonstrations continued on a weekly basis despite a quick response from the King to dismiss the Prime Minister and the distribution of 'Royal Charity' to the Deeban protesters. Starting in February 2011, the protests were met with counter demonstrations staged by pro-regime groups or individuals - with the risk that the peaceful protests could turn violent. One Yayeen coordinator further claimed that the movement had to scale down its activism after the political parties started to interfere in the movement in February, and particularly the Muslim Brotherhood. The focus shifted from the original economic demands toward more political demands to reform the electoral law and the constitution -- demands that were strategically more imperative for the parties. According to others I interviewed, Yayeen slowly ceased to exist, but the Yayeen coordinator claimed that they had just shifted focus to more tribal areas outside Amman.²⁰

¹⁹ Author's interview in Amman, 31st March 2012.

²⁰ Author's interview in Amman, 31st March 2012.

The Jordanian Youth Movement

On 30th January 2011, five friends wanted to show their support for the Egyptian revolution and called for a demonstration outside the Egyptian Embassy in Amman. The response was overwhelming with more than 2,000 people in attendance. The press called the organizers, 'The Jordanian Youth Movement', and the name of the group was sealed. The group aimed at opening new communication channels with other independent youth groups in Jordan using the internet and social media, as well as participating in the new wave of demonstrations. The group quickly widened its core group of activists to 20. This group met regularly to organize activities and normally mobilize about 300 people for their events. They claimed to be the first group in Jordan to utilize new social media channels and their Facebook page has more than 18,000 likes (as of July 2012). They also use Twitter, Messenger (MSN), SMS, posters and flyers to mobilize people. Their methods for recruiting more supporters involve mingling with people and make themselves known and visible. They target independent youth not already active in political parties and aim to raise awareness.²¹

All of them claim to have been harassed by the secret services. This harassment has been psychological and physical in nature; one young man described how his car was smashed right outside the window of his office while he watched. Men in plain clothes came in an unmarked van and stopped to smash his car before disappearing. He claims to have checked the license plates and found that the car belonged to the intelligence services.²² Before this event, he received several anonymous phone calls and threats; a note was left for him and his colleague where their lives were threatened. He also received threats that his sister would be raped, and his mother was threatened that her son would be killed.²³ Several other group members also described how their employers had been informed and warned about their employees' political activity, and a few of them lost their jobs. The women in the group were sexually harassed through blackmailing and the spreading of negative rumors. One of the women also found a video montage of herself on the internet portraying her as a prostitute.²⁴ Such threats have proved efficient to quell political activity in the past, but these youths were determined to pursue their quest for democratic liberalizations despite of these obstacles.

The core of the Jordanian Youth Movement consists of Jordanians of both East Bank and Palestinian origins. For them, the traditional division between these two demographic groups and the post-Black September 'de-palestinianization' process is

²¹ Author's interview in Amman, 7th December 2011.

²² It is unusual for secret intelligence services to register their cars in a public register so it is uncertain here what he actually found out. It might be that he did not find any registration at all and suspected that the car belonged to the secret intelligence or that the car was carrying plates exposing an official connection.

²³ Author's interview in Amman, 11th December 2011.

²⁴ Author's interview in Amman, 7th December 2011.

irrelevant. According to them, Jordanians of both origins suffer from the political and economic stagnation and have an equal interest in improving the situation.

24th March Coalition

After nearly three months of protests and demonstrations, activists decided to try a new strategy. Echoing what Egyptian protesters had done in Tahrir Square in Cairo, they decided to erect a permanent tent camp on the Jamal Abdel Nasser circle or roundabout - also known as the Dahhlieh' Circle (meaning the 'interior' circle due to the proximity to the Interior Ministry). The roundabout is also close to the office of the Petra News Agency, from where the organizers had hoped to attract some attention towards their event.

According to those interviewed, the demonstration's atmosphere was very special on the eve of Thursday 24th March. Demonstrators of both Jordanian and Palestinian backgrounds felt they were all there for Jordan and that they all belonged. For the first time, many had a sense that the differences between the two nationalities had disappeared.²⁵ However, this feeling and the tent camp itself were short lived. A counter demonstration was quickly organized by loyalists to defend the King and the regime. A confrontation was building up and escalated through the night. Protesters claim their group was disciplined and protested in a non-violent way, while the loyalists started to hurl stones at the peaceful protesters. The next day, the protests were disbanded relatively brutally by the Special Forces, and the confrontation ended. One person died, many were arrested, and more than one hundred were injured.

In the aftermath, representatives from different youth groups and political parties that had participated in the demonstration, met to organize a coordination group for future protests. The group was called the 24th March Coalition. They met regularly to plan and organize joint activities in Amman. This group also cooperated with a national coordination body called the 'Coalition for Change'. The 24th March Coalition was self-funded, the different parties and groups contributed with the necessary money to produce banners, posters and sound systems for the demonstrations.

Amongst those I interviewed, they disagreed about who created the 24th March Coalition, and all wanted to take the credit. The Islamists took a more active role at this stage of the protests, and others felt that the Muslim Brotherhood was aiming to control the 24th March Coalition - a claim partly confirmed by Muslim Brotherhood leaders.²⁶ The Muslim Brotherhood had control over the 24th March web page and was unwilling to hand it over to the coordinating committee. The coordination meetings became fewer and slowly ended. One coalition partner claimed the coalition collapsed

²⁵ Author's interview in Amman, 5th December 2011.

²⁶ Author's interview in Amman, 10th December 2011.

after the Muslim Brotherhood and other political parties used the 24th March Coalition as an arena to promote their own political views.²⁷ Groups like Yayeen, which were absorbed by the 24th March Coalition, later withdrew and started to work as Yayeen again - when the Muslim Brotherhood and other political parties started to dominate the coalition.²⁸ In light of the accusations that the protest movement and the 24th March Coalition in particular was a Palestinian and Islamist initiative, many of the protest and reform groups started to concentrate their efforts in more tribal areas dominated by people of East bank origins. These protest organizers were keen to avoid a situation where protests were framed as a Palestinian conspiracy. For several months, the coalition ceased all activities under its name and was further weakened by conflicts between pan-Arabist supporters of the Assad regime in Syria and others supporting popular demands for democratic rights in Syria (Vogt 2011).

On the first anniversary of the 24th March demonstration, the former coalition staged a new protest to commemorate the events of the previous year. Activists marched to the roundabout from different directions. The site was heavily guarded by armed police as both anti and pro-regime activists had announced their intended protests. Both groups shouted slogans; however, the event remained peaceful and ended when the police called people to go home.

Tribal protest groups

Military veterans

Perhaps the most extraordinary incident in 2010 was a communiqué published by the National Committee for Military Veterans, representing 140,000 former-soldiers and high-ranking officers. The statement directly attacked the monarchy and its relations with the ethnic Palestinian population - criticizing the King's neo-liberal policies which presumably favor the business sector dominated by 'West Bankers'. The appointment of West Bank Jordanians to key government posts - notably as Prime Minister and head of the Royal Court - was also condemned. The statement further accused the Jordanian regime of resolving the Palestinian issue at the expense of Jordan. The Israeli military had issued an order stating that 70,000 West Bank residents failed to possess proper Israeli papers and classifying them as 'infiltrators' who would soon be expelled to Jordan. The army veterans feared this Israeli declaration would further marginalize the original Transjordanian population in Jordan and issued their communiqué in response. For the first time in Jordan's history, an organization closely linked to the

²⁷ Author's interview in Amman, 22nd March 2012.

²⁸ Author's interview in Amman, 28th March 2012 and 31st March 2012.

army had issued a public political statement related to one of the most sensitive issues in Jordan. The move also came from an organization that mirrors much of the underlying currents of dissatisfaction amongst the East Bank Jordanian society.²⁹

Years of neo-liberal economic policies had undermined the social contract between the Hashemite regime and the East Bank Jordanian tribes, in which the tribes would exchange their loyalty to the King in return for state services and employment opportunities. The neo-liberal policies had in the view of the military veterans limited the tribal leaders' ability to provide jobs for tribal youth, while the Palestinians had increased both their economic dominance and political influence (David 2010, Hamid and Freer 2011, Stemman 2011 Vogt 2011).

In 2012, the retired army officers followed up on their petition and established a political party. The party program is concerned with Jordanian identity and wants to exclude Jordanians of Palestinian background from all the Jordanian movements. A 2012 International Crisis Group report comments however that the veterans have failed to mobilize significant numbers in protests. Further a parliamentarian of a Palestinian origin stated this kind of proposed exclusion based on citizen's origin was impossible because both groups live under the same conditions, and he predicted that the new party would be short lived.³⁰ The establishment of a political party with a dominantly East Bank constituency is nevertheless interesting in a context where East Bankers' politics have mainly been built around individuals and tribes rather than around political parties and programs.

36 Statement

Another surprising development preceding the military veterans' mobilization was an open letter to the King by 36 East Bank Jordanians from prominent tribes. They criticized corruption at the highest echelons of power, including Queen Rania (ICG 2012). The growing wealth of her family and her expensive shopping habit were also often mentioned during my interviews. In an interview, 36-year-old Mustafa, a member of the '36 Statement', indicated that the group is made up of individuals that participate in politics and represent different political views. While 36 people had signed the first petition, by the time of the interview, the petition had expanded to more than 700 supporters. The group has a seven-member leadership committee.

Mustafa is originally from a town in the south. His father had basic education and worked in agriculture and construction, while he and his brothers graduated with

²⁹ http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/15/the_revolt_of_jordans_military_veterans.

³⁰ Author's interview in Amman, 6th June 2012.

university degrees. He describes the south as marginal when it comes to political and economic growth and blames the government for just making economic growth in Amman and in the central region. He was unable to find a job or build a company in the South, so his entire family moved from the south to Amman ten years ago.

First of all I want to say something about the power in Jordan. It is a tyrannical power, and there is so much corruption here [...] and there is the absolute rule of the King. We are educated people, and we want to have governance in which the people are the source of the authority. We will change the situation here by returning the power to the people. And make real democratic parliamentary elections.

At the beginning of the year, there was a feeling in Jordan that there is a lot of corruption and that the political situation was going to get bad. So the people in this group, the '36 Statement', met to talk about these issues. We already knew each other and started the group. We had many discussions over three weeks and then we decided to create a statement and send it to the King. We demanded to reform the general situation in Jordan because it affected the citizens in Jordan. We have agreed on one political and economic view for reform of Jordan. We are concerned about corruption and politics and the economy. We were the first group that touched the red line issues publicly. This happened on the 5th February. In the past, it was dangerous to talk about these issues, about the political system.³¹

Disappointment with the economic situation combined with widespread corruption, is not only raising the concern of a group of people, but also urging them to take action and protest against a development they perceive is going in the wrong direction.

At the time of this interview, the '36 Statement' was part of the 24th March Coalition and participated in joint activities. When the 24th March Coalition dissolved and in an effort to curb the accusations that the demonstrations were a 'Palestinian conspiracy', activists increasingly started to focus on East Bank areas.

Local protest groups

After the motivations of many protest groups in Amman were challenged and even accused of being a Palestinian conspiracy, organizers directed their attention to the tribal areas. Economic discontent motivated many tribal youth to participate in protests. That being said, these protesters do not represent all the tribes, nor do that necessarily the predominant views of the tribe they belong to. Tribal leaders are generally loyal

³¹ Author's interview in Amman, 13th December 2011.

to the regime, although their authority over tribe members probably is diminished because of reduced resources directed to them from the royal court. Younger members commonly form groups to express alternative views from the traditional leadership although there is a large silent majority that is unconcerned about political matters. As such the popular movements cannot be seen as either strong or as representing much of an opposition force. Still they represent a new way of expressing demands towards the regime, which in turn finds it hard to neglect their impact.

