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**“Jordan Spring: An Analysis of the Regime Survival Tactics  
Adopted by the Hashemite Kingdom.”**

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## ABSTRACT

Inspired by the 2011 Arab Spring events in Tunisia, cries of the regional chant “*al-sha’ab yurid isqat al-nizam*” (the people want to bring down the regime) were echoing in several MENA countries. Targeted demonstrations were aimed to express people’s dissatisfaction with the political and socioeconomic conditions within their countries. Protestors demanded regime change and, as a result, authoritarian leaders in countries like Tunisia and Libya were deposed. Some regimes succumbed to their citizens’ demands, while others launched violent crackdowns and used their security forces to confront the demonstrators. However, countries like Jordan curbed major social unrest and avoided the outbreak of severe violence. This paper explores the reasons why the country’s experiences during the Arab Spring were markedly different from its regional counterparts. By analyzing the protests within the country, the paper argues that the regime survival measures adopted by the monarch coupled with weak reform coalitions staved off major social unrest.

**Key words:** Jordan, Arab spring, regime survival, reform, social unrest.

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The research for this paper included considerable field work, observations, and interviews with local Jordanians, academics, current and former politicians, and civil servants. My analysis on Jordanian politics would have been impossible without the grants provided by Beloit College to support my study abroad in the kingdom during the Spring 2023 semester. First, my thanks goes to Professor Beth Dougherty for mentoring me throughout my undergraduate journey. Without her, I would not have had the inspiration to explore the Middle East and study abroad in Jordan. I thank Dr. Jawad Anani, former Deputy Prime Minister for Economic affairs and Minister of State for Investment Affairs, for his insights about Jordanian history and economy. I appreciate his efforts in connecting me with current and former Jordanian politicians for research interviews and conversations.

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During my time in Jordan, I was fortunate to have countless conversations with local Jordanians. These conversations have been included in the paper via direct quotes to represent the diversity of opinions among Jordanians. Their time and insights helped me gain a detailed understanding of the country's politics. I also thank opposition party officials, parliamentarians, and journalists who contributed to my paper but requested anonymity. Finally, I thank my host family and my SIT friends for helping me with my Arabic. Shukran for showing me what Jordanian respect and hospitality means.

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## I. INTRODUCTION.

Rulers and executives in monarchies and authoritarian regimes are notoriously known for their tactics to consolidate and maintain their power. Often, they do so by adopting draconian measures and increasing military presence or by weakening the opposition and thwarting the presence of civil society. This has become increasingly pertinent in a global era of democratization, whereby rulers have adopted unique strategies to curb national and international calls for greater autonomy and regime change. An example of how regimes maintain their power and avoid meaningful change comes from the response of monarchs and autocrats during the 2011 Arab uprisings. Successful case studies of the Arab Spring are often examined to commemorate the power of civil society and highlight the weaknesses of autocratic regimes. However, it is the unsuccessful attempts that help us unpack the tactics adopted by autocrats and monarchs to forestall regime survival. Examining these case studies are essential to “upgrade” our knowledge about present-day authoritarianism in the MENA region.

The Arab spring was a true test for monarchies and authoritarian regimes. For the rulers, it tested boundaries of power and control. For the people, it tested their ability to rise against injustices and express their socio-economic and political grievances. This paper explores the tactics adopted by the Hashemite Kingdom to curb the Arab uprisings in Jordan. By adopting Steven Heydemann’s theory of authoritarian upgrading, the paper argues that the relatively peaceful and stable Jordan spring was not an indicator of happy and content citizens or monarchical exceptionalism. Instead, this paper argues that the regime survival measures adopted by the monarch coupled with weak reform coalitions, domestic elites, and international actors staved off major social unrest within the country.

Inspired by the events in Tunisia, thousands of Bahrainis, Syrians, Egyptians, and Libyans took to the streets and organized anti-government protests in 2011. As a result, cries of the regional chant “*al-sha’ab yurid isqat al-nizam*” (the people want to bring down the regime) were echoing in major cities and capitals of several Middle East and North African (MENA) countries.<sup>1</sup> Targeted demonstrations aimed to express people’s dissatisfaction with socio-economic and political conditions within their countries. Protestors demanded a regime change and, as a result, authoritarian leaders such as Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh were deposed.<sup>2</sup> Some regimes succumbed to their citizens' demands, while others launched violent crackdowns and used their security forces to confront the demonstrators.

Frequent political upheavals, major uprisings, riots, civil wars, and insurgencies marked what experts call the Arab Spring (2010-2014).<sup>3</sup> The phenomenon “shook the entire Middle East to its foundations” and “marked a period of both profound changes and significant continuities in Middle East regional politics.”<sup>4</sup> Jordan, unlike other MENA countries, curbed major social unrest, deterred counterrevolution, and avoided the spillovers of the Syrian civil war. Throughout the regional upheaval, the country remained stable and, to some extent, represented the region’s oasis of calm amidst chaos.<sup>5</sup> But, underneath this stability is also a tense and fragile state. In recent years, several Jordanians have expressed concerns over the government’s inaction towards the growing socio-economic and political problems. Some of their grievances stem from lack of political rights, high public debt, significant current account deficit, and high unemployment.

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<sup>1</sup> Zoltan Barany, “The Arab Spring in the Kingdoms,” *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, September, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> BBC, “Arab Uprising: Country by country - Jordan,” December 16, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, “Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State,” *Columbia University Press*, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Since its independence from the United Kingdom in 1946, Jordan has been a constitutional monarchy ruled by the House of Hashim. The 1952 constitution drafted during the reign of King Tala bin Abdullah stipulates the rights of the citizens and provides the legal framework for the functioning of the monarch, the bi-cameral government, the legislature, and the judiciary.<sup>6</sup> However, like the other Arab monarchies, the Hashemite king wields near absolute power and dictates domestic and foreign policies, controls the state's coercive apparatus, and has heavy influence over the parliament and the judiciary.<sup>7</sup> Reports published by Human Rights Watch accuse the Jordanian authorities of “quashing dissent” and introducing “vague and abusive laws to restrict civil space.”<sup>8</sup> The V-dem reports classify Jordan as a “closed autocracy” and reports published by Freedom House classify Jordan as a “not free” state with limited political rights (11/40) and civil liberties (22/60).<sup>9,10</sup> These scores suggest that Jordanian authorities have systematically eliminated a broad range of political rights and civil liberties and dismantled the room for a true political opposition.

The current economic condition of the country also remains a major challenge for many Jordanians. Jordan is a non-oil based economy with limited resources and scarce water supply. The country is a rentier state and relies heavily on imports to meet its energy and consumption needs. The UN data suggests that 32 percent of the Jordanian youth is unemployed.<sup>11</sup> However, government officials place the youth unemployment numbers at 50 percent. Part of Jordan's socio-economic challenges trace back to its location in a challenging neighborhood. Since the onset of

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of State, “2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Jordan,” 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Sean L. Yom and Gregory Gause, “Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On,” *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 23, No. 4, (October 2012): 74-88.

