



## PERSPECTIVES

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# In Jordan's 2020 Parliamentary Elections, the King Won Hands Down

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Despite non-stop forebodings that have gone on for decades among analysts and the intelligentsia about the inevitable fall of the Jordanian monarchy, the recent parliamentary elections proved that yet again, the King won hands down.

Few political outcomes have shamed the prophecies of security officials, political scientists, and commentators more than the persistence of the Jordanian Hashemite kingdom.

During the 1950s, it was considered "inevitable" that the Jordanian monarchy, headed by the grandson of the Sharif of Mecca, would fall in the face of rising pan-Arabism personified by Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, who undermined King Hussein at every turn. But Nasser died a premature death at 52, three years after experiencing one of the most resounding military defeats ever faced by a political leader. King Hussein went on to rule Jordan for nearly 30 years after Nasser's death.

In the 1960s, it was the Palestinians' turn to declare the inevitability of the Jordanian monarchy's demise to a chorus of widespread agreement from heads of Western security services, journalists, and political scientists.

The second-biggest Palestinian faction at the time, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, even turned this forecast into its logo. The image featured an arrow that begins in Amman and ends in Tel Aviv to visually describe what the liberation of Palestine was going to entail: the reactionary Western stooge regime in Jordan would be felled on the road to the conquest of Tel Aviv. As the PFLP was Palestinian, pan-Arab, and Marxist, it was widely considered to be on the "right side of history."

In 1970, the demise of the Kingdom seemed not just inevitable but imminent. Not only was the PFLP busy hijacking planes and landing them in Jordanian airports, but there were more armed Palestinians than Jordanian military personnel roaming the streets of Amman.

Yet by the summer of 1971, the Palestinian factions had been totally defeated by the Jordanian army, which remained loyal to the King. So resounding was the defeat of “the forces of the future” that hundreds of surviving Palestinian terrorists fled westward into the hands of the Israelis rather than risk the retribution they feared from the Hashemite Kingdom.

Nervous political officers at the US Embassy in Tel Aviv felt the same way when the Palestinian intifada broke out in December 1987. The King was indeed worried that the uprising would spread to the Kingdom, where the Palestinians were the clear majority. At the height of the intifada, he announced that Jordan was “cutting ties” with the West Bank, one ramification of which was that Jordanian passports would no longer be issued to Palestinians in the area.

There were indeed large demonstrations during the first years of the intifada at Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, some of which ended in the deaths of both demonstrators and security personnel—but few would have predicted that massive Palestinian protest in Jordan would become a thing of the past. Henceforth, it was the Bedouin in the south of Jordan, not the Palestinians, who demonstrated, sometimes violently, against the monarchy.

Passivity among Jordan’s Palestinian majority did not bring an end to either the challenges faced by the monarchy or the general expectation of its “inevitable” fall. Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and Saddam’s widespread popularity in Jordan aroused new fears that the population would turn against the King. These fears, which were probably exaggerated in the first place, dissipated after Saddam’s expulsion from Kuwait.

In 2014, it was the dramatic rise of ISIS and its success in controlling much of northern Iraq and eastern Syria that posed a challenge to the Kingdom and once again raised the specter of its “inevitable” demise. Yet again, the threat failed to materialize.

Between these peaks, political scientists were always predicting that modernization—the growth of a Jordanian middle class based on merit rather than lineage or genealogy—would “inevitably” turn against the King and bring about the demise of the monarchy, which lacked the oil revenues of the Gulf kingdoms to buy its citizenry off.

The recent elections to the Jordanian parliament, like most elections before them, showed how wrong was this “inevitable” reading, which was based on the middle class revolution in the West. The King won hands down.

Ostensibly, Jordan is home to dozens of parties and movements that would like to send King Abdullah (Hussein’s son) packing (probably to London, where he was raised). Some of those groups want to create a Jordanian republic. The Muslim Brotherhood, which is the largest organized opposition to the King, and its party arm, the Islamic Action Front, want to turn Jordan into a theocracy. Other parties include pan-Arabists, socialists, assorted forms of “progressives,” and combinations thereof. Some of these groups are linked to Palestinian factions.

Though many of these parties have the word “popular” in their names, the results of the elections show that they are anything but. The Jordanian parliament is 130 strong—115 of whom are elected, plus 15 women appointed by the King. (These are usually women who secured the most votes among female candidates but lost the elections.) Of the 115 seats contested, the largest and most organized party, the Islamic Action Front, won only five seats.

None of the other ideological parties secured any seats at all. They ran on their own, and most of the lists (rather than parties) featured candidates from one locality only.

Ten years after the so-called “Arab Spring,” it seems that for the time being at least, Jordan will continue to be the conservative mainstay it has been since the days of Black September 50 years ago, when the Palestinian factions fought the Hashemite Kingdom.

Evidently, the majority of Jordanians reason that a conservative king is preferable to “progressives” like Nasser, “socialists” like the Baathist Saddam Hussein, and “revolutionary” Palestinian factions and the Muslim Brotherhood—all adjectives Western academics and ideologues in their folly have affixed to these leaders and movements over the years.

Can one blame the Jordanians for preferring a king to these despots?

*This is an edited version of an [article](#) that appeared in the Jerusalem Post on December 9, 2020.*

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