I visited al-Karak, Tafileh and Irbid during the fieldwork and met with the representatives of the local popular movements established by residents in these places. The popular movements organized regular Friday demonstrations and other protests locally. Such groups have now been formed in nearly every town across Jordan. For many of the activists in the local protest groups, this is a natural continuation of the strikes and labor protests which started in 2010. There is also close contact between many of these groups, as well as between tribal activists and protest groups in Amman. To some extent, they also coordinate their activities, for example, by agreeing on the main slogan for each Friday protest.

The parliamentary system and the election law are designed to give more influence to tribal areas, and the traditional social contract between the regime and the tribes is intended to ensure employment availability in return for loyalty to the King. The neo-liberal policies have diminished the role of the state in the economy and hence the local leaders' ability to provide jobs. Seeing Jordanians of Palestinian origin in prominent leadership roles has also fueled a feeling of losing the battle for national identity among many East Bank Jordanians (Vogt 2011). This marginalization did not only motivate the military veterans and tribal political leaders, but is experienced in the daily life of ordinary East Bankers and fuels their motivation to protest against the regime.

The popular movement in the southern town of al-Karak is a multi-party movement. When it started in 2011, all the political parties participated in a joint protest effort. As the situation evolved, it became difficult to keep this unity together. Ali (29) is active in a youth party, as well as in the popular movement. He has a university degree, but found it difficult to find work after graduation. A year later and with some assistance from people he knew, he was able to secure a job. With his father having passed away, he still lives at home and assists his mother in providing for the family. He recalls his experience in the local popular movement:

When we started this union, all the parties came together under one banner, from the Muslim Brotherhood to the left. But as things developed we realized that the Muslim Brotherhood had a totally different agenda with the Americans and other foreign forces that are coming from outside the country. So we separated from the Muslim Brotherhood. We did not kick anyone out; it was just a separation

when we realized that we had different agendas. The forum we have now includes people from the [labor] unions and from the street. There are no political parties [represented], only independent people. [...] We have a national agenda. We are defending our national properties, our human resources, our phosphate and national companies.³²

A general sense of dissatisfaction about developments in the country has motivated ordinary East Bankers to participate in protests, although their numbers are still few. In contrast to areas which are faring better after economic reforms (as in the central, urban and predominantly West-Banker areas), the daily experience of seeing one's living conditions deteriorate is urging many to stand up for their rights. Several East bankers express a complex view on the relation between East Bankers and West Bankers in Jordan. Acknowledging that the West Bankers must have equal rights and opportunities, they also express that their presence in Jordan has a limited nature until the Palestinian state is realized, and the vast number of Palestinian refugees can return to their own state. The focus on a national agenda to 'save the country' is often a way to express the frustration of seeing how East Bankers have been left behind, while they think West Bankers have benefitted more from the economic reforms. They often forget that this is perhaps more a question of class than ethnicity.

Although the demands for reform stem from economic concerns, protesters simultaneously call for political reforms since they see the two sectors interrelated. A parliament and government representing the people is necessary to address the current economic challenges, which they see as saving national assets, fighting corruption and creating more jobs, particularly for youth. Even though economic reforms are important, this group also demand constitutional change to reduce the power of the King and make people the base for authority. The weekly protest in al-Karak is small, but stable. They are determined to keep up the pressure on the government until their demands for change are met.

In the northern city of Irbid, the Syrian conflict has complicated the situation for the protest movement. The proximity to the unfolding conflict on the other side of the Syrian border has divided the local popular movement. The Baathist regime in Syria finds considerable support among left radicals in Jordan, which also has its own Baath parties.³³ The Muslim Brotherhood, on the other hand, supports the rebels. In addition, many that used to be positively inclined towards the Syrian regime have become doubtful following the regime's violent response towards Syrian protesters. These doubts and divisions among Jordanian protesters are also visible in Amman,

³² Author's interview in al-Karak, 30th March 2012.

³³ There are two branches of the Bath party in Jordan; one aligning with the Bath party in Syria and the other with the Bath party in Iraq.

but not as clearly in the south. In Irbid, the protests were originally organized by different political parties; however, later, an independent youth movement unaffiliated to any political party emerged. This movement found it important to remain unaffiliated politically and asked the different party member to leave their political agendas outside and to focus on the reform issues they could agree on inside the union. Ahmed, a 31 year old public servant, is part of this movement:

It was the political parties that started to organize this [protests here in Irbid]; there were all kinds of parties. Later we started to organize our own group to give our own opinions. [...] But we have stopped for a while now, we just recently returned to the street. We started the protests in January 2011 and continued until September in the same year. The reason we stopped the protests was that there was a conflict inside the group, and in the rest of Jordan because of the Syria case. [...] During this time we joined protests in Amman, al-Karak and Tafileh, but we were unable to unite [with the groups there], because the other groups raised mottoes [slogans] that we could not agree with, that targeted the government itself. [...] We just returned to the group [here in Irbid]. The demonstrations did not actually start again before April. The reason we returned [to demonstrations] was that we could not see any tangible reforms from the government. We also returned because the others amended their demands and slogans, and we agreed to focus on Jordanian Issues and let go of the regional [e.g. Syria] issues.³⁴

The Syrian conflict has split Jordanian protesters into either pro-Syrian regime or pro-Syrian opposition camps. Jordanians were alarmed by seeing how the peaceful protests in Syria were met with severe force and descend into civil war and increasingly a sectarian conflict. As a result, many are fearful of the street protests. Most Jordanians acknowledge the peaceful situation in Jordan and are willing to put up with economic and other problems as long as calm prevails.

Tafileh

Tafileh is a town located some 180 km south west of Amman (between al-Karak and Ma'an) with a population of nearly 40,000 people. It is best known for its 360 natural springs, which have been important for the local farming. The area is also rich in natural resources. The main livelihoods for Tafileh's inhabitants come from these two sectors: combined agriculture (olive groves and wheat cultivation) and animal husbandry with sheep; and mineral mining, particularly phosphate and potassium.

³⁴ Author's interview in Irbid, 7th June 2012.

A combination of unfortunate events has marginalized Tafileh. The national economic restructuring program has introduced new taxes and limited subsidies related to agricultural production – making farming less profitable. Years of declining precipitation have reduced agricultural productivity. For this reason, many from Tafileh have abandoned agriculture to find new occupations, mainly in the army and the public sector. Many have altogether moved away from Tafileh to the big cities where it is easier to find work, like Amman, Zarka and Aqaba. According to a Jordanian researcher from Tafileh, there is a Tafileh quarter in Amman with some 60,000 former Tafileh inhabitants.³⁵

Parallel to the changes in the agriculture sector, many large state-owned companies have been privatized through the neo-liberal economic reforms. In Tafileh, many people previously employed with the phosphate and potash companies lost their jobs following privatization. A politician I interviewed claimed that 40 buses used to depart from Tafileh every morning to bring workers to the phosphate factory; however, following privatization, only one bus transports workers to the factory. In addition, staff involved in transportation and logistics were also laid off - affecting many more people and their families. To cite the politician:

Two months ago I was informed that the contractors of the cement factory in Tafileh had put in an appeal to the Ministry of economy to shut down the factory. This was because in 2011 the factory was only running at 25 percent of its capacity, and this year, it did not work at all. And they [the contractors] knew that this year the government had issued licenses to open seven new cement factories in Jordan. The cost of running the factory in Tafileh is higher than in the new factories; so the contractors could not handle it any more.³⁶

The politician continues to list other problems for Tafileh, like the building of a dam to secure water to the potash factory, which has drained the natural wells the town is famous for. Also, the army used to absorb much of the surplus labor force, but professionalizing the armed forces has decreased the demand for army personnel. According to him, all these factors combined create the sense of marginalization and of being left behind amongst the people in Tafileh while urban areas have seen development.

Such feelings and perceptions now threaten the traditional social contract that gave legitimacy to the ruler of Jordan, the King. The tribes know their importance in sustaining the kingdom, particularly during events like 'Black September' in 1970 when the Palestinian militias threatened the stability of the kingdom. Now they feel that the King and those around him no longer fulfill their part of this contract, which

³⁵ Author's interview in Amman, 27th March 2012.

³⁶ Author's interview in Amman, 28th March 2012.

they claim is to provide jobs and livelihoods to the tribal communities. Many young people cannot find jobs on which to sustain themselves or a family – much less which are relevant to their formal education. They thus find themselves dependent on support from parents. Available jobs are often far away, and sometimes it is cheaper to quit the job to save the money for transportation and/or housing in a big city. Employment problems for youth are not new in the Middle East, but during the former oil booms, migration could solve the problem, albeit largely for young men as labor migration was less an option for young women. This opportunity has however become less available and less profitable than before.

As elsewhere, a popular movement was created to demand reforms, ‘The Free Tafileh Movement’. In the beginning, the demands focused on development projects specific to Tafileh, but rapidly shifted focus to political reforms. East Bank Jordanians are however concerned that should political reforms lead to a more representative parliament, then, West Bankers may dominate. Furthermore, there are concerns over what it will mean if political reforms may lead to an elected government in lieu of the current situation where prime minister and government are appointed by the King (ICG 2012). However, something had been brewing in Tafileh. Already in June 2011, demonstrators attacked the King’s motorcade with empty bottles during a visit to Tafileh.³⁷ The incident was later denied by the royal court and explained as a ‘shuffle’ to greet the King.³⁸

In December 2011, unemployed youth decided to demonstrate outside the government building in Tafileh and refused to leave before they were guaranteed jobs. Representatives from the youth and political leaders started negotiations with the government and were soon promised 450 jobs. But when the promises were not redeemed four weeks later, the youth restarted their action. This time each unemployed youth received a letter of recommendation they could bring to public employers to secure work. Still none of the youth could find work, and the action outside the municipality continued. Muhammad (29) is in the leadership of the ‘Free Tafileh Movement’:

We had already been demonstrating for more than a year. At that time the demonstrations had become a weekly routine, and the impact of the demonstrations seemed to go down. We wanted to do something new to show the government and other people that we are serious. So we decided to set up the tent camp [in Tafileh].³⁹

³⁷ <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/06/13/153113.html>.

³⁸ <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/06/13/jordan.visit.clashes/>.

³⁹ Author’s interview in Tafileh, 8th June 2012.

A local leader explained to me how the youth had ‘been running around to government institutions with their appointed letters and how nobody had accepted them. Instead the mayor decided to crush the tent camp on the protesters’ heads if they did not leave.’⁴⁰ A politician in Amman called the attack ‘brutal’, as the police used tear gas to dissolve the camp.⁴¹ Then they arrested the political leaders and charged them with ‘cursing the King’, as well as ‘illegal public gathering’. During my second fieldwork in March, eight local leaders were in prison. Many of them claimed they had not even been near the protest in the tent camp. Many rumors were spread, and it was unclear how many people actually had been arrested. People I talked to suggested that altogether 22 people were in prison. What was clear was that this was the first time several protesters were arrested in this kind of round-up since the start of the protests at the beginning of 2011.