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Jordan,” Accessed on May 1, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Varieties of Democracy, “Democracy Report (2023): Defiance in the Face of Autocratization,” 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2023: Jordan,” Accessed on April 20, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, “Jordan - Youth,” Accessed on April 22, 2023. <https://www.unicef.org/jordan/youth>.



the Israel-Palestine conflict, Jordan has integrated more than two million Palestinians. In the past decade, regional conflicts in Iraq and Syria resulted in an influx of more than 1.3 million refugees in the country.<sup>12</sup> These socio-economic and political grievances serve as a catalyst for demands for reforms and leaves the monarchy vulnerable to instability.<sup>13</sup>

Despite socio-economic and political challenges, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan weathered regional turmoil and experienced only minor demonstrations throughout the entirety of the Arab Spring.<sup>14</sup> In spite of rising tensions on its northern, eastern, and western borders, the kingdom did not succumb to a civil war or violent insurrection and remained relatively stable.<sup>15</sup> Scholars who carefully monitored the regional events predicted that the Syrian crisis would instigate a civil war in Jordan and would bring the country on the brink of collapse.<sup>16</sup> However, Jordanian King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein's regime survival techniques made Jordan the key exception to an increasingly pervasive regional crisis. This paper explores the reasons why the Hashemite Kingdom's experiences during the Arab Spring were markedly different from its regional counterparts. By analyzing the protests within the country, this paper argues that the regime survival measures adopted by the monarch coupled with weak reform coalitions staved off major social unrest.

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Jordan," Accessed May , 2023.

<sup>13</sup> Que'Nique Mykte Newbill, "Why Syria May Be the Catalyst for Jordan's Arab Spring," *Stimson*, November 3, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Que'Nique Mykte Newbill, "Why Syria May Be the Catalyst for Jordan's Arab Spring," *Stimson*, November 3, 2012.

## II. ARAB SPRING EVENTS IN JORDAN.

On January 14, 2011, an estimated five thousand Jordanians took to the streets of Amman, Irbid, Karak, Salt, and Maan.<sup>17</sup> The country's socio-economic and political conditions served as a catalyst for the protests. Between 2010 and 2011, Jordan's economy was stumbling with an estimated six percent inflation rate, 12 percent unemployment rate, and 25 percent poverty rate.<sup>18</sup> Further, the protesters accused the government of impoverishing the working class with regressive tax brackets which forced poor Jordanians to pay a higher income tax.<sup>19</sup> During the initial phase of the protests, Jordanians expressed their dissatisfaction with the rising fuel and food prices and demanded for Prime Minister Samir Rifai's resignation.<sup>20</sup> As the movement evolved, several Jordanians condemned endemic corruption in the government and asked the regime to improve job opportunities, launch anti-poverty measures, and introduce social justice measures.<sup>21</sup> As in other Arab states, some protestors overtly challenged the monarchy and demanded regime change, while some advocates wanted to maintain the system but demanded that the king abdicate the throne in favor of his half-brother, Hamzah. However, most demonstrators only demanded economic and social justice reforms and avoided any direct challenges to King Abdullah II.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout the Arab Spring events in Jordan, protests were largely organized as sit-ins after Friday prayers.<sup>23</sup> Individual demonstrations remained relatively small and only occasionally, attracted about seven thousand people.<sup>24</sup> The demonstrations remained largely peaceful and were

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<sup>17</sup>Haaretz, "Thousands of Jordanians Protest Rising Costs of Food, Fuel," January 14, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Mahdi Majbouri, "Income Mobility and the Arab Spring: the case of Egypt and Jordan," *Applied Economics Letters*, Vol. 24, No. 15(2017): 1070-1074.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>Los Angeles Times. "Jordan: Thousands of Demonstrators Protest Food Prices, Denounce Government." January 15, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, "Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State," *Columbia University Press*. 2018.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Beck, Martin and Huser, Simone. "Jordan and the Arab Spring: No Challenge, No Change?" *Middle East Critique*. 24:1 (2015), 83-97

rarely confronted by the Jordanian Public Security Directorate (PSD).<sup>25</sup> Unlike an estimated 846 civilian deaths in Egypt and an estimated 15,000 civilian deaths in Libya, Jordan reported only three deaths during the entirety of the Arab Spring.<sup>26,27</sup> It is important to note that these numbers do not fully reflect the true nature of protests in Jordan.

Despite the public image of Jordan being “docile” during the Arab spring, a new series of youth-led protests swept the country, forming a new wave of Arab Spring events in Jordan. Collectively known as the Jordanian Popular Movement, the *al-Hirak al-Sha’bi al-Urduni* protests encompassed extensive youth protests, strikes, labor organizations, and leftist activism.<sup>28</sup> Participants of the movement were mainly youth who used social media platforms such as Facebook, SMS, Whatsapp, and Twitter to organize protests and communicate with other Jordanians. Similar to the 1989 protests, *al-Hirak* (the movement) mobilized in South Jordan in the cities of Kerak, Maan, Dhiban, and Tafilah. Unlike past protestors, members of the Hirak often crossed red lines and combined popular patriotic symbols such as flags, nationalist songs, and *dabke* to mobilize groups.

Although small in number, the Hirak protestors were largely of East Jordanian origin and were later joined by Palestinian Jordanians. The protests spread rapidly across the country to several towns, villages, and cities such as Ajlun, Irbib, Jerash, and Mafraq. Ideologically, the protests expanded to incorporate opposition parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic Action Front and leftist and Pan-Arab nationalist parties.<sup>29</sup> Al-Hirak grassroots regional movements slowly developed into a broader national and regional phenomenon and became the cornerstone

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<sup>25</sup>Haaretz. “Thousands of Jordanians Protest Rising Costs of Food, Fuel.” January 14, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> BBC. “Egypt Unrest: 846 Killed in Protests Official Toll.” April 19, 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Black, Ian. “Libyan Revolution Casualties Lower than expected, says new government.” *The Guardian*. January 8, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, “Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State,” *Columbia University Press*. 2018.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

of Arab Spring events in Jordan. By mid-2011, protestors advocated for inclusion and social justice and demanded an end to corruption.<sup>30</sup> Some criticized the royal family and elites for “selling the country” and for profiting in the name of globalization and privatization.<sup>31</sup>

The regional Arab Spring events and subsequent demands for democracy were not the sole inspiration for the protests. Historically, tribal and East Jordanians have engaged in protests expressing dissent against neoliberal economic policies that resulted in a shift from state industries to private investors, reduced opportunities for livelihoods for local communities, and national wide economic crisis.<sup>32</sup> The 1989 protests in response to rising food prices are a classic example of active civil society in Jordan. Other inspirations included historic labor activism at the port of Aqaba and the formation of the national teacher’s union. Overall, the HIRAK movement became a projection of the culminated grievance of economically and politically disenfranchised Jordanians.

