

Election Watch for the Digital Age



Jordan

Preelection assessment

Parliamentary elections set for November 2020

Jordan's parliamentary elections will take place following a year of tumultuous anti-government protests, which were tamped down by the country's COVID-19 restrictions. The upper house of parliament, the Senate, is appointed by the king, while the lower chamber, the House of Representatives, is up for election.

Candidates typically run as independents and are often tribal figures or businesspeople considered loyal to the monarchy. Despite the dissolution of the Jordanian chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood in July, its political arm, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), remains the country's largest opposition party and will participate in the November elections. The IAF won 10 seats in the 2016 election after having boycotted the previous two votes.

Jordanians regularly self-censor when speaking publicly on sensitive political topics and the monarchy. Organizers of the protest movement have been arrested and prosecuted over the past year. Journalists are sometimes targeted with harassment and assault in response to their reporting, and the government has pressured editors of news websites and online activists to delete articles and social media posts. Jordan's COVID-19 response may further impact these rights ahead of the election, as emergency provisions have introduced new limits on free expression and movement. Recent attempts to amend the punitive Cybercrime Law to criminalize vaguely defined terms including rumors, false news, and hate speech also demonstrate the government's continued pressure on free expression.

Jordan has a score of 40 out of 100, with 100 representing the least vulnerable in terms of election integrity, on Freedom House's Election Vulnerability Index, which is based on a selection of key election-related indicators. Jordan's score reflects a broadly restrictive environment for free expression, assembly, and political engagement. The country is rated **Partly Free** in *Freedom in the World 2020*, with a score of 37 out of 100 with respect to its political rights and civil liberties, and **Partly Free** in *Freedom on the Net 2020*, with an internet freedom score of 49 out of 100. To learn more about these annual Freedom House assessments, please visit the Jordan country reports for [Freedom in the World](#) and [Freedom on the Net](#).

Freedom House has identified the following as key issues to watch ahead of election day:

- **Cyberattacks:** Multiple politically consequential cyberattacks have occurred in recent years, including the hacking of social media accounts belonging to the deputy head of the teachers'

union in 2019 and the speaker of the House of Representatives in 2018. In July 2019, the official website of the Constitutional Court was compromised by an “international hacker.” This history of politically related cyberattacks suggests similar incidents may be seen during the electoral period.

- **Arrests and prosecutions:** There are several laws, including criminal defamation and lèse-majesté, that can be used to punish nonviolent political and social expression ahead of the election, and the government sometimes issues gag orders that restrict reporting on sensitive subjects. Numerous activists and critics have faced charges of insulting the royal family and undermining the regime in the past year for social media posts that criticized Jordanian leadership.
- **Connectivity disruptions:** Jordanian authorities may have interfered with internet access in the past. In July, NetBlocks reported that Facebook’s live-streaming service was restricted for a few hours during protests. Facebook Live allegedly experienced disruptions during demonstrations in December 2018 and January 2019 as well. These incidents may signal a willingness on the part of the government to repeat similar restrictions during politically tense moments or demonstrations related to the elections.