The arrests have, if anything, lead to increased activity among pro-reform activists. If the arrests were intended to curb the protests, they failed. Protesters from all over the country staged new protests outside the prison to demand the activists’ release. Such solidarity actions came despite the fact that many activists elsewhere criticized the ‘Free Tafileh Movement’ for radicalizing the protests by attacking the King directly and calling for the regime to fall. Most protesters outside Tafileh support a more moderate reform process. They want change, but not a revolution. Many felt that the people in Tafileh had moved too fast to adopt anti-regime slogans. Some argued that the escalation of slogans had split the protest movement and repelled potential supporters rather than garnishing more support for the reform protest. Yet others feared popular reactions to the arrests had the potential to escalate and blow up into country-wide tensions and destabilize the regime.

In March there was a lot of speculation around why the authorities had decided to arrest so many people from Tafileh when they had been so careful not to arrest people during the first 15 months of the protest. Most of the people I talked to agreed that the activists in Tafileh were too radical when they targeted the King in the protests. All the people I met agreed that the freedom of expression had improved in Jordan after the protests started. However, they acknowledged some clear red lines had been crossed - the most important being the King’s position. There was common knowledge that this issue should not be addressed in the protests, although many would say that the King’s position is no longer safe should he fail to implement tangible reforms. Crossing this red line will be seen as anti-regime activity liable to prosecution and punishment by the regime. The demonstrators were usually kept in line by an active and visible secret service, present at every demonstration. Plain-cloth agents would take notes, writing down slogans, filming with their mobile phones and call in reports from the

⁴⁰ Author’s interview in Tafileh, 8th June 2012.

⁴¹ Author’s interview in Amman, 28th March 2012.

demonstrations. The visibility of this activity sends a clear message that the regime is following the protests closely as a warning against crossing red lines.

When I came back in June 2012, the situation in Tafileh had calmed down despite activists' early concerns that the arrests could trigger more violent protests. Violent escalation is perhaps what many Jordanians fear the most after observing the experiences in Libya and Syria. The arrested activists were released after some 40 days; however, the charges of anti-regime activity were not dropped, and the cases are pending without a deadline. In Tafileh, the evaluation of the experience was that the arrests had unified people from different places and moved the protests forward, claiming that local people were keener to participate in public protests because of the arrests.⁴² While others I talked to said that the escalation of slogans and the arrests deterred potential reform supporters from participating in demonstrations.

The Islamist force

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Jordan and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), initially adopted a reluctant stand towards the protest movement when it started in early 2011. As the major opposition party, the Jordanian MB has built a significant strength with a substantial organization and economic foundation, as well as a clear political platform. Founded in 1992, the IAF developed as a reformist Islamist party, loyal to the King. They seek political change through political processes, as opposed to more militant Islamist parties. The Muslim Brothers had built their strength during the period of martial law from 1957 to 1989, and particularly after the conflict with the Palestinian militia in 1970. Siding with the regime in this conflict, they were rewarded and allowed to work exclusively in the Palestinian camps after the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan in 1971. This gave them a special influence over the service sector in the camps and the Palestinian communities, further aided by generous funds from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. Education and health are among their main priorities, and according to a small business owner in the media sector, they also control the Ministry of education and parts of the Ministry of health.⁴³

When other political parties were illegal during the 1970s and 1980s, the Muslim Brotherhood was free to build up their organizational structure under the auspices of being a charity organization. Unlike other Jordanian political parties, the Brotherhood gained unique experience during those years, which they were able to

⁴² Author's interview in Tafileh, 8th June 2012.

⁴³ Author's interview in Amman, 16th June 2012.

capitalize on when political parties were legalized in 1989. In addition they have abundant economic resources making it possible to run several hospitals, universities, schools, health clinics in addition to traditional charity to poor and needy people. Their charitable activities give them a good standing amongst poorer segments of the population and is unmatched by other political groups and parties which lack similar sources of funding.

When parliamentary elections were reinstated in Jordan in 1989, the MB is considered to have won 22 of 80 parliamentary seats in addition to a dozen affiliated independent candidates, forming the biggest block in the Parliament. As mentioned earlier, an alarmed government seeking measures to limit the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, introduced the controversial 'non-transferable-single-vote system' (SNTV) or the 'one-man-one-vote law' before the next parliamentary election in 1993. The new law favors individual rural and tribal candidates causing underrepresentation of urban areas dominated by West Bank Jordanians. The IAF secured only 16 seats in the 93 election and decided to lead a group of opposition parties to boycott the 1997 elections (Al Quds Center 2009, Bank 2011, Curtis 2004). The IAF resumed participation in the elections in 2003 and 2007, but decided in favor of a new boycott in 2010. This time again the boycott was due to the undemocratic dimensions in the electoral law. Mr. Hamid, a parliamentarian from the IAF both in 2003 and 2007, confirmed the following picture:

There are political reasons for me not to be in this election. I am an Islamist, and I am a member of the Islamic Action Front (IAF). [...] We are boycotting because the election law is unfair, and the elected representatives will not represent the people in a fair way [or a representative way]. [...] There is also an unfair distribution of the seats in the different districts. So the government is controlling citizen's rights through many regulations that limit the opposition's chances in the election. [...] Instead we will work to change the election law. We want the government to be more neutral in relation to the elections. As it is now, there is too much manipulation through regulations and even forgery in the elections. The government has already guaranteed a particular majority in the parliament through the unfair distribution of seats and other regulations. This makes the opposition too small to have any real influence. [...] So by the boycott, we are sending a very clear message about the unfair situation in the elections. We will also arrange demonstrations, sit-ins and other activities to protest against this situation. But we are not expecting a rapid change in these matters.⁴⁴

So when the Arab spring started in January 2011, the Islamists had already started to organize sit-ins to protest against lack of democracy. Contrary to the tribal protest groups focusing on economic hardships, the Islamists focused more on political

⁴⁴ Author's interview in Amman, 23rd October 2012.

reforms that could strengthen their position, first and foremost in the election law and constitution. They wanted to limit the role of the King and the secret intelligence service to the advantage of elected representatives in the parliament. The actual support to the Muslim Brotherhood is difficult to estimate because they boycotted the last election and since the election law is designed to limit their influence. It is, however, expected that they will have a favorable outcome in the election if election reforms introduce a more representative system. This nevertheless seems unlikely at the moment, since the amendments of the election law for the parliamentary elections at the end of January 2013, only made small changes to the 'one-man-one-vote' system. As a result, the IAF and other opposition parties announced their boycott of the 2013 elections.⁴⁵

Although the Muslim Brotherhood took a passive role at the start of the protests, many of their younger members participated in demonstrations as individuals. The Muslim Brothers also refused to accept an invitation to participate in the 'national dialogue committee', instead they sent persons that were affiliated to them, but officially represented other institutions.⁴⁶ A left-leaning politician I interviewed claimed that this indirect way of working in politics often was preferred by the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan.⁴⁷ Even though the Muslim Brotherhood took a passive role at the start of the protests, many of their younger members participated in demonstrations as individuals. After the crackdown of the demonstration at the 'interior circle' on the 24th March, the Muslim Brotherhood decided to take a more active role in the protests and soon became the best organized group in the protest movement.

The change in the previously-positive relationship between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood started in 1994 after Jordan signed the Wadi Arabi agreement which is the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel. Other factors have complicated the relationship further; the hotel bombings in Amman in 2005 and Hamas's victory in the Palestinian elections in 2006. The Jordanian government adopted a policy to suppress the Islamist opposition in the aftermath of these events, culminating in the closing of the Brotherhood's charity office and the arrest of IAF parliamentarians in 2006. The continued political repression led to an internal conflict inside the Muslim Brotherhood that further weakened the organization. After having consolidated its ranks, the Muslim Brotherhood seems to take a more confrontational line towards the government, although they also have been seen to negotiate terms for political participation during the protest period.

The negotiation attempts are the reason people in the tribal protest groups criticize the Muslim Brotherhood for cooperating too closely with the regime. They claim that

⁴⁵ <http://jordantimes.com/many-in-opposition-support-election-boycott>.

⁴⁶ They were representatives from the student committee at Jordan University and the agricultural union.

⁴⁷ Author's interview in Amman, 28th March 2012.

the Islamists do not really want change; instead they are seen as a part of the system and only seeking their own political positions.⁴⁸ Tribal figures attribute the Muslim Brotherhood's reluctance to participate early on in the protests to the fact that the Prime Minister and people in other leading positions were of Palestinian origin and that the Muslim Brotherhood are so closely related to West Bank Jordanians themselves. They claim the Islamists kept a low profile for this reason. The Muslim Brothers first started to engage in protests after Prime Minister Rifai was dismissed and Marouf al-Bakhit was appointed Prime Minister - because al-Bakhit was seen as being very unpopular with the Muslim Brotherhood. He was the Prime Minister chosen to restore order after the hotel bombing in 2005 and lead the intensified confrontation against the Islamists afterwards (Vogt 2011). Al-Bakhit was on the other hand very popular among some tribal activists who called him 'a friend of the poor people'. He was prized for his initiative to reinstate many public employees who had been fired under PM Rifai's government, to their jobs. He also gained popularity among public sector employees for looking into salary structures to make a fairer distribution of remuneration.⁴⁹

The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria has also brought a message to the Jordanian government that they have to relate to the Muslim Brotherhood one way or another. The outcome of the conflict in Syria in particular will have important consequences for the situation in Jordan. Trade with and through Syria is important for Jordan and hence, good relations with their neighbor to the north are key. For this reason, Jordan also asked to be exempt from the Arab League's and European economic sanctions against Syria. According to an evaluation of the effect of the sanctions on the Syrian economy in June 2012, the official Syrian trade with Jordan had increased since the imposition of the Arab embargo (Abboud 2012). Escalating violence in Syria has made this trade more vulnerable.

The possible rise of Islamists and particularly the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria is worrisome for the Jordanian regime. Such a development might encourage the Islamists in Jordan to demand more power. The so-called 'Brotherhood Crescent' including Egypt and Syria will create an internal pressure in Jordan.⁵⁰ A young female activist expressed this dilemma as follows:

When the Jordanian government felt that the Syrian revolution might be successful, they started to have negotiations with the Muslim Brotherhood here in Jordan. That happened under Awn Khasawneh's time as Prime Minister. He started negotiations with the Muslim Brotherhood just in case the revolution succeeded in Syria, and there were indications that the same would happen in Egypt. [...]

⁴⁸ Author's interview in Amman, 1st April March 2012.

⁴⁹ Author's interview in Amman, 31st March 2012.

⁵⁰ Islamist rise in Syria challenge to Jordan: analysts 23rd February. <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/23/196504.html>.

During this time the government forgot the left parties and the independent activists. But when the situation changed and it seemed that Bashar al-Assad would not go [...] the leaders here discovered that they did not have to make a deal with the Muslim Brothers. So they went back to the old politics. [Negotiations] were only necessary if the Muslim Brotherhood succeeded in taking power both in Syria and Egypt⁵¹, because then they would have needed access to both these regimes.⁵²

Varulkar (2011) however points to a more internal factor behind the regime's initiation of a dialogue with the Muslim Brothers. Realizing the crucial role the Islamist movement had in organizing the protests and marches every Friday, particularly the vast numbers they brought to the streets, the government decided that appeasing the Islamists would contribute to dispel tensions. Varulkar also thinks that the replacement of Prime Minister al-Bakhit for Awn Khasawneh was done to ease the grounds for dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood. The new Prime Minister invited the Islamist movement to join his government, which they declined, but they accepted to participate in a dialogue about the reform process.