Activists stemming from a liberal background viewed the Jordan Spring as pro democracy and secular movements aimed to generate greater political openness within the country. They advocated for meaningful and lasting reforms over cosmetic reforms and expressed optimism for the coexistence of monarchy and Jordanian democracy. Conservative groups, on the other hand, associated the Arab Spring with disorder, instability, and violence.<sup>33</sup> They viewed the events as “something the country should be proud to have avoided or survived.”<sup>34</sup> In their perspective, “Jordan was a stable and peaceful oasis in an otherwise volatile region.”<sup>35</sup> A poll conducted with the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) at the University of Jordan suggests that 80 percent of the

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, “Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State,” *Columbia University Press*. 2018.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

national population did not support the Arab Spring protests in Jordan.<sup>36</sup> Out of the 80 percent, 55 percent thought that the protests led to chaos and undermined state security, 15 percent viewed them as unnecessary and useless, and 9 percent believed that “the country enjoys security and stability, and the situation does not require demonstration.”<sup>37</sup>

Members and supporters of the Hashemite family saw the Arab Spring as an opportunity to showcase the monarch’s commitment to reform.<sup>38</sup> King Abdullah II presented the events as a “new period of change in Jordan” and promised reforms to the constitution, parliament, media, and elections.<sup>39</sup> Pro-regime observers commended the monarch for following the middle ground between a retrenching police state and a violent implosion of a civil war.<sup>40</sup> To them, Jordan was a “model for reform without revolution and change without chaos or instability.”<sup>41</sup>

Jordan stands as a unique case study among all Arab uprising countries. This is due to the nature of Arab spring protests experienced by the country and the response of the regime towards the protestors. This paper aims to examine the regime survival tactics adopted by Jordan’s King Abdullah II to weather the domestic Arab spring turmoil. By analyzing the country’s domestic and international arena, the paper presents a theoretical framework to understand the country’s peace and stability during the Jordan spring protests.

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<sup>36</sup> Samuel Helfont and Tally Helfont, “Jordan: Between the Arab Spring and the Gulf Cooperation Council,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, January 1, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, “Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State,” *Columbia University Press*, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW.

There is abundant literature that explains chaos and instability in regimes. This is an important sub-field of analysis within the discipline of peace and conflict studies. However, there are limited schools that frame the debate for the subsequent discussions. Some experts analyze the events and outcomes of the Arab spring by regime type and argue that the wave of protests produced upheaval in the authoritarian republics but bypassed autocratic monarchies.<sup>42</sup> They argue that unlike the authoritarian republics, countries like Morocco, Jordan, and Kuwait experienced significant protests but survived the Arab uprising precisely because they are monarchies.<sup>43</sup> To make this argument, they subscribe to the theories of “monarchical exceptionalism” and draw correlations between regime type and regime persistence.<sup>44</sup>

Robery Snyder suggests that eight Arab monarchies survived the Arab Spring due to the monarch’s cultural power. The cultural argument propounds that Arab monarchs yield authority by claiming direct blood relations with Prophet Muhammad and his family.<sup>45</sup> This religious connection allows them to gain tribal legitimacy and loyalty from their citizens. However, this argument holds little merit. Arab kings in post-colonial Egypt (1952), Tunisia (1957), Iraq (1958), Saudi Arabia (1967), and Libya (1969) have been overthrown before. Several others, including Jordan, have witnessed a series of protests and demands for reforms. If the kings had religious and cultural legitimacy, then why did some monarchies fail and why do some remain vulnerable to demands for change? The history of protests and demands for change in the Arab world suggest

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<sup>43</sup> Yom, L. Sean and Gause, Gregory. “Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On.” *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 23, No. 4,(October 2012): 74-88.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>Schwedler, Jillian. “The End of Monarchical Exceptionalism.” *Aljazeera*. June 22, 2011.

that few Arab citizens view hereditary succession or religious, cultural, and tribal legitimacy as a golden ticket to legitimacy.

Todd Spinks, Brian Calfano, and Emile Sahliyah Spinks suggest an institutional approach which contends that monarchies allow greater degree of political participation and kings use their power to introduce controlled, pseudo-democratic reforms to defuse discontent.<sup>46</sup> As a result, monarchies in Morocco, Jordan, and Kuwait, are more resilient to upheaval because they are less repressive and provide greater freedoms as compared to authoritarian republics.<sup>47</sup> This argument holds more credibility in liberalized kingdoms where monarchs diffuse opposition by offering limited democratic openings. In Jordan, past monarchs have resorted to introducing pseudo-democratic reforms to diffuse opposition groups. Often, these changes include constitutional amendments, new cabinets, fresh elections, or appointment of new prime ministers. However, these reforms are only meant to create a temporary semblance of change, and leave the kingdom more vulnerable to future protests. So, adopting this tactic alone might not be sufficient to quell protests and demands for socio-political and economic reforms.

Sean Yom and Gregory Gause argue that monarchies no longer rely on cultural traditions, religious legitimacy, and institutional structures to survive. Instead, they use cross-cutting coalitions, hydrocarbon rents, and foreign patronage to suppress uprisings and ensure stability.<sup>48</sup> From this perspective, one can hypothesize that countries like Jordan suppress dissent using support from east bank Jordanians, tribal communities, and Palestinian businesses.<sup>49</sup> Instead of

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<sup>46</sup> Spinks, Todd, Sahliyah, Emile, and Calfano, Brian. "The Status of Democracy and Human Rights in the Middle East: Does Regime Type Make a Difference?" *Democratization*, Vol. 15, No. 2(2008): 321-341.

<sup>47</sup> Spinks, Todd, Sahliyah, Emile, and Calfano, Brian. "The Status of Democracy and Human Rights in the Middle East: Does Regime Type Make a Difference?" *Democratization*, Vol. 15, No. 2(2008): 321-341.

<sup>48</sup> Yom, L. Sean and Gause, Gregory. "Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On." *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 23, No. 4,(October 2012): 74-88.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

hydrocarbon rents, the country uses GCC economic aid and foreign aid from the U.S and Saudi Arabia.<sup>50</sup> Yom and Gause's theory hold some merit in explaining Jordan's stability during the Arab uprising. In August 2011, Saudi Arabia delivered an estimated \$1.4 billion to Jordan to expand public employment and price subsidies.<sup>51</sup> Yom and Gause's theory provides some insight into the Hashemite king's response. However, I argue that along with economic strategies King Abdullah adopted unique political, security, and social tactics to suppress dissent.

