

Jordan at a Crossroads: Obstacles and Opportunities for Structural Reforms

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Political Diagnosis

The lack of trust in political systems, low credibility, and accusations of bad governance and corruption shape the conviction of the new generations. This is a critical issue that should be considered, as it could drive the shift to a new style of confrontation with the political systems in the region. The main trend of previous protests during the Arab Spring has coalesced around corruption of individual officials.

Recent demonstrations in the region, mark a fundamental shift in the perception of the dissatisfied young protesters towards the state in its totality, rather than individual officials. Hence, it is paramount to acknowledge that future uprisings amongst the younger population will be driven by those who lived and grew up disappointed in the older generation and are therefore increasingly disillusioned with the state and its structures. This suggests that future protests will have a higher proportion of these younger generations with more advanced technological expertise, and as a result may get more disillusioned and radicalized.

In Jordan, during the Arab Spring protests, people called for reforms and policy changes based on existing institutions with a respect for the state. However, this sense of responsibility

and respect for the state might be at risk as corruption and lack of transparency, nepotism, and favoritism are becoming the main perceived characterizations of governments. Talk of corruption and the inefficiency of addressing it has been noticeably increasing and solidifying in the minds of people. A new approach to restore the image of the state in fighting corruption is becoming a critical necessity.

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Post-Pandemic Challenges

Jordan had the opportunity to develop effective strategies to counter the pandemic, but instead of implementing more social and progressive policy options, it chose to militarize the management of the crisis. What Jordan needs today is a government that takes into consideration a new concept of governance. Jordan's economy needs reform through a progressive vision that takes into consideration the change in internal politics and attitudes of people. Jordan should consider a more effective strategy that takes the needs and desires of people into account. Recent developments and the COVID-19 crisis should serve as

a wake-up call for the political leadership to reconsider the concept of national security that is not limited to technical security and border protection. There needs to be a more progressive strategy with programs and policies that provide people with what they need and communicates a coherent and unified narrative to develop the economy and affected communities. Only this approach will make policies more effective and meet the challenges that we face as a nation and as a people. A good start would be a national alliance and partnership between the private and public sectors to accelerate the vaccination process, as time is a decisive factor to navigate the way out of this crisis.

Political Reform Attempt

King Abdullah sent a letter, on 10th of June 2021, to former Prime Minister and current Vice President of the Senate, Samir Rifai, entrusting him with chairing the Royal Committee to modernize the political system. While it's a good step to shape a committee from various backgrounds to provide suggestions for reform, it is more important to ensure a clear political vision of why the reform is necessary and clarify the main objectives as well as its final intended outcomes. Then, this attempt can be the initial step of a long-term process of political reform.

It is important to pave the way for reform by adopting a comprehensive process that restores hope, confidence and trust in the system. At the same time, it must create a positive perception amongst people and put an end to policies of marginalization and exclusion. On a more practical level, for any reform process to be successful, it requires the will and political determination, continuous follow-up to implementation, and the imposition of public and direct penalization of public corruption.

Creating a pro-reform atmosphere is as important as making any decisions or amendments. Restoring the confidence of people in their governments requires quick and direct measures that make people feel the seriousness of change and the sincerity of the intentions of any reforms. For example, fixing problems related to liberties, freedom of speech and political activism and union work will help bridge the trust gap and begin to restore credibility in the process.

Policy Recommendations

"It is important not to forget that people need to see action and real change at all levels, such that they notice the changes in their daily lives."

- It is critical to deal with and address people's perceptions of corruption. Mismanagement that caused human catastrophe in healthcare, infrastructure and

transportation are seen as a result of corruption.

- To this end, the efficiency of the bureaucracy is an important issue to resolve. What is required is an “administrative or white-collar revolution”, to revive the spirit of institutions based on the concepts of reward and punishment.
- The state should apply innovative methods and changes, starting with strong laws and virtuous officials. This would not just be necessary to maintain a positive image of the state, but it is also important to restore the people's confidence, rebuilding credibility, and re-establishing hope and optimism about the future.
- People need to see action and real change at all levels, such that they notice the changes in their daily lives. This can only be done by addressing officials at all levels with a new motivation structure to change the mechanisms of work and achievement within the system.
- A shared sense of responsibility is the key to re-establish trust and confidence in state institutions. This can only be created by building and rewarding efficiency and outcomes, which in turn leads to effective political leadership, rather than a lack of responsibility which destroys any efficiency in the system. It is also critical to promote political inclusion of youth and put an end to the centralization of power in the hands of a small elite.
- Political reform should be considered more broadly to encourage the establishment of political parties. As such, the focus should be on greater investment in the development of political culture in addition to electoral reform. Furthermore, free thought and expression protected by the state will help develop political parties that represent the people.
- Political pluralism is the basis of democracy and allows ideas to take shape and develop into actionable plans. Plans resulting from a pluralist political culture are more likely to be based on reality on the ground and therefore more likely to yield positive outcomes. The transition from a culture of unilateralism to one of pluralism is a critical step towards fostering human intellect and promoting free thought as the foundation of effective development and reform.
- Jordan should work on political inclusions on all levels, members of the royal family should play a vital role by activating social and political powers across society. Unions and youth movements should also be included in the political reform process. Jordan should put an end to the political exclusion that many parts of society are suffering from.
- Finally, it is paramount that in a dynamic region like the Middle East, the concept of national security should be revised in order to successfully meet challenges by providing effective and efficient

tools to develop a more resilient society. Jordan should focus more on the professional role of its intelligence agency in regional and international cooperation.

The agency should maintain professional counterterrorism and national security operations and less involvement in internal political affairs.

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