The worry of many independent and leftist activists that I interviewed was that although the Muslim Brotherhood was the largest protest group, they were not the largest group for change. These activists viewed them as being insincere and disinterested in real change, and accused them of merely seeking a more significant political role.

Coalitions

As stated earlier, the 24th March Coalition was born out of demonstrations on the same day in 2011; however, its activities gradually slowed, and it eventually dissolved. The ability to create more durable coalitions and foster cooperation between different segments of the protest movement will be crucial for the outcome of these protests in Jordan. Given the importance of partnering with others, there have been several attempts to create coalitions between different parts of the protest movements to strengthen the movement.

Tribal alliances

The combination of the crackdown on the 24th March demonstration and the rumors that the protests were staged by Palestinian activists led many protest groups to change their focus and strategy and relocate from Amman to tribal areas. Simultaneously they indicated that the call for reform was Jordanian in origin. The local popular movements proved efficient to mobilize people in small local protests, as well as bring-

⁵¹ The ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has since decreased this pressure further.

⁵² Author's interview in Amman, 13th June 2012.

ing people to Amman for larger events. Four of the larger tribes - the Bani Hassan, Bani Sakher, Daaja and Ajarmeh tribes - formed an alliance called the Tribal Coalition for Reform (Varulkar 2011, Yom and al-Khatib 2012).

Yom and al-Khatib (2012) argue that new tribal dissidents differ from traditional urban opposition parties in their informality; they prefer mobility over institutionalization and despise vertical leadership and what activists call 'deep pockets'. The struggle against corruption is thus a central aim. They do not aspire to create political parties, which they associate with factionalism and elitism. The popular tribal groups have built networks with youth movements elsewhere, and they use social media to spread news and new strategies for protests. This has enabled a new cross-provincial solidarity, and the seven largest protest groups have formed a coordination committee for the popular movements through which they plan Friday protests. Young activists also travel across Jordan to support each other's activities and are forming a wider solidarity network which becomes more visible when an activist is arrested. In these incidences, protesters travel from different towns and cities to demonstrate outside the prison demanding the release of their colleague and showing solidarity and support. They use traditional cultural expressions, such as the 'dabkeh' folk dance, giving it new content to proclaim their demands.

Left-wing party coalition

Since the signing of the peace treaty with Israel in 1994, the opposition parties have coordinated efforts in disapproval of the treaty. Jordanian left-wing parties, nationalist parties and the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamic Action Front (IAF) all took part. The recent waves of protest have however split this coalition as it became clear to some of the parties that their reform agenda differed substantially from the Muslim Brotherhood's. A new coalition was then formed between six left-wing and nationalist parties and shifted its focus to reform issues. The new coalition emphasizes its secular approach to politics and accuses the Brotherhood of mixing religion and politics, making it difficult for supporters to differentiate between the two.

A young woman active in a small opposition party claims that smaller parties find that the Muslim Brotherhood gets more attention from the government because of their size. They almost have a monopoly as the regime's negotiation partner. She claims the small parties have created the new coalition to be more visible and gain joint strength. This way they hope government officials will start meeting with them on a regular basis to discuss political matters generally and the reform process in particular. In addition to organizing protests, the left-wing and nationalist coalition also engages in trade union elections, as well as women's rights issues.⁵³

⁵³ Author's interview in Amman, 16th June 2012.

In Jordan, there is a surge of interest and activity in what a Jordanian analyst called the social democratic ideology. The social democratic actors focus on people's rights and often call for new and independent labor unions. These actors also aim to redistribute some of the power which had been allocated to the King through what many call 'unconstitutional' amendments, back to a stronger and more representative parliament. Unlike Islamist or nationalist ideology promoted through the established political parties,⁵⁴ the social democratic ideology is mainly promoted in the independent trade unions and in small groups that gather informally to shed light on a particular problem of concern. The groups learn strategies from each other about how they can develop as pressure groups towards the government.⁵⁵ Some people I interviewed are also working to establish a new national social democratic movement. They emphasize that it is a movement and not a political party, since the regulations for a movement is less strict than for establishing a political party. The social democratic initiative is closely related to the protest groups.⁵⁶ According to some of their critics, this group is also accused of being more interested in securing seats in elections, than working for actual change.⁵⁷

Muslim Brotherhood coalition

In June 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood launched another attempt to unite the protest movement, admitting that it remained fractured after a year and a half of protests. The Muslim Brothers wanted to move beyond the differences and concentrate on a few issues that all the involved could agree on, such as an election law based on proportional representation and the formation of governments elected by the majority in parliament. Representatives from 35 different reform groups and political parties participated in the discussion, but the seven-tribe Jordanian Popular Movement committee declined the invitation to participate in order to maintain their independence.⁵⁸ When I interviewed people from different popular movements and political parties, most claimed they did not belong to this new coalition and stated it was purely a Muslim Brotherhood initiative despite including some left-wing parties. Most left-wing parties, tribal groups and independent movements stayed away from the Muslim Brotherhood-promoted coalition and avoided the activities they organized. The Islamist initiative to unite protest movements thus seems to have failed. Still the Muslim Brotherhood is a large and perhaps even the most successful force in the overall protest movement and it will continue to pursue its aims of gaining more political influence.

⁵⁴ Author's interview in Amman, 16th June 2012.

⁵⁵ Author's interview in Amman, 16th June 2012.

⁵⁶ Author's interview in Amman, 8th December 2011 and 25th March 2012.

⁵⁷ Author's interview in Amman, 22nd March 2012.

⁵⁸ <http://jordantimes.com/islamists-popular-movements-to-unite-ranks>.

National Front for Reform

The National Front for Reform is perhaps the broadest pro-reform coalition and operates at a different level than the other reform coalitions. Its leader, Ahmad Obeidat, is a former Prime Minister and head of the General Intelligence Directorate. Obeidat was also central in developing the political liberalization program that followed the 1989 Ma'an uprising. The National Front for Reform includes several prominent opposition politicians from the Islamist (IAF), nationalist and left-wing parties, as well as independents. The coalition aims to provide an umbrella for the reform movement by proposing a framework for action and for streamlining efforts. The coalition put forward a comprehensive political reform program focusing on state-building and the rule of law. They hoped to generate consensus for such principles among different political actors and forces. Combating corruption was also a key focus (ICG 2012).

Critics of this coalition claim that while the intentions of the National Front for Reform were genuine, the coalition was taken over by the Muslim Brotherhood. They claimed that the Islamists are using the coalition to gain impact and position, neglecting grass-root viewpoints. A leading leftist figure further stated that the National Front for Reform is an old-fashioned mechanism unsuitable for implementing its aims, although his own party was part of the coalition.⁵⁹ According to him, the coalition is slow-moving and unable to move forward precisely because it tries to build consensus and embrace all the political parties and movements in Jordan at the same time, including the Islamists. This creates a particular dynamic in the coalition in which it must consider all suggestions from the different parties and evaluate all alternatives before trying to reach a consensus. All parties have to agree before they can take any decisions. This makes the process very complicated, contrary to the new loosely-organized youth movements that can mobilize and organize small activities very fast.

One parliamentarian I interviewed in June 2011 acknowledged the influence of the protest movement on Jordanian politics, but claimed this influence was declining precisely because the protest movement was unable to unite.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Author's interview in Amman, 23rd March 2012.

⁶⁰ Author's interview in Amman, 6th June 2012.

Regime response

Change of governments – a well-used strategy

The revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt concerned the Jordanian King and when the protests started in Jordan, the King decided to respond quickly to avoid a deteriorating situation in Jordan. The Prime Minister was ordered to immediately reverse some fiscal measures intended to address the growing budget deficit. The planned lifting of subsidies on basic staples and energy were revoked, but the protests continued nonetheless. While the protests were triggered partly by economic neglect and lack of investments in tribal areas and political grievances, easing the economic situations was insufficient to stop protests. However, protests did not turn against the King and ultimate ruler of the country as in Tunisia and Egypt; instead protesters demanded the resignation of the Prime Minister in addition to put focus on corruption and the distribution of power.

In response, the King, having learned from developments in Tunisia and Egypt, moved on and dismissed Prime Minister Rifai on February 1st 2011 (Barnes-Dacey 2012, ICG 2012, Varulkar 2011, Vogt 2011). Changing governments and reshuffling cabinets is a well-established mechanism used by both the current King and his father King Hussein to defuse social unrest. In this way, politics can be reoriented while the monarchy remains untouched. A new Prime Minister has been appointed by the King four times since the start of the protests in January 2011. Additionally the King quickly repeated his promise of reform by establishing committees with reform mandates.

Prime Minister Samir Rifai was highly unpopular and was directly linked to the economic complaints at the heart of the protests. He implemented neo-liberal policies with a strong emphasis on privatization of several state enterprises to address the Kingdom's mounting budget deficits. Being of Palestinian background, he was also accused by tribal Jordanians of benefitting Palestinian businessmen at the cost of developing tribal areas, which are traditionally more dependent on public sector investment and work.

The King appointed Marouf al-Bakhit to speed up the reform process in response to calls from the street. Al-Bakhit, from a powerful tribe, appeared to be a friend of the poor now protesting against low salaries and high prices. He started looking into salary scales in the public sector, promising improvements, as well as implementing the King's call for a National Dialogue Committee to discuss reforms in the election and the political party laws (Vogt 2011).

Another tribal son and activist from the south expressed his appreciation for al-Bakhit's arrival:

Bakhit started as if he was a friend of all those poor people. [...] One of the first decisions that Bakhit made was in response to what Rifai had done, he returned 256 workers that had been dismissed from the agricultural ministry under Rifai's government, and he returned them to the ministry. He started a program called 'skeletonization', to cut to the bone and have some standardization for the salaries. They looked into salaries to see how they could be fairer for the workers. So he started this change to get higher salaries for people who had really low salaries. He gave the highest percentage increase to those that had the lowest salary, and lesser increases to those who already have high salaries. He also started to revise the salaries in institutions that were private, but also kind of governmental, and he started to look into those that had really high salaries. They call them independent organizations, but they are not, they are actually part of the government [headed by former politicians and their relatives]. In some of those organizations, an engineer could take up to 1,500 JD [a month], and in the governmental institutions they take 450 JD [a month]. [...] But he [al-Bakhit] could not do it [the change] because there were so many people in power that wanted to take advantage of the old system.⁶¹

Prime Minister al-Bakhit was less popular however with Jordanians of Palestinian origin; he had served previously as the Prime Minister assigned to restore order after the hotel bombings in Amman in November 2005, when he applied a security-oriented policy leading to confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood. His return as Prime Minister in 2011 led to the first division of the protest movement. The tribal groups saw the time fit to give the new government a chance, while the Muslim Brotherhood and some of the left parties wanted to continue the Friday protests (Vogt 2011). During al-Bakhit's time in office, the Muslim Brotherhood decided to prioritize the protest movement, which alarmed the regime. The experience from the 24th March demonstration and protesters' shift of focus towards discontent in tribal areas further diminished al-Bakhit's room for maneuver. When he got entangled in corruption charges and increasingly was perceived to be opposed to reforms, his government came to an end (Varulkar 2011).