Steven Heydemann suggests that authoritarian regimes learn from international, regional, and domestic circumstances and adopt strategies to ensure regime survival.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, in response to historical pressures for democratization and regime change, autocrats have "upgraded" their tactics to maintain greater control over their regimes and deter political reform. Heydemann suggests that authoritarian upgrading consists of five defining elements that are adopted in varying combinations by major Arab states. These include appropriating and containing civil societies; managing political contestation; capturing the benefits of selective economic reforms; controlling new communications technologies; and diversifying international linkages.<sup>53</sup>

Although they continue to practice the old tactics of monitoring and policing the socio-political behavior of their citizens; autocrats have adopted innovative tactics to defend their regimes from the threats of globalization, markets, and democratization. Unlike past strategies of coercion, close surveillance, corruption, and torture to crack down on civil state, Arab regimes have shown willingness to engage in reform, granted limited freedom for civil societies and opposition parties, broadened freedom of speech and press, and acknowledged the legitimacy of

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Heydemann, Steven. "Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World." *The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institute*. October 2007.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*



human rights. As a result, they created a hybrid form of authoritarianism. Heydemann's theory of authoritarian upgrading recommends analyzing Jordan's stability based on the regime's response to contain civil society and manage political contestation by introducing selective economic and political reforms.

#### **IV. METHODOLOGY.**

This paper adopts Steven Heydmann's theory to inspect peace and stability in Jordan during the 2011 regional turmoil. It asserts that absence of mass protests in Jordan is not an indicator of satisfaction among Jordanians and the lack of upheaval does not represent the lack of demands for reform. Instead, this paper argues, it is the combination of state strategies such as pseudo-democratic reforms, divided opposition movements, and extensive international support that suppress the Jordan version of the Arab spring. The fact that the Jordan spring events were markedly different from those of Bahrain or Egypt is not representative of the King's goodwill or the economic and political uniqueness of the country. Instead, it is a story of the success of the king's ability to adopt timely tactics to weaken opposition and quell protests.

To develop this argument, this paper incorporates considerable primary and secondary research. In the course of my research, I have met and interviewed former Jordanian diplomats, ministers, academics, and activists (see Appendix, Table 1). Their inputs have been invaluable in guiding the research for this paper. Throughout the paper, I have tried to include a diverse selection of Jordanian voices to provide a comprehensive picture of the Jordan spring events and analyze the tactics adopted by the regime to mitigate demands for economic and political reform.

## V. REGIME STABILITY IN THE MIDST OF THE ARAB SPRING.

Mark Lynch notes “authoritarianism is rarely as stable as it appears during the days of normal politics, but equally rarely as ephemeral as it might seem during revolutionary moments.”<sup>54</sup> Jordan is no exception to the authoritarian regimes prevalent in most MENA countries. All offer little transparency, accountability, and civil liberties to their citizens.<sup>55</sup> They practice exclusionary economic and political policies that erode the ability of the average citizen to meet their basic needs.<sup>56</sup> However, the number of citizens that took to the streets in Jordan was relatively small in comparison to the massive turnout elsewhere. What set Jordan even further apart was the nature of the protest demands, which centered only on calls for a variety of political and economic reforms.<sup>57</sup> Although some anti-regime sentiments were expressed by youth protesters, the mobilizations were never about regime change.<sup>58</sup>

The stable nature of protests in Jordan during the Arab Spring is not because mass uprisings against the regime are impossible.<sup>59</sup> Rather, it is a culmination of the legacies of protests within the country along with the regime stability measures adopted by the Hashemite family that deterred major social unrest.<sup>60</sup> Arguments offered to explain Jordan’s stability are multi-faceted and are affected by several social, economic, and political factors.<sup>61</sup> In the following sections, I provide some reasons why the Hashemite Kingdom experienced regime stability amidst the Arab Spring protests.

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<sup>54</sup> Marc Lynch, “The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East,” *Columbia University Press*, September 16, 2014: 316.

<sup>55</sup> Alaa Hadid and Ghassan Elkahlout, “Stable Jordan: How A Monarchy Survived Disorder,” *Asia Affairs*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (December): 852-871.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Ghassan Elkahlout and Alaa Hadid, “Stable Jordan: How A Monarchy Survived Disorder,” *Asian Affairs*, 52(4): 852-871.

### **The Hashemite Kingdom's Response Towards the Protests:**

Jordan's story is unique partly because unlike most MENA regimes, the Hashemite kingdom symbolically engaged in dialogue with opposition groups and allowed its citizens to express themselves freely and participate in public demonstrations.<sup>62</sup> Instead of associating the Arab spring with violence and disorder, Jordan's Hashemite monarchy viewed the movement as an "opportunity to move the political reform process forward." The Arab Spring, the king suggests, "was a call for respect and for social justice that only democratic, accountable systems of governments can provide. It signaled a new beginning for our region, but a long road lies ahead." Unlike other Arab monarchs, King Abdullah publicly expressed his opinions about the country's economic and political condition by publishing his book *Our Last Best Chance - The Pursuit of Peace In a Time of Peril* in 2011. This book is dedicated to the people of Jordan and personally addressed their grievances during the Arab uprisings. In the book, the king notes:

Today our region is going through a severe transition. I am determined to transform this moment of regional upheaval into an opportunity to implement the reforms that I have sought but could not deliver in full, particularly those relating to political empowerment....Failure to better our system of government is a greater threat to the country and its future...Our aim is structural change on multiple fronts: political, legislative and economic. We want to give Jordanian men and women a greater voice in determining their own and their country's future.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Alarabiya News, "Jordan to Ease Restrictions On Public Assembly," February 15, 2011.

<sup>63</sup> King Abdullah II of Jordan, *Our Last Best Chance - The Pursuit of Peace In a Time of Peril*, Viking Press in New York City, 2011.

In the king's perspective, the Arab Spring was an opportunity for the country to model change and reform in the region without revolution and instability.<sup>64</sup> It was a needed stimulus to reinvigorate earlier reform efforts and launch new reforms to address the longstanding political and socio-economic grievances.<sup>65</sup> It is difficult to conclude whether the king had the genuine willingness to truly democratize and reform the economy and politics within the country. But what is evident is that the system is more intelligent in Jordan as compared to other countries. Unlike the draconian measures adopted by executives in response to the Arab uprisings, the Jordanian system adapted their tactics and provided limited freedoms for the protestors. Instead of using brute force, the king symbolically "addressed" the people and engaged in cosmetic change.

When Muslim opposition groups, leftist allies, and independent rights activists demanded that the government remove restrictions on free speech and assembly, the king responded by promising changes to pertinent laws. For example, on February 15, 2011, Jordan's interior minister announced a reform to the Public Gatherings Law allowing unrestricted freedom of expression without the permission from the governor.<sup>66</sup> This is similar to the state response in the 1989 bread riots, where King Hussein introduced a series of reforms to rescind martial law and provide greater freedom of press, speech, and organization.<sup>67</sup>

Amidst the Arab Spring events, King Abdullah II declared that his priority was to "ensure public safety."<sup>68</sup> He assured his citizens that the government would not interfere in the protests and would allow the demonstrations to end peacefully.<sup>69</sup> This ensured that civilian injuries and

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> CBS News, "Jordan Revokes Restrictions on Public Gatherings," February 15, 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Lamis Andoni and Jillian Schwedler, "Bread Riots in Jordan," *Middle East Report*, 201(Winter 1996).

