The determinants of Jordan’s stability case study: The Arab spring (2011–2019) and the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract
Why was Jordan able to survive the Arab Spring revolutions and the COVID-19 pandemic despite lacking financial capabilities compared to other monarchies? Based on the political system and a comparative case study approach, this article argues that during the Arab Spring, the absence of internal pressure for change and the presence of internal and external support led Jordan’s state practice to change into a balanced approach of both authoritarianism and revolution to sustain stability. However, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Jordan faced a more imminent economic and health threat, coupled with a change in the positions of its external allies. The findings confirm that, in both cases, Jordan faced critical internal and external threats. During the Arab Spring, international assistance supported Jordan. However, during COVID-19, a global pandemic and changing international positions, Jordan did not receive international assistance. Consequently, the Jordanian monarchy had to control the political system through authoritarian policies. Therefore, in a changing environment with shifting international positions, the more the threat is imminent to Jordan’s stability, the more Jordan’s internal inherited elements sustain its stability.

Keywords
Arab Spring, authoritarian, COVID-19 pandemic, Jordan, semi-constitutional, stability

During 2011, a wave of popular uprisings started in 2011 in the Arab world, known as the “Arab Spring,” managed to overthrow ancient dictators in the region, namely Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and Tunisia. This, of course, spread fear in Arab authoritarian monarchies, and prompted some to resort to financial resources to satisfy their people and others to request military assistance from neighboring countries to suppress popular uprisings, while others still introduced some political reforms.

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However, Jordan, a non-oil monarchy, lacks the financial resources to satisfy its people. How did it manage to sustain its stability? How did Jordan adapt to the changes that have taken place in the external environment during the Arab Spring and the COVID-19 pandemic?

Internally, Jordan is a monarchy with a small economy. It suffers from a shortage of natural resources, especially water and oil availability. It has “high rates of unemployment, budget and current account deficits, and government debt” (Moody’s Analytics, n.d.; International Monetary Fund, n.d.). Therefore, the external debt increases. In order to overcome the weakness of the Jordanian economy, “international assistance has also been