October 2011 saw a new government reshuffle, in which Marouf al-Bakhit was replaced by Awn Khasawneh. In an effort to prove that he was serious about his reforms, the King this time avoided a 'returnee', or what protesters call the 'revolving door' of the prime ministry. Prime ministers have usually been selected from a few families, some of them returning and others following in the steps of their fathers. This time a well-known judge, highly praised for his integrity and without any suspicions of corruption, was called back from his position as a judge at the International Court of Justice in The Hague where he had served since 1999. The appointment was seen

⁶¹ Author's interview in Amman, 31st March 2012.

as a gesture towards the Islamist movement. This was soon confirmed when the new Prime Minister immediately announced his intention to hold dialogue with all powers in the country, including the opposition parties and protest movements. The Muslim Brotherhood turned out to be the focal point of these negotiations.

Khasawneh further annulled all the pay scale reforms announced by his predecessor and postponed scheduled municipal elections to amend a new election law. These and other measures meant to appease the Muslim Brotherhood, succeeded to some extent in subduing the protest activity of the Islamist movement. This paralleled the East Bank activists' reduction of protests after the appointment of al-Bakhit. Now the East Bankers looked with worry at how the Islamist movement was invited to dialogues. They feared that the reform process would develop in favor of the Muslim Brotherhood's demands for constitutional changes and a proportional representation election law. The protests thus continued particularly in the tribal areas. The Islamists participated intermittently as they also had one foot in negotiations with the regime. The Muslim Brotherhood both wanted to remain an influential pressure group in the 'street' by appeasing their popular support base, at the same time they were reluctant to stand in way of the new government (Varulkar 2011). At this point the Muslim Brotherhood eyed profitable political deals with the government, which failed to materialize mainly due to lack of democratic reforms. Generally the protest movement increasingly saw a separation between activities organized by the Islamic movement and others arranged by tribal groups, fragmenting more than uniting protest efforts.

Khasawneh stepped down in April 2012 to the surprise of many. In a June interview, one parliamentarian claimed that Awn Khasawneh left was because of a disagreement with the King over the elections. The former-Prime Minister wanted to hold elections in the middle of 2013 to allow time for amendments to relevant laws, but also to give enough time for political stakeholders to prepare for and conduct election campaigns without interference from the intelligence. The King, however, was in a hurry to conduct elections before the end of 2012. Another parliamentarian believed the rush was because of the pressure the King felt from the European Union and the Americans to move the democratic process forward.⁶² Elections are often seen as the most important democratic tool at hand and have become a symbol of democratic development. Since the Islamic movement boycotted the last elections, it is significant to bring them back into the circles of power to give both the regime and the parliament more legitimacy.

Media analysts on the other hand claim the cabinet reshuffle was a direct response to the former-Prime Minister's proposed election law that drew opposition from many sides. Tribal parliamentarians felt it favored Islamists, while some

⁶² Author's interview in Amman, 6th June 2012.

Islamists were unhappy because the proposed party list system efficiently limited the number of seats the opposition could win altogether under the new election law. The Muslim Brotherhood also disregarded a proposed ban on political parties established on religious bases, claiming both measures aimed at limiting the Islamists' influence which otherwise is expected to increase under fair and free elections.⁶³

Fayez al-Tarawneh, who also was Prime Minister in the late 1990s, was appointed Prime Minister after Awn Khasawneh. Responses to the news of his appointment suggested it would not be seen as a significant change. The new government was dominated by conservatives from the political establishment. The monarch instructed al-Tarawneh to form a government for "a limited transitional period" to implement reforms needed to hold elections before the end of 2012.⁶⁴ In addition to the country's mounting economic challenges, Al-Tarawneh also faced the same dilemmas as his predecessors, namely: in reforming election and political party laws; preparing for parliamentary and delayed municipal elections and drafting liberalization measures for the media.⁶⁵ When he failed to end the protests against economic stagnation and lack of democratic reforms, the King surprised everyone by yet again appointing a new Prime Minister after dissolving the parliament in preparations for the parliamentary elections.

The current Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour, a former minister and a vocal advocate of democratic reforms. Abdullah Ensour is an independent member of parliament and recognized for his extensive networks both in circles around the royal court, as well as with the Islamic Action Front, other opposition groups and trade unions. His main task was to persuade the Islamists to drop the announced boycott of the forthcoming elections, a rather complex and difficult task with an election law clearly favoring tribal candidates known to be more supportive of the monarchy.⁶⁶ A task that in the end failed as the Islamic Action Front sustained their boycott decision.

It remains to be seen whether it is possible for Jordan to maintain the security and stability they strive to uphold in a turbulent region, taking into account all the counterforces that are built into this divided society. If protesters from all the different backgrounds do not see their living conditions improve, the stability of Jordan might face challenges far more dramatic than the small and contained demonstrations we have seen so far.

⁶³ <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=267649>, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/26/jordan-prime-minister-awn-khasawneh-resigns>.

⁶⁴ <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/05/02/211758.html>.

⁶⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14636308>.

⁶⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14636308>.

Repeated promise of reform

The promise of reform dates back long before the Arab Spring, but has not yet materialized to the satisfaction of ordinary people. Jordan's first experience with democracy and political pluralism in the 1950s ended abruptly when the new parliament was dominated by secular nationalists that threatened to dissolve the state. Martial law was imposed in 1957 by the King and maintained for three decades preventing most political activity and freedom of association. Martial law was lifted following the 1989 rebellion which was triggered by the economic recession in the 80s. King Hussein realized the need for reform and introduced the 'National Charter' suggesting a new contract between the state and its citizens. Most of the political reforms had been revoked, however, by the time King Abdullah II inherited his position in 1999 (Muasher 2008).

Since King Abdullah II's coronation, economic and political reform has been one of his first priorities. Each Prime Minister he appointed was entrusted with clear instructions to advance the reform process (Muasher 2011, Vogt 2011). He took over a country that was relatively stable, but still suffering from the economic crisis dating back to 1988. As discussed earlier, the King first of all focused on economic measures introducing neo-liberal economic reforms aiming to decrease the state deficit. The idea was to reduce costs in the public sector and strengthen the private sector. In addition, he emphasized national unity and democratic reforms. Despite these claims, the King suspended the parliament between 2001 and 2003. During this period, the King passed and amended 211 provisional laws, curbed press freedom and the right to public gathering, but most importantly failed to change an electoral system designed to limit the number of parliamentarians of Palestinian origin (Muasher 2011:11).

The King initiated several commissions with a mandate to develop democratization programs. The first campaign was 'The Jordan First initiative' in 2002 which proposed a comprehensive reform program. The process failed to include any representatives from the opposition and soon the initiative was reduced to a 'slogan'. The only tangible result was the introduction of a small parliamentary quota for women (Muasher 2011, Barnes-Dacey 2012).

After the 2004 Arab Summit in Tunisia, Arab member states committed to certain key areas of political reform. The King once again called for reform, but as before nothing happened. Muasher (2011) has characterized Jordan's political system as a 'rentier system', which privileges a small elite class who benefit from their position in society. This elite serves as a 'counter force' against all change and development that threatens its privileges. Today, this elite stratum is accused of corruption and depleting public funds for private benefit. A real estate developer from a well-established business family in Amman understood the popular call for more democracy, although he worried about his business prospects should the Islamists gain more political influence.

Recognizing Jordan's serious corruption problem, he believed that most people appreciated the government's tougher stand against corruption. However, he acknowledged some challenges as follows:

[T]here is another case [of corruption], a man in this military-owned company. It is a company for the Army; I don't know if you have heard about this? Anyway there is a lot of land for the Army, and the military has companies. And [the army companies] started to partner up with developers and wanted to do shopping malls and other businesses. And suddenly a few hundred [thousand?] dollars were missing from this company. So they put the CEO of this company and the head financial controller in jail. But they had not proceeded with the court case for a year or two. And people have put pressure on them to begin with the court proceedings. Okay he is the CEO of the company, but the [head of the] board of the company was the head of the army. Some people have the impression that they are not proceeding with the court case because if you proceed you have to interview these people, and this will open up [new questions] and then there will be even higher heads that will roll. [You know] to put the head of the Army in jail. So there is a bit of that. We have a tricky situation.⁶⁷

In some previous experiences where government institutions independently interpreted reform directives, the original content and intent were often diluted. So, in 2005, the King attempted a new and more holistic reform process, called the 'National Agenda'. This time the opposition was invited to participate in the committee, as were representatives from civil society, women's organizations, media and the private sector together with government representatives. The committee for the 'National Agenda' was mainly comprised of three groups: the traditional elite, economic neo-liberals and political liberals. Again the elite were unprepared to relinquish its power and argued against reforms that put 'merit over loyalty' which from their perspective would weaken the Jordanian state. With support from most of the political and military institutions, the committee endorsed stability at the cost of reform effectively stopping the move away from tribal-based politics towards a parliament elected through political parties. This decision was further aided by three significant regional events: the Muslim Brotherhood securing 20 percent of the seats in the 2005 Egyptian parliamentary elections; the bombing of three hotels in Amman in November 2005; and the 2006 election victory of Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The events convinced the Jordanian government to postpone the reform agenda and adopt a more security-oriented policy (Muasher 2011, Vogt 2011, Barnes-Dacey 2012).⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Author's interview in Amman, 14th June 2012.

⁶⁸ Marwan Muasher is a former deputy Prime Minister and the head of the 'National Agenda Committee'.

In 2006, the government felt compelled to show some effort on the reform file again. Prime Minister al-Bakhit initiated a 'national consensus process' to discuss political, economic and social challenges - all topics already addressed by the 'National Agenda'. Muasher (2011) describes the initiative as an attempt to bypass the 'National Agenda' by selecting fifteen priorities where several were focusing on loyalty and national interests. The process was not taken seriously by senior leaders. For instance, the next Prime Minister, Nader Dahabi, who replaced al-Bakhit after charges of election fraud, put even less emphasis and commitment to the reform process. Instead NGOs were subject to tougher restrictions on their activities with many claiming they were under strict surveillance. When I interviewed people in 2010 about social and political participation, before the Arab Spring started, many expressed fear of surveillance and arrest connected to such activity. Many thus found alternative ways to participate in society and express opinions (Christophersen 2011). Most of my informants had lost faith in the reform or a reform process that never seemed to progress. When the last Prime Minister before the Arab Spring was asked to continue the reform process, expectations for the outcome were very low.

Amended laws, but no change

In addition to reinstating subsidies which had been cut and changing the Prime Minister in response to the popular protests, the King also established a National Dialogue Committee in March 2011 with a wide reform mandate. The main priority was to draft a new law for elections and political parties. The opposition was invited to participate. Some small parties accepted the invitation, while the Muslim Brotherhood's IAF declined, arguing that the mandate was too limited as it excluded discussions about the constitution. One of the committee members explains what happened:

I was a member of the National Dialogue Committee. The Muslim Brotherhood refused to participate, although they had two persons in the committee. It is not a secret that they came from the Brotherhood; they were known: one was the president of the student committee at Jordan University, and the other was chief of the agricultural union of Jordan. Both of them said that they were there to represent their unions, not the Muslim Brotherhood, although they are supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. This is their [the Muslim Brotherhood's] way of working in politics.