<sup>68</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, "Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State," *Columbia University Press*. 2018.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

deaths were limited to a bare minimum and indicated that the government had given freedom to its citizens.<sup>70</sup> By allowing citizens to express themselves, the kingdom prevented inciting other potential protesters. This is especially important because in other countries, violent repressive reactions incited the public and enlarged the opposition groups.

### **Jordan's Hybrid Regime:**

Part of the story of Jordan and the Arab Spring is about the monarchy's response towards the protest movement and its willingness to engage with the people. But, it is also a story of the regime's attempt to maintain its power and deter challenges to the king's throne. By modifying its draconian policies and ensuring limited political freedoms and civil liberties, the Jordanians regime adopted the path of "liberalized authoritarianism."<sup>71</sup> Political Scientist Joshua Stacher argues that "adaptable autocrats" use "soft security" strategies to adjust to new challenges to their rule.<sup>72</sup> They limit or renounce the use of coercion or brute force, and instead, co-opt with opponents, instigate minimal reforms to forestall greater change, or introduce new elections.<sup>73</sup> A hybrid regime's reform process is aimed at micro-level changes to ensure regime survival while showcasing efforts towards reform.<sup>74</sup>

In response to past protests, Jordanian kings have often employed the tactic of sacking the prime minister or reshuffling the cabinet to indicate their commitment to democratic and political reform.<sup>75</sup> A Jordanian activist suggested that "prime ministers in Jordan are appointed to be sacked.

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

They act as a shock absorber between the people and the king and become collateral damage when people demand reforms.” Traditionally, in Jordanian politics, the regime has responded to demands for reform by dissolving the parliament or calling for new elections. These changes are often aimed at redirecting the focus of the opposition groups towards the formation of a new government and appointment of a new prime minister.<sup>76</sup> During the 1989 demonstrations, King Hussein responded to his people by dismissing Prime Minister Zaid al-Rifai’s government and launching programs for political and economic liberalization. In 2011, the same tactic was employed by King Abdullah II.

In response to intermittent demonstrations, the king dismissed Prime Minister Samir Rifai and appointed Prime Minister Marouf-al Bakhit to form a new cabinet. On February 1, 2011, the Royal Palace along with Bakhit issued a statement reassuring the demonstrators that the new government’s objective is to “take tangible steps to social, political, and economic reform and give priority to dialogue with all segments of society.”<sup>77</sup> Just during the first nineteen months of the Jordan spring, the people saw five different governments and five different prime ministers (See appendix, Table 2).<sup>78</sup> Each prime minister was appointed carefully by the king and was charged with a specific reform task aimed at satisfying the demands of the people.

Therefore, in the king’s perspective, the regime's quick response indicated their commitment to strengthening democracy.<sup>79</sup> However, a 2011 report suggests that changing cabinets is not unique for King Abdullah II. At the time, in his 12 years as the monarch, the king had imposed the royal decree to dismiss eight cabinets.<sup>80</sup> These immediate political reforms are an

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<sup>76</sup> Ranya Kadri and Ethan Bronner, “King of Jordan Dismisses His Cabinet,” *The New York Times*, February 1, 2011.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Sean L. Yom, “Jordan: The Ruse of Reform,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 24, No. 3, July 3, 2013: 127-139.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

old tactic of the regime to create a semblance of change. Just like previous monarchs in the family, King Abdullah was determined to redirect the kingdom towards a path of “more genuine political and economic reform.” However, were these reforms meaningful? Did they shift the direction of the country by bringing long term change?

### **Cosmetic Reforms and the Semblance of Change:**

In times of recurring protests, convention security measures along with commitment to reform projects and democratic initiatives have been the standard response of the regime.<sup>81</sup> The 2011 protests are a classic example of the path of semblance of change that the Hashemite kingdom creates. In response to the demonstrations, the king emphasized a new period of change in Jordan, which would include reform to the constitution, parliament, the media, and laws on parties and elections.<sup>82</sup> During the early months of the protests, the king organized meetings with the Muslim Brotherhood and discussed possible reforms to the constitution, parliament, and media rights.<sup>83</sup>

On March 15, King Abdullah II promised his citizens that a 53-member committee comprised of government officials and opposition leaders would draft new laws for parliamentary elections and political parties.<sup>84</sup> He also established a three-month deadline to “modernize” the country’s political system and on June 12, he publicly announced his intentions to relinquish the right to appoint prime ministers and cabinets.<sup>85</sup> Instead, he emphasized the role of the elected parliamentary majority in the formation of future cabinets.<sup>86</sup> He also issued a series of “Discussion

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Tehran Times, “Jordan sets 3-month deadline for political reforms,” March 16, 2011.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

Papers,” that were meant to prompt public discussion regarding specific aspects of reform and change.<sup>87</sup>

In August 2011, Jordan proposed a series of constitutional amendments aimed at addressing the demands presented by Jordanian people and reform groups. The committee appointed by King Abdullah II proposed four major amendments to the 1952 constitution. The first amendment included the establishment of a constitutional court to monitor the constitutionality of laws and regulations.<sup>88</sup> Here, the court would replace a high tribunal for the interpretation of such laws that was headed by the speaker of the Senate and widely considered less than totally independent. The second amendment included the establishment of an independent commission to monitor elections.<sup>89</sup> This commission would replace the Ministry of Interior and assume a key role in ensuring free and fair elections. The third amendment guaranteed the protection of civil liberties and criminalized any infringement on the rights and public freedoms of all Jordanians.<sup>90</sup> It prohibited the use of torture and promised to remove censorship. The fourth amendment limited the government’s ability to issue temporary, arbitrary laws in the absence of a parliament.<sup>91</sup> It also restricted the government’s ability to dissolve parliament without having to resign itself.

While members of the Royal Hashemite Court praised the Hashemite monarch’s openness to reform and viewed the kingdom as a unique case among other authoritarian regimes, these

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<sup>87</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, “Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State,” *Columbia University Press*. 2018.

<sup>88</sup> Muasher, Marwan. “Jordan’s Proposed Constitutional Amendments - A First Step in the Right Direction.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. August 17, 2011.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Muasher, Marwan. “Jordan’s Proposed Constitutional Amendments - A First Step in the Right Direction.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. August 17, 2011.



amendments failed to address real change within the regime.<sup>92</sup> Eleven years after the Arab Spring protests, the king continues to exercise his power to appoint and dismiss the prime minister, the upper house of the parliament along with top public security and judicial officials.<sup>93</sup> Further, some amendments limited the role of security services in the political affairs of the country. However, the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) or the *Mukhabarat* (Jordan's intelligence agency) continues to remain strong and pervasive in public life.