The King sent a letter to the National Dialogue Committee saying that they should focus on two issues: the election law and the political party law. This was on 23rd of March 2011. On the 24th of March, the sit-in at the interior circle

started. The next day they [the police] banished them [the protesters], and we went out of the Committee [...] as a protest against what happened in the circle on 25th March. We were 16 persons from the different opposition groups [...] After about ten days, maybe on the 29th, Taher Masri [the leader of the National Dialogue Committee] [...] called for a general meeting of the Committee, and asked if we agreed to come [back] and participate...We told him we have these demands: we have to discuss the constitutional reforms; secondly, the party law; and thirdly, the election law. And we need a guarantee from the King. [...] [Later] we met the King and he agreed [for us] to discuss the constitutional reforms that are in relation with the law on political parties and the election law.⁶⁹

In June the Committee presented its recommendations for amendments to the election law and the law on political parties, including necessary constitutional amendments. The National Dialogue Committee recommended a two-tier system for parliamentary elections with 115 deputies elected at the district level and 15 seats earmarked for national lists. It further suggested canceling the 'single-non-transferable-vote' system and instead implementing a proportional list system, which surely would boost the opposition parties, particularly the Islamic Action Front. The recommendations stopped short of addressing the gerrymandering where election districts in rural and tribal areas are given disproportional weight at the expense of urban areas dominated by Jordanians of Palestinian origin (Hamid and Freer 2011, Barnes-Dacey 2012). According to a 2012 International Crisis Group report, from the beginning, neither the al-Bakhit nor Khasawneh governments planned to seriously implement the recommendations from the National Dialogue Commission.

When the election law amendments were finally approved by both the Upper and Lower Houses in July 2012, the seats allocated to national party lists had increased to 27 from 15 and the total number of seats in the parliament from 120 to 150. The potential representation of political parties is thus still limited to 6.2 percent of the parliament, falling short of protesters' and opposition parties' demand for 50 percent of the seats in the Chamber. In addition the SNTV, the one-person-one-vote system was left intact at the district level, further enraging the opposition. They claimed that the law did not differ significantly from the previous law which had been unable to result in a legitimate parliament.⁷⁰

The political party law was also criticized because the last amendment to the law makes it difficult to form new parties. This amendment also contradicts a

⁶⁹ Author's interview in Amman, 28th March 2012.

⁷⁰ <http://jordantimes.com/many-in-opposition-support-election-boycott> <http://jordantimes.com/elections-law-amendments-death-blow-to-jordans-reform-drive>.

policy to increase the participation of political parties in Jordanian politics. The parties are repeatedly criticized for not being responsible and issue-based and hence sufficiently mature for a modern democracy. One parliamentarian whom I interviewed had been working on amendments to the law on political parties and had this to say:

I have been working on this party law for a week, and it is very detailed, and now I am very frustrated. One of the suggestions is that you cannot adjust the basic internal party system unless you have Ministry approval. So if we want to change something in our party here, for example, our internal by-laws, we first have to take the approval from the Ministry of the Interior. And if a new party wants to be created, it must gather [signatures from] at least 500 supporters to do it. This does not affect those of us who are already established as a party but it affects those that want to establish a new party. And there are so many laws that bring you to jail if you break them. So they are in a way mixing criminal law with the party law which has nothing to do with criminal acts.⁷¹

The King also appointed a new committee for constitutional reform; however, the opposition and civil society were not included. The Jordanian constitution dates back to 1952. Since then, the constitution has been amended 29 times by royal decree, mainly to weaken the position of the parliament and the government in favor of a stronger position for the King (Vogt 2011). The constitutional committee returned with proposals for 42 constitutional amendments, including the establishment of a constitutional court and an independent election committee (Barnes-Dacey 2012). These were significant amendments to the constitution and highly appreciated by protesters and opposition parties. However, activists that I interviewed said that apart from these two amendments, the other amendments were small and insignificant. The remaining amendments did not meet the demands for constitutional reform since power-sharing was not addressed, nor was the redistribution of power from the King back to the people. Nor did the amendments include proposals to allow the parliament select the Prime Minister or to challenge the King's right to dismiss prime ministers or the parliament altogether.

Repeatedly I heard these changes were too little too late, as well as claims that the King was reacting under pressure rather than initiating steps toward real reform. In this way, the demands had a chance to develop ahead of the King's response - making him always seem one step behind the developments on the street and hence somewhat out of control.

⁷¹ Author's interview in Amman, 6th June 2012.

Limitations for the reform process

Heterogeneous protests

The protest movement in Jordan is not calling for a despotic leader to step down unlike in several neighboring countries during the Arab Spring. Instead we can see a protest movement reflecting different currents in society with divergent positions, demands and expectations that seem difficult to transform into a common political agenda. These divergent currents appear to follow Jordan's political fault lines, mainly between Jordanians of Palestinian origin and the more tribally organized East Bank Jordanians. Although both groups are united in their calls for change, the actual changes they hope to see differ. The West Bank Jordanians first of all want political, electoral and constitutional reforms that can boost their influence and parliamentary participation. The primary drivers for the East Bankers relate to the economy and their economic motivations, primarily to make sure that their historic privileges are reciprocated in return for their support of the regime. This principal fault line stands in the way of establishing a more coherent opposition. The divergent demands also limit the regime's repertoire for response as appeasing one group might easily repel the other.

So far the King has balanced his responses to the different demands by altering prime ministers and governments, changing the focus from one group at the cost of the other. Division is not necessarily a disadvantage from the King's point of view. The Hashemite rulers, coming from outside Jordan, benefits from using the communal divides to portray themselves as the country's sole unifier that can protect and bring stability to all the people in Jordan. This method of divide and rule was acknowledged, but criticized by most of the activists that I interviewed.

Palestinian versus Jordanian, or divide and rule?

The separation between the East Bankers and Jordanians of Palestinian origin dates back to the civil war in 1970-71. At that time the Palestinian refugees had acquired Jordanian citizenship, and Jordanian policies aimed at full integration of the Palestinians. The conflict between Palestinian fighters and the Jordanian army created however a sense of exclusion among West Bank Jordanians, corresponding with sentiments of suspicion towards disloyal 'Palestinians' among the East Bankers. This division roughly follows an urban-rural divide mirrored by a similar private-public sector employment division. Sometimes East Bankers are portrayed as poor public sector employees, and West Bankers as rich owners of private enterprises or alternatively as Muslim Brothers. These divisions are no longer as clear cut as people like to present them; you will now find poor urban West Bankers as well as rich and well established business families of East Bank origin living in the cities. Although the Muslim Brotherhood is drawing its constituency base

from Palestinian camps and poor urban neighborhoods, significant numbers of East Bank Jordanians are also present in its ranks. The movement can thus not be seen as a simple proxy for Palestinian interests, a fact that surfaces as conflicts between ‘hawkish’ leaders prioritizing Palestinian politics and more moderate trends focusing on Jordanian issues. Nevertheless, the issue is a contentious one, as the following discussion shows.

As described earlier in this paper, the labor protests in 2010 and the early reform protests in 2011 grew out of what many people experienced as deteriorating economic conditions for ordinary people. The call for improved livelihoods and better rights resonated particularly among poor East Bankers. When the situation in the region escalated with mass demonstrations in the beginning of 2011, many Jordanians claimed that these developments broke the fear of persecution long associated with any form of political activity. Inspired by this new sense of freedom, youth in Amman, a city with a predominantly West Bank Jordanian population, joined the protest wave. The young and independent activists in the capital were of both East Bank and West Bank origins. They were quick to announce that the new protest movement had overcome the traditional fault line between ‘Jordanians and Palestinians’, arguing that the call for reform had an economic basis and was a question more of class than ethnic origin. Both poor East and West Bankers were suffering under the economic system, which is controlled by rich and influential people from both sides. The young activists often expressed leftist ideologies and claimed that in the circles of power, divisions between people of East Bank and West Bank origins are non-existent. They hold that only workers and public employees are fearful that Jordan will be made into Palestine, as an ‘alternative homeland’. These youth claim that the ruling class use this game of divide and rule to prevent the development of a class consciousness and broader cooperation among lower class East Bank and West Bank Jordanians. While many of the activists carry this consciousness, they understand nonetheless that the fear and suspicion between the two groups is deep rooted and difficult to overcome.

The core organizers of the open-ended sit-in at the Gamal Abdel Nasser circle on the 24th March 2011 were young, independent, often left-leaning East and West Bank Jordanians, including individuals associated to the Muslim Brotherhood. Several demonstrators of Palestinian origin recalled how they early on during the initial sit-ins, were feeling for the first time that they were true Jordanians and belonged to the country. A 27-year-old computer engineer of Palestinian origin recalled his experience on the 24th March:

[T]he reason I participated in [demonstrations] can be summed up in two factors. One is the romantic notion of the revolution. That people are finally becoming more aware of their rights, social justice and the [struggle for a] better quality of life that has been going on in the region recently. And the second thing is the surprise I faced when I entered my first demonstration to find out that no one is chanting for anything else than a better quality of life, because I always thought it was a tribal society and that

it would always be like that. I was delightfully surprised to find out that the majority of the people taking part in the demonstrations were not being tribal, they are not sectarian, they are not – I don't know [belonging] to any party or a group, but basically asking for the same thing - asking for a better standard for living. [But] to be honest with you, after the 25th, I was broken as a person. So I did not participate after that, because I did not see the point, because it will always be like that. It will always be so easy for people to convince other people that the Palestinians are ready to take over. [But] it was not only Palestinians. It was not [even] Palestinians to begin with. You know why, because we [Palestinians] were so afraid of this happening, because there is a group consciousness that this would happen. No one would believe that we would want to reform Jordan, no one, including our own kind [he laughs].

By participating, what I wanted to achieve was [for] those four hours [from 24th March] to continue, where I felt that I belonged, where I felt unity and [that] the 'caste' system disappeared, because it is choking us. [...] And this 'caste' system, or 'caste tribal' system, disappeared that day.⁷²

Following the attack on the demonstration first by 'loyalist thugs' and later by Special Forces, rumors spread that this demonstration was organized by Palestinians. The rumor further claimed that the protesters' aim was not reform, but to take over the country, echoing threats from armed groups in the '70s. This repelled several activists of Palestinian origin, who feared being blamed for any and every subsequent mishap. Although many understand that this is a game of divide and rule, this practice works because many Jordanians of Palestinian origin feel vulnerable and think of themselves as guests in a foreign country, despite their citizenship and decades of residency. A trend amplified by a state practice of withdrawing citizenships from West Bank Jordanians over the last few years.⁷³ A political leader told me that the West Bank Jordanians were kept in place because of this constant threat of

⁷² Author's interview in Amman, 5th December 2011.

⁷³ http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2009/07/21/Jordan-strips-Palestinians-of-citizenship/UPI-93421248183799/.