The king's engagement with opposition groups and his willingness to discuss reforms are laudable and unique as compared to the Arab counterparts. But it is important to highlight that despite relative change, the end result is the same dominant executive with a semi free press and weak parliament. The cosmetic reforms were a victorious stunt to portray the king's image as a flexible leader. In reality, reform programs, new governments and cabinets, and new elections and electoral systems are all designed to buy time and to continue the process of movement without allowing for change significant enough to challenge the regime.<sup>94</sup> Proponents of these measures suggest that these tactics tighten the king's grip on state institutions, defuse opposition, and increase public support for the regime itself.<sup>95</sup> This is not to say that reform-minded people are absent in Jordan's government, palace, and bureaucracy. Efforts are being made at a grassroots level to genuinely address pressing issues and endemic corruption. But there is a shortage of a meaningful reform process and a lack of commitment to truly reform the country. As former foreign minister Marwan Muasher said: "Until fully accountable governments emerge, much of

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Mohammad Ayesha, "Jordan: How the King is Consolidating His Powers," *Middle East Eye*, January 10, 2022.

the load in leading that process falls on the king. He needs to help restore the credibility gap that exists today.”<sup>96</sup>

### **The Hashemite Family:**

The Hashemite king unites all personalities in the country and the monarchy remains non-contested as an organization. Mr. Laith Al-Qasem, Chairman, Arabian Business Consultants for Development, suggests that “Jordan has a benevolent monarchy. Unlike the brutality of dictatorships in Iraq or Syria, Jordan’s House of Hashim is popular among most people. King Abdullah II is loved by his people and has a strong support base.”<sup>97</sup> For this reason, he suggests, majority protests were calm and aimed towards reform and not regime change.<sup>98</sup> The presence of the king is equally important for Jordanians and Palestinians - the monarchy is a force of stability within the country.

The Hashemite dynasty has had a long tradition of preserving and protecting the values of the country. Historically, Jordanian monarchs have “taken all necessary measures to defend the country from regional chaos.”<sup>99</sup> Popular support for the king also derives from the House of Hashim’s credence in religion and family values, suggests Mr. Mazen Homoud, former Ambassador of Jordan to the United Kingdom, Ireland & Iceland.<sup>100</sup> His Majesty King Abdullah II is the forty-third generation direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Jordanians are proud of their culture and heritage and appreciate the Hashemite family’s religious ties with the Prophet. He suggests that due to the king’s humbleness and accessibility, people view him as “one of them”

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<sup>96</sup> Marwan Muasher, Personal Interview, May 2, 2023.

<sup>97</sup> Laith Al-Qasem, Personal Interview, April 13, 2023.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Mazen Homoud, Personal Interview, April 4, 2023.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

and do not challenge his power.<sup>101</sup> Majority Jordanians agree upon the effectiveness of the monarchy and only challenge the government policies to advocate for reform.

Since 1921, Hashemite kings have a proven track record of navigating the country's challenges. Hence, Jordanians trust the king and do not want someone to restructure the status quo and manipulate the system. Unlike regimes in Saudi Arabia or Syria, "the Jordanian monarchy has no blood on their hands." When people oppose the regime, they are not brutally killed or disappeared. Instead, they face a fair legal trial or serve short sentences. Many Jordanians strongly support the king and share this viewpoint. Dr. Yusuf Mansur, former Minister of State for Economic Affairs, explains that "Jordanians view the Hashemites as a linchpin of the country. Without them the country will succumb to chaos and upheaval."

The other set of views shared by some regime critics suggests that although the king is popular, the people are feeling frustrated with inaction and promises for reforms. Jillian Schwedler argues that King Hussein's degree of popular support has diminished during the reign of King Abdullah and Queen Rania.<sup>102</sup> This was evident during the king's visit to the loyalist city of Tafileh on June 13, 2011 where a group of young activists attacked the king's motorcade with stones and glass bottles.<sup>103</sup> The news came as a shock to loyalist supporters who viewed the southern city of Tafileh as the regime's traditional base of support.

Although few demands for regime change echoed during the Jordan spring, intensity to the demonstrations, and the calls for reform and change were quite serious. In face of serious challenges threatening the stability of the country, there is little room to assume that the Jordanian monarchy enjoys widespread support and popular legitimacy. With growing tensions within the

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Schwedler, Jillian. "The End of Monarchical Exceptionalism." *Aljazeera*. June 22, 2011.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

country, King Abdullah II cannot continue to rule based on his old tactics. For “all his choices are contested; his choice of prime minister, his choice of crown prince, his choice of wife. All are contested.”<sup>104</sup> Today, many Jordanians hope that the king will assume leadership for a strong reform effort and will “liberate” the kingdom from its social, political, and economic struggles.

### **Divided Opposition Movements: Social Fragments:**

Opposition forces in Jordan have historically struggled to assemble and present a united reform coalition with a clear list of domestic and foreign policy demands.<sup>105</sup> Opposition groups often agreed on foreign policy issues such as their opposition to Israel and the U.S. involvement in the Middle East.<sup>106</sup> However, they failed to agree upon domestic social issues.<sup>107</sup> During the Arab Spring, Jordan had multiple reform coalitions with overlapping memberships and objectives.<sup>108</sup> However, they can be categorized into two broad categories. The first group included members who associated with conservative ideology and were anti-reform.<sup>109</sup> These members were embedded in key institutions within the state itself. The second group included traditional opposition rooted in Islamist, leftist, and nationalist parties, as well as the series of youth movements.<sup>110</sup>

The *Hirak* youth movement was more broad, diverse, and highly pluralistic.<sup>111</sup> Ideologically, it was difficult to describe the bend of Hirak activist movements. Some activists had

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<sup>104</sup>Ryan, Curtis. “The King’s Speech.” Foreign Policy. June 17, 2011.

<sup>105</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, “Political Opposition and Reform Coalitions in Jordan,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, December 2011, Vol. 38, No. 3 (December 2011): 367-390.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, “Political Opposition and Reform Coalitions in Jordan,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, December 2011, Vol. 38, No. 3 (December 2011): 367-390.

left leaning economic views and represented pro-democracy activism. But, when it came to topics of identity politics, these activists rooted their demands in right-wing, ultra-nationalist voices. To gather wide support, the *Hirak* activists temporarily organized themselves with leftist and nationalist parties. However, they lacked a clear support base and failed to provide ideological clarity. Between expressing leftist ideology for social and democratic demands and rightist ideas for maintaining the social structures within the country; the *Hirak* failed to generate unity and consensus.

Since 1989, there have been several attempts to create broad-ranging and unified reform coalitions.<sup>112</sup> However, opposition forces and pro-reform activists have had little success in achieving meaningful political change.<sup>113</sup> This is because the regime uses structural and institutional means along with a divide and rule strategy to check and contain the power of opposition forces.<sup>114</sup> Through institutional means, the regime constantly changes election and opposition party laws.<sup>115</sup> And, through the divide-and-rule strategy, the regime splits opposition focus along the lines of socio-economic or political fissures within the country.<sup>116</sup> This strategy was widely adopted by the state institutions especially during the peak of the *Hirak* movement. Several *Hirak* activists accuse the regime of employing the Mukhabarat (Jordan's intelligence service) to weaken opposition groups and defuse protestors. This made it challenging for the activists to form an effective and coordinated opposition. Even without state prodding, opposition groups often splintered and divided themselves due to their failure to generate consensus.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, "Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State," *Columbia University Press*.