⁷⁴ While all Palestinian refugees became Jordanian citizens after the annexation of the West Bank in 1950, a system of ID cards was introduced for statistical reasons in 1980: green cards for people living in the West Bank and yellow cards for people of Palestinian origin with family or businesses in the West Bank. After Jordan's disengagement from the West Bank in 1988, green-card holders living in the West Bank lost their citizenship. From 1992 a system of national numbers was introduced and only citizens with such a number had access to government services and were permitted to open a bank account and obtain a driving license. Many yellow-card holders were somewhat arbitrarily stripped of their national numbers after 1988. Without clear regulations for the procedure, this threat now looms over Jordanians with a Palestinian refugee background (Jamjoum, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2010; Curtis, 2010).

losing their national numbers,⁷⁴ while the East Bank Jordanians were continuously reminded that the Palestinians would take the country if they got the chance. This is combined with another principle where East Bank Jordanians are considered loyal unless proven otherwise, while West Bankers are considered to be against the country unless proven otherwise.⁷⁵

Activists firmly denied accusations that the protests were Palestinian driven, claiming there was no division between East and West Bankers in this regard. Instead they were convinced this was only a game from the authority, their usual divide and rule strategy. According to them, should the authority's strategy fail, the government would find other groups to divide and rule, for example between North and South Jordan, or between different tribes. One activist said we could just wait and see, if the 'Palestine' card did not work, we would soon see the 'Islamist' card come into use to underscore the necessity to keep Jordan ruled by the Hashemite. If not the women will be veiled and can no longer wear jeans under Islamist rule of the country, so only the King can protect Jordan from this kind of development.⁷⁶

Despite reassurances from many activists that the division between East and West Bankers is irrelevant for many protesters, activists of Palestinian origin kept a lower profile following the 24th March demonstration. Several activists of Palestinian origin continued their activism, but avoided being in the front line. Some shared that they had been raised to see the Jordanians of Palestinian origin as different from the East Bank Jordanians because of the right of return of Palestinian refugees. The Arab Spring had however taught them that there is no inherent conflict between Jordanian and Palestinian identity forcing them to choose between the two. Many were both Palestinians and Jordanians and had legitimate interests in creating a better Jordan for all its citizens, as well as working for Palestinian rights.⁷⁷

For the purpose of this report, I will conclude by saying that the division between Jordanians of East and West bank origins remains highly sensitive. The suspicion between the two groups is deeply internalized and hard to overcome. This division also legitimizes the need for a ruling body above this fault line, such as the Hashemite royal family, who themselves came originally from Hejaz in today's Saudi Arabia. For many Jordanians, this division between East and West Bankers informs and determines the decision to call for reform, rather than a revolution with a regime change. Most Jordanians across the communal divide see the need for a superior ruler to keep multiple divisions under control. They fear that a regime change might throw the country into turmoil caused by an unknown number of groups fighting to fill the void after the current ruler.

⁷⁵ Author's interview in Amman, 28th March 2012.

⁷⁶ Author's interview in Amman, 7th December 2011.

⁷⁷ Author's interview in Amman, 13th June 2012.

Islamist 'infiltration'

Many of the new protest groups are organized by youth with limited political experience. As a result, these groups and the youth members are enthusiastic, flexible and able to mobilize quickly. An opposition politician claimed however that although these youth were 'good guys', if they confined themselves to 'sit in the street', they would put themselves at the margin of politics, unable to reach their goals. He said that in politics you have to negotiate, you cannot only sit in the corner and shout. And even if you cannot get everything you want, you have started a process that is (hopefully) going in the right direction.⁷⁸ The youth is inexperienced politically - making them an easy target for more experienced politicians, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood's IAF.

As discussed earlier, teachers succeeded in creating an independent teachers' union in 2012, but in that struggle, also had to face the power of the Islamists. 29th March 2012 was election day for the new teachers' union. In Amman schools, I met excited teachers with high expectations who saw this as a milestone for Jordanian public school teachers. The new union with about 100,000 members was going to elect 286 representatives to the central committee. The committee would then elect the board for the union. Activists distributing election pamphlets complained however that they had met significant obstacles in their election campaigns. For example, they were not allowed to campaign or hand out election material in the schools; these activities had to be done outside. In addition they complained that the election was poorly organized which created delays on election day. The Free Amman Committee was a central force in the strikes and the demands for a teachers' union, but it soon became apparent that they would not perform well in the election. When I asked why, they pointed to all the veiled female teachers that came to vote.

Two days after the election, the Muslim Brotherhood-supported candidates won a landslide victory in the election, much to the frustration of activists from the Free Amman Movement. One of the teacher campaigners explained:

The Muslim Brotherhood came to the movement of the teachers at the end, I think of all the seats [they won]. That is what happens all the time. [...] They are strong, because they are the oldest movement here, or party. And the government stood behind them, they are suitable for the government because they at the end will do what the government tells them to do. They do anything to reach their purpose and goals.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Author's interview in Amman, 28th March 2012.

⁷⁹ Author's interview in Amman, 1st April 2012.

She accused one of leaders from her own movement to have negotiated a secret deal with the Muslim Brotherhood to secure his own position as the leader of the union. A well-known writer and political analyst confirmed this disappointment in a candidate they had trusted, and claimed that the Muslim Brotherhood was ruthless in their methods to reach their goals, hinting that their former ally had been tempted by promise of a high position in the new union. He warned that this small election foreshadows future parliamentary elections. He also said that elections in large unions like the teachers' union; there is a need for a lot of funding for candidates to succeed. If this is correct, only the Muslim Brotherhood has the necessary resources, including financial resources and professional organization to success in this kind of election.

The pre-election period when the liberal coalition and the Muslim Brotherhood competed for places in the independent teachers' union offers an interesting lesson. The parties spent time competing for seats and fighting each other; in the meantime the core issue of reform fell out of the spotlight. As a result, the potential power and strength of an independent teachers' union is transformed into an internal struggle. The challenge and eventual threat towards the King and his regime is diminished with little or no effort, but to let the struggling groups continue their internal competition.

In a democratic system, groups and parties compete for power and positions. In Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood has unique organizational skills and economic standing, giving them advantage over other parties and groups. The Muslim Brotherhood has not however succeeded in controlling all labor unions. They have a long charitable tradition of involvement in education and healthcare, for example and have encouraged their supporters to become teachers. So long before the protests started with demands for an independent union, the Muslim Brotherhood had a major influence in the education sector which also can explain their success in the teacher union election. According to a young activist in the coalition of leftist parties, the Muslim Brotherhood also won the election in the professional association for engineers, but the left coalition won in the associations for doctors, pharmacists and lawyers. She was portraying this as the real political battleground in Jordan, giving less importance to what happened on the street.⁸⁰

Corruption

Throughout the interviews conducted for this report, corruption was consistently stated as the number one problem for the country and as a major cause of Jordan's economic problems. Interviewees further claimed that the country's elite was stealing the resources from the country, leaving the poor and the middle class to pay taxes so

⁸⁰ Author's interview in Amman, 16th June 2012.

the rich could keep their privileges – what Muasher (2008) calls a rentier system. The ruling elites are uninterested in proceeding with reform processes that will eventually reduce or remove these privileges from them.

One of the politicians cited several times earlier in this paper said that the biggest obstacle to reform and change in Jordan is that the corrupt people also occupy the key positions in government and society. A common challenge for reforms is that they not only have to fight corruption, but that the corrupt people are in crucial positions and simultaneously are the ones benefitting from the corruption they are supposed to fight.⁸¹

I interviewed an army veteran who had become active in politics after retiring – motivated by a combination of personal grievances. Having worked his entire life for his country, he found that his modest pension could barely sustain his family. He also feared ‘losing the country’ and was particularly concerned about corruption:

I decided to engage in politics when I saw that our country was lost. This is because there is a minority at the top, and they have dried up all the resources in our country. So our image as Jordanians has become one of a bunch of thieves. When it comes to investments whether it is foreign, Arab or local, they look at the Jordanians as people who are going under the table to steal.

He describes the case of the former chief of the secret intelligence service who was sentenced and is serving time in prison for money laundering in Kurdistan. He also shares the case of another man he knows well and served together with in the army; this acquaintance entered the army after finishing high school and has become a billionaire. While he himself, a university graduate, finds himself in debt and without a house for his family after more than 25 years of service. Bitterness seems to have become a driving force mobilizing him as an activist against the regime that he served for so many years.⁸²

Corruption angers many Jordanians. Some will point at two half-finished high-rise towers at the eight circle roundabout in Amman, claiming that contractors or others involved in the construction stole so much of the investments that the building could not be finished. Now the towers have been looming dark over the city for several years. For some this has become a visible symbol of the country’s corruption problem. At the same time, the accusations of corruption target leaders at the highest levels of authority, including the royal family. I heard in my interviews several claims that if this leak from the state coffers could be stopped, they believed that Jordan’s financial problems could be solved.

⁸¹ Author’s interview in Amman, 28th March 2012.

⁸² Author’s interview in Amman, 17th June 2012.

As the state deficit increases from year to year, Jordan has become heavily dependent on foreign aid. Most Jordanians know that something has to be done about the economy. An economy based on few natural resources, but at the same time offering generous subsidies on fuel, energy and other basic commodities, is not sustainable. An attempt to remove some of the subsidies at the end of 2010 had to be revoked after the protests took off in 2011. A general rise in fuel prices in March 2012 triggered some new protests, but less than expected. Many people were discussing the effects of fuel prices on the cost of other commodities. People get angry when their standard of living deteriorates. This is particularly so when they see that some rich people are benefitting from the economic system, while the poor and middle classes are paying the price.

In the autumn of 2012, Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour cancelled a JD 800 million subsidy on fuel, which instantly led to a rise in prices for cooking gas, diesel and petrol for cars. Immediately demonstrations and protests erupted all over the country. Some of these protests turned violent; something the regular reform protesters sought to avoid. The popular reform groups also claimed that the petrol protest brought new people to the street. They are less organized and harder to control, and resemble more an angry mob than the peaceful protesters in 2011-12. The meaning of this new development must be assessed in further studies, but the first impression is that those petrol protesters vandalizing public property only involve a small number of people.⁸³ Sweeping arrests to restore order seem to have worked, as subsequent protests against raising petrol prices have been peaceful.⁸⁴ The reactions to the subsidy cuts are somewhat surprising, since increased petrol prices are mainly considered to be an issue for the middle and upper classes. My sense is that the Jordanian middle class is the driving force behind the democracy protests. The other explanation, however, is that increased fuel prices adds to a general sense of economic deterioration also experienced by the lower classes.

⁸³ <http://jordantimes.com/vandalism-arrests-as-fuel-riots-continue>.

⁸⁴ <http://jordantimes.com/opposition-coalition-announces-friday-march-to-interior-ministry-circle>.

Conclusion

Unlike in Egypt and Tunisia, the Jordanian protest movement is not generalized across the country with a unified objective. Disparate protesters in Jordan are calling for reform which diffuses the demands. Some protest groups, mainly with tribal affiliations, emphasize economic reforms to improve ordinary people's standard of living. Other groups, particularly represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, are calling for political reform to better distribute power and gain more influence over politics. These differences have fragmented the protest movement and weakened the potential of pressure for change. In addition the protest groups seem unable to engage broader segments of the Jordanian population and only manage to mobilize small groups in street activities and demonstrations. Still the activists make use of recent improvements vis-à-vis freedom of expression and claim to influence decisions in their country. Using non-violent methods, they accept that change will take time, but are ready to continue their activities until their goals can be reached.

Well before the Arab Spring, the role of independent labor protests has been crucial in both Tunisia and Egypt, as well as in Jordan. Years of economic decline, increased aid dependency and mounting budget deficits are hard felt among Jordan's rural population and the lower classes in the cities. Protests against privatization aimed at decreasing state deficits and calls for worker's rights and improved economic conditions for ordinary people preceded the demonstrations for democratic reform. The difference between economic and political demands among the protesters is the most important obstacle to a unified protest movement in Jordan. This division is often explained by another division: the one between Jordanians of East and West Bank origin, or as a conflict between the two main ethnic groups in Jordan. An ethnic explanation conceals however an important conflict between social classes since there is rich and poor among both East and West Bank Jordanians. As a result, there is a reduced opportunity to build important alliances for the protest movement across the ethnic divide.