Due to the lack of unity and coordination, Jordanians perceive the reform parties as weak and an obsolete form of opposition.<sup>118</sup> Aside from the Islamic Action Front, most opposition parties carry little support within the country.<sup>119</sup> A Jordanian analyst suggests that there are more than fifty political parties within the country; however, most people can hardly name one.<sup>120</sup> The monarchy remains widely popular under King Abdullah II who enjoys wide support because Jordanians view the monarchy as “the thread that holds a divided country together.”<sup>121</sup>

### **Nature of the Protests:**

Mr. Homoud noted that “Jordan’s educated population realize that it is in nobody’s interest to destabilize the country by engaging in mass uprisings.”<sup>122</sup> Although the country has serious economic troubles, endemic corruption, and lack of political freedom, they do not express demands for regime change. This is because “Jordanians do not have many political alternatives...they observe the critical condition of democracies in the neighborhood. The regional experiences have taught them that democratic systems do not solve problems, administrators do.”<sup>123</sup> So, when the region was ablaze with demands for democracy, Jordanians realized that “democratic political parties only work in their self interests” and therefore, only expressed demands for reform.<sup>124</sup> He suggests that the limited number of people of the country who have grievances are “allowed to voice their opinions and complaints. However, the majority Jordanian have no reason to destabilize the country by engaging in mass protests.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup>Mazen Homoud, Personal Interview, April 4, 2023.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*

Reports by journalist Nicolas Pelham suggest that as compared to regional standards, the turnout for the Arab Spring protests in Jordan were “puny” and only a few demonstrations attracted more than five thousand protesters.<sup>126</sup> The March 24 protest movement was the only incident which attracted an estimated seven thousand to ten thousand protesters.<sup>127</sup> Unlike protests in the Arab world, Jordanians gathered after Friday prayers, organized demonstrations for a couple hours, and then dispersed, only to return the following Friday.<sup>128</sup> Due to socio-political fissures, most pro-regime East and West Bankers were reluctant to join movements with openly seditious slogans.<sup>129</sup>

The Hashemite regime’s tactics to control and prevent massive protests played a huge role in determining the nature of the Arab Spring in Jordan. The Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate (GID) employed outreach, surveillance, inquiry, and negotiation tactics to establish contacts with protest leaders and activists.<sup>130</sup> Through surveillance, the GID tapped and recorded telephone and social media communication.<sup>131</sup> They also bribed the protesters’ colleagues to collect intel to curb and monitor future protest organizations.<sup>132</sup> The regime also practiced tactics to censor activists by depriving them of resources.<sup>133</sup> Pro-reform NGOs were compelled to modify their agenda and publications to participate in government led programs.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, “Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State,” *Columbia University Press*.

2018.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Moss, Dana M. “Repression, Response, and Contained Escalation Under “Liberalized” Authoritarianism in Jordan.” *Mobilization*, 19(3): 261-286.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

Throughout the Arab Spring events in Jordan, neither the government nor the PSD engaged in direct confrontations with the protesters.<sup>135</sup> During an interview, a Jordanian analyst suggested that during the Arab Spring, the PSD had established a social contract with the people. In exchange for peaceful and acceptable protests, the organization adopted a policy of “soft security” and denounced the use of force to confront demonstrations. However, pro democracy activists argue that more repressive tactics such as the use of slander, legal persecution, negative defamation, physical and bodily harm, and threats and attacks on friends and family were in fact employed by the regime.<sup>136</sup>

In public awareness, the only incident where the PSD employed harsh tactics was during July 15, 2011 protests in downtown Amman. Right outside the popular Hussein Mosque, the peaceful protest was organized by youth groups and attended by members of labor unions and the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>137</sup> However, riot police officers wielding wooden clubs broke up a peaceful demonstration.<sup>138</sup> The confrontation killed one and left hundreds dead. While this incident was an exception to the peaceful protests, pro-reform activists allege that the government frequently sponsored “repressive entities” to attack and clash with individual activists or protesting groups.<sup>139</sup> This was evident during the events of the March 24 protest where supporters of the regime threw stones at the protesters and injured an estimated forty people, and the Jordanian riot police did not intervene to prevent the clashes.<sup>140</sup> The tactics employed by the regime to curb the protests generated fear and discouraged Jordanians from participating.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Fahim, Kareem. “Jordanian Police Break Up a Peaceful March With Beatings.” *The New York Times*. July 15, 2011.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> BBC. “Clashes Break Out At Jordan Anti-Government Protest.” March 25, 2011.

<sup>141</sup> Moss, Dana M. “Repression, Response, and Contained Escalation Under “Liberalized” Authoritarianism in Jordan.” *Mobilization*, 19(3): 261-286.



### **The “Palestinian” and “Jordanian” Divide:**

Questions surrounding national, social, and ethnic identity effectively limited the protests during the Arab Spring. During past protest movements, pro-regime reactionaries labeled mass activism as “really” Palestinian or Islamist.<sup>142</sup> Their goal was to use identity labels to question the national loyalty and patriotism of the activists.<sup>143</sup> Due to the historically complicated status of Jordanians of Palestine origin, Palestinians were hesitant to join the Arab Spring movement.<sup>144</sup> Within the Jordanian-Palestinian community, consensus suggested that the Palestinians would not participate in the protests unless ethnic Jordanians led the demonstrations.<sup>145</sup> This was largely because protests led solely by Palestinians would be dismissed as mere complaints rather than a legitimate demand for political revisions.<sup>146</sup>

Most protests during the Jordanian Arab Spring were aimed towards the government's disproportionate economic policies which had exacerbated income inequality and resulted in large unemployment rates.<sup>147</sup> However, due to the social impacts of Prime Minister Wasfi al-Tal's policy of Jordanization (1970s), Jordanian workers were highly favored in the public sector, while majority Palestinians were employed in the private sector.<sup>148</sup> This meant that the economic crisis was more prevalent among Jordanians as compared to Palestinians.<sup>149</sup> Therefore, Palestinians refrained from joining demonstrations that were directed against their own disproportionate

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<sup>142</sup>Curtis R.Ryan, “Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State,” *Columbia University Press*, 2018.

<sup>143</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

economic power and influence on the royal palace.<sup>150</sup> Similarly, East Bankers decried corruption and the lack of economic opportunities but did not join calls for democratization that would effectively mean more political power to the Palestinian community.<sup>151</sup>

### **Regional Unrest:**

By early 2013, several pro and anti-reform Jordanians reduced their participation in protests and backed off in their demands on the state. They expressed deep concerns about the instability and violence in neighboring countries, such as Syria.<sup>152</sup> Members of the regime and opposition feared potential spillovers of the Syrian civil war and were mindful of their participation and reaction to the demonstrators in Jordan.<sup>153</sup> They realized the negative impact of the regional Arab uprisings and observed revolutions turning into civil wars in neighboring countries. As a result of the Arab spring, the region was ablaze with insurgency, repression, foreign intervention, state-led suppression, and sectarian tension. With the growing influence of jihadist movements and terrorist organizations such as al-Qa'ida and the Islamic State in the region, Jordanians expressed concerns about maintaining regional and domestic security. Activists feared that Jordan too could tip towards severe violence and instability and therefore, temporarily toned down their demands.<sup>154</sup> For them, ensuring security within the region was a greater priority and this security dilemma played a huge role in derailing the domestic reform efforts.

The regional violence and the response of other Arab countries towards protests helped Jordanians gain respect for their political stability, freedom of expression and opinion, and freedom

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, "Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State," *Columbia University Press*, 2018.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

of assembly.<sup>155</sup> Based on regional events, the protesters realized that they had two options. First, they could attempt to overthrow the regime and risk unleashing chaos.<sup>156</sup> Or, second, they could respect the political stability of the hybrid regime and continue minor protests for reform.<sup>157</sup> Regional wars, massive influx of refugees, and the threat of terrorism helped Jordanians understand that stability was more important than regime change and civil war.<sup>158</sup> Therefore, activists did not stop their protests to accept the status quo; rather, they realized Jordan's vulnerable situation and consciously held back from extreme protests.<sup>159</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSION.

The economic and political issues that brought people to the streets in 2011 have not been clearly resolved. The demands for reform were heard and promises were made by King Abdullah II; however, these promises were a part of the regime's tactic to create a semblance of change.<sup>160</sup> Although protests and demonstrations started declining after 2012, Jordan's economic, social, and political crises persist. Since 2013, some Arab Spring activists in Jordan have simply faded away or co-opted. While they had pro-democracy, anti-corruption, and anti-neoliberal aspirations; they failed to organize themselves into a united reform coalition. Repeated public criticisms of the country's socio-economic and political conditions along with flawed mechanisms for political participation and accountability, defined the Arab Spring in Jordan. And, although the Hashemite

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Mehran Kamrava, "Beyond the Arab Spring: The Evolving Ruling Bargain in the Middle East," *Oxford Academic*, December 18, 2014.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

kingdom continues to implement its tactics for regime survival, the spirit for reform has not subsided within the country and activists continue to advocate for reform.<sup>161</sup>

## VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS.

The goal of this paper is to present some key arguments to help the reader understand the reasons why the Arab Spring in Jordan was markedly different from the regional chaos. While the author provides some reasons to answer this question, there are several other factors such as the country's history, the tribal system, and the role of allies in ensuring peace and stability within the country. Further, due to limited time constraints, the researcher was unable to gather more interview responses. The addition of more Jordanian voices in the paper would have made the paper more diverse and representative. In the future, the researcher aims to collect more data and add more case studies to answer the analyze the major stability factors in Jordan.

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## VIII. APPENDIX.

Table 1 - List of Individuals Interviewed.

INTERVIEWEE	DESCRIPTION
Dr. Jawad Anani	Jordan's former deputy prime minister, foreign minister, chief of the Royal Court, and coordinator of the peace process negotiating team
Mr. Mazin Hmoud	Former Jordanian Ambassador to the United Kingdom
Dr Yusuf Mansur	former Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Member of the Prime Minister's Economic Policy Advisory Committee
Laith Al Qassem	Chairman of Arabian Business Consultants for Development
Zaidoun Abuhassan	N/A
Omar Zuhair Abdul Fattah Malhas	Former Minister Finance at the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.
Amar Majali	N/A
Osama al Sharif	Veteran journalist and political commentator based in Amman.
Dr Oroub EL-Abed	Lead researcher and co- investigator at the Centre for Lebanese Studies
Senator Issa Murad	N/A
Dr. Walid Alkhatib	Head of public opinion polls and survey department at Center for Strategic Studies/University of Jordan

Marwan Muasher	Foreign Minister (2002–2004) and Deputy Prime Minister (2004–2005) of Jordan
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**Table 2 - List of Jordanian Prime Ministers and Governments During the Arab Spring.**

<b>Prime Minister</b>	<b>Term</b>
Samir al-Rifa'i	October 2012 - February 2011
Ma'rouf al-Bakhit	February 2011 - October 2011
'Awn al-Khasawneh	October 2011 - May 2012
Fayez Tarawneh	May 2012 - October 2012
Abdullah an-Nsour	October 2012 - June 2016



**Title: Peace and Stability Factors in Jordan**

**Your Name/Homeschool: Beloit College**

School for International Training—Jordan: Geopolitics, International Relations, and The future of the Middle East

1. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that make Jordan stable as compared to its neighbors in the Middle East. How does the country avoid protests? How does the country remain stable when its regional counterparts are war torn?
2. **Rights Notice**  
**If at any time, you feel that you are at risk or exposed to unreasonable harm, you may terminate and stop the interview.** Please take some time to carefully read the statements provided below.
  - a. **Privacy** - all information you present in this interview may be recorded and safeguarded. If you do not want the information recorded, you need to let the interviewer know.
  - b. **Anonymity** - all names in this study will be kept anonymous unless the participant chooses otherwise.
  - c. **Confidentiality** - all names will remain completely confidential and fully protected by the interviewer. By signing below, you give the interviewer full responsibility to uphold this contract and its contents. The interviewer will also sign a copy of this contract and give it to the participant.

**3. Instructions:**

*Please read the following statements carefully and mark your preferences where indicated. Signing below indicates your agreement with all statements and your voluntary participation in the study. Signing below while failing to mark a preference where indicated will be interpreted as an affirmative preference. Please ask the researcher if you have any questions regarding this consent form.*

I am aware that this interview is conducted by an independent undergraduate researcher with the goal of producing a descriptive case study on **Peace and Stability Factors in Jordan**.

I am aware that the information I provide is for research purposes only. I understand that my responses will be confidential and that my name will not be associated with any results of this study.

I am aware that I have the right to full anonymity upon request, and that upon request the researcher will omit all identifying information from both notes and drafts.

I am aware that I have the right to refuse to answer any question and to terminate my participation at any time, and that the researcher will answer any questions I have about the study.

I am aware of and take full responsibility for any risk, physical, psychological, legal, or social, associated with participation in this study.

I am aware that I will not receive monetary compensation for participation in this study, but a copy of the final study will be made available to me upon request.

I [ do / do not ] give the researcher permission to use my name and position in the final study.

I [ do / do not ] give the researcher permission to use my organizational affiliation in the final study.

I [ do / do not ] give the researcher permission to use data collected in this interview in a later study.

**Date:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Printed Name:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Signature:**

\_\_\_\_\_

***Thank you for participating!***

*Questions, comments, complaints, and requests for the final written study can be directed to:*

Dr. ~~Raed Altabini~~ Raed Altabini, SIT Jordan Academic Director | Email: raed.altabini@sit.edu