The street activists can be roughly divided into three groups. The largest of them is organized around the Muslim Brotherhood, which have the most experienced and organized political party in Jordan. In addition they have access to secure funding for political activity, as well as offering a wide range of welfare programs. The Islamists are mainly attracted to reform issues that can improve their overall political position in Jordan, particularly electoral and constitutional reforms. For this reason their main focus is directed at the election law and the parliamentary system. They want the Prime Minister to be elected by the majority in the Parliament, as well a better power-sharing system to reduce some of the King's current

powers and strengthen Parliament and the Prime Minister's position. They are also calling for a constitutional court system to replace the current use of military courts against civil offences. The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood is particularly inspired by developments in Tunisia and Egypt, where the Islamists at least initially significantly strengthened their position in political institutions. Some critics argue that the Muslim Brotherhood is unconcerned with reform and change for ordinary people - focusing instead on how to get into power.

The second group is comprised of people belonging to left-leaning political parties. These parties are small with limited power, but some have organized a coalition to gain more influence. This group demands both economic development and political reform with a special emphasis on corruption. Their biggest concern is the total dominance of Islamists in future politics. For this reason, they have placed themselves politically between the Islamists and the regime. They are against radical regime change, which they believe will only benefit the Muslim Brotherhood. Instead they only demand moderate democratic reforms and are keen to maintain the country's stability. They fear the recent chaos and violent developments they have seen in Egypt and Syria, where calls for reform have turned into a devastating sectarian civil war. They want to keep the Hashemite King, believing he is the only one capable of keeping the divided Jordanian population together. Mindful of the availability of weapons in the hands of many Jordanian tribal members, should the Hashemite King lose hold on the country, the prospects appear rather grim.

The last group of protesters is the newly-organized groups of politically independent youth. These groups are politically inexperienced and have few limits on their demands. Their slogan is to return the power from the King to the people, pointing to amendments in the 1952 constitution done by royal decree during periods of martial law and suspended governments. The amendments have steadily allocated more power to the King. This group is basically calling for a constitutional monarchy where the King would be a national symbol instead of the center of political power.

This last group may represent the major challenge for the regime, since it is more unpredictable in its actions, but this same factor will also limit its opportunity to build broader networks for cooperation, since it will repel people that want to have both change and stability. The two first groups have a tradition of cooperating with the regime. The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan is moderate and has a history of regime cooperation, although the relationship has been challenged and strained at times (i.e. during the 'clean-up' after the Amman hotel bombings in 2005). The leftist parties' limited influence also makes them rather cooperative towards the regime. Critics of the political parties in Jordan further claim that the political parties in Jordan are controlled by the regime through economic benefits and strict rules for operation. Consequently, the independent protest groups remain the only group uncontrollable for the regime. These groups are however divided, inexperienced and have failed to

unite and join forces to gain effective political influence. Their untraditional way of organizing and ability to quickly mobilize means that they have the potential of developing into a real political force in the future.

Although the leftist parties and the independent youth groups have different aims and methods, they both have a social dimension in their demands which is lacking in the Muslim Brotherhood's main focus on political position. This has created a static situation between the regime, the Muslim Brotherhood and the other social movements. At the moment, there is no mutual ground between any of these three groups. To break this stalemate, mutual understanding needs to emerge between at least two of the groups. The first option is an alliance between the social movements and the regime, which seems rather unlikely, particularly because of Jordan's strained economic situation. The second option is cooperation between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been attempted, but failed during the government of Awn Khasawneh. The last option is collaboration between the social movement and the Muslim Brotherhood, which was also attempted during the initial phase of the protest movement. However, the long history of mistrust and suspicion between them has jeopardized such development. If no mutual ground can be found between these parties, the reform process will be unable to move forward – meaning that the status quo will most probably continue. The population is likely to become increasingly impatient - as hinted during the petrol riots in November 2012 - with the potential of triggering turmoil throughout the country.

In addition to this internal stalemate, Jordan is under pressure from several external factors. However peaceful the transitions in Egypt and Tunisia have been, the Islamists were initially the greatest political benefactors of the regime change. The deteriorating situation in Syria has further scared the Jordanian public, by curbing its desire for change with a greater appreciation of the importance of stability. Also pressure from Saudi Arabia, one of Jordan's most important economic benefactors, aims at restricting any democratic development in Jordan. In contrast, the US and the EU, likewise important donors, also exert pressure on the regime to respect democratic freedoms. Jordan can end up as an ideological battleground for foreign powers donating money to a hard pressed Jordanian economy, hoping to influence the politics in one direction or the other. At the same time, all of these external actors want to keep Jordan as a stable island in an unpredictable Middle East. Both regional and domestic complexities will most probably contribute to continued stalemate in Jordan, with only incremental progress on key reform issues.

References

- Abboud, Samer 2012. *The Syrian Economy: Hanging by a Thread*, Carnegie Middle East Center, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Commentary, June 20. <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=48598>.
- Abu-Odeh, Adnan 1999. *Jordanians, Palestinians & The Hashemite Kingdom in the Middle East Process*. Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Abu-Rish, Ziad 2012a: "On the Nature of the Hashemite Regime and Jordanian Politics: An Interview with Tariq Tell" (part 1). *Jadaliyya*. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/6979/on-the-nature-of-the-hashemite-regime-and-jordania>.
- Abu-Rish, Ziad 2012b. "Jordan's Current Political Opposition Movement and the Need for Further Research: An Interview with Tariq Tell" (part 2). *Jadaliyya*. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/7007/jordans-current-political-opposition-movements-and>.
- Al Quds Center for Political Studies 2009. *Listening to Palestinian Refugees/Displaced Persons in Jordan: Perceptions of their Political and Socio-Economic Status*. January.
- Anderson, Lisa 2011. "Demystifying the Arab Spring: Parsing the Differences Between Tunisia, Egypt and Libya". *Foreign Affairs*, May/June.
- Bank, André 2011. Jordan's Elections and the Islamist Boycott. Arabist blog net, 3rd January. <http://www.arabist.net/blog/2011/1/5/jordans-parliamentary-elections-and-the-islamist-boycott.html>.
- Barnes-Dacey, Julien 2012. *Europe and Jordan: Reform before it is too late*. Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, ecf.eu. ECFR/54, April. http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR54_JORDAN_BRIEF_AW.pdf.
- Butenschøn, Nils A. 2008. *Midtøsten - Imperiefall, statsutvikling, kriger*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Christophersen, Mona 2011. *Citizen and Refugee. Experience of integration and discrimination; Implications for the right of return among Palestinian refugees in Jordan*. Memo to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oslo: Fafo.
- Curtis, Ryan 2012. "We are all Jordan' ... but who is we?" *Middle East Research and Information Project*, July 13. <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero071310>.
- Curtis, Ryan R. 2004. "Islamic Action Front." *Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa 2004*. *Encyclopedia.com*. <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>
- David, Assaf 2010. The revolt of Jordan's military veterans. *The Middle East Channel, Foreign Policy*. June. http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/15/the_revolt_of_jordans_military_veterans.
- Diwan, Ishac 2012. *Understanding the Revolution in the Middle East: The Central Role of the Middle Class*. Working paper No. 726. Economic Research Forum, Egypt.

- Farah, Randa R. 1999. *Popular Memory and Reconstructions of Palestinian Identity. A-Baq'a Refugee Camp, Jordan*. Ph.D. Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto.
- Hamid, Shadi and Freer, Courtney 2011. *How Stable is Jordan? King Abdullah's Half-Hearted Reforms and the Challenge of the Arab Spring*, Brookings Doha Center Policy Briefing, November.
- Human Rights Watch 2012. "Stateless again: Palestinian-origin Jordanians deprived of their nationality." February 1. <http://www.hrw.org/node/87906>.
- International Crisis Group (ICG) 2012. *Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (IX): Dallying with Reform in a Divided Jordan*. Middle East/North Africa report No. 118, March 12.
- Jamjoum, Hazem 2012. Palestinian Refugees in Jordan and the Revocation of Citizenship. *Al-Madjal*, winter; Forced Secondary Displacement: Palestinian Refugees in the Gaza Strip, Iraq, Jordan, and Libya. Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee rights. <http://www.badil.org/en/al-majdal/item/1569-interview1>.
- Jordan Labor Watch 2012. *Labor Protests in 2011: Analytical Report*. Jordan Labor Watch, an affiliate of The Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies Amman, Jordan. http://www.phenixcenter.net/en/files/labor_protests_English_final.pdf.
- Lee, Eric and Weinthal, Benjamin 2012: "Trade Unions: The Truly Revolutionary Social Network". In Manhire, Toby: *The Arab Spring, Rebellion, revolution and a new world order*. London: Guardian Books.
- Lucas, R. 2008. "Side Effects of Regime Building in Jordan: The State and the Nation". *Civil Wars*, vol. 10, No. 3. September, pp. 281-293.
- Muasher, Marwan 2011. A Decade of Struggling for Reform Efforts in Jordan, the Resilience of the Rentier System. *The Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Middle East, May.
- Muasher, Marwan 2008. *The Arab Center: The Promise of Reform*. London: Yale University Press.
- Ottaway, Marina and Hamzawy, Amr 2011. Protest movements and Political Change in the Arab World. *Policy Outlook*. 28 January. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. http://carnegieendowment.org/files/OttawayHamzawy_Outlook_Jan11_ProtestMovements.pdf.
- Schulz, H.L. (with Juliana Hammer) 2003. *The Palestinian Diaspora. Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland*. London: Routledge.
- Stemman, J.J.E. 2011: *Jordan's Future Challenges*. Rivka Shapak Lissak <http://rslissak.com/content/jordans-future-challenges-juanjestemmann>.
- Varulkar, H. 2011. *The Arab Spring in Jordan: King Compelled to Make Concessions to Protest Movement*. The Middle East Media Research Institute. Inquiry & Analysis

Series Report No. 771. Washington, December. <http://www.memri.org/report/en/print5906.htm>.

Vogt, A. 2011. Jordan's Eternal Promise of Reform. *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft Online (IPG)* 4/2011. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/ipg/2011-4/08_a_vogt_eng.pdf.

Yom, Sean L. and al-Khatib, Wael 2012. "Jordan's New Politics of Tribal Dissent". *The Middle East Channel*, August 7. http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/08/07/jordans_new_politics_of_tribal_dissent.

Protest and reform in Jordan

Popular demand and government response 2011 to 2012

This report investigates political dynamics related to calls for political and economic reform in Jordan and the regime's efforts to move the reform process forward.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in four towns in 2011 and 2012, the main finding is that the protests in Jordan engage limited segments of the population and that the regime continues to enjoy considerable support. The silent majority often support democratic and economic change, but tend to value the country's stability more.

Not only does the Jordanian protest movement engage limited segments of society, it has failed to unite around a common goal and is fragmented. Three main protest groups have emerged with different priorities related to political and economic development. The reform objectives of one group tend to repel other groups, which limits the protesters' political impact. In light of regional developments, the protests have still compelled the government to respond to some of the demands, although many protesters find the changes to be too small and coming too late.



Fafo

P.O.Box 2947 Tøyen
N-0608 Oslo
www.fafo.no/english/

Fafo-report 2013:50
ISBN 978-82-324-0064-5
ISSN 0801-6143
Order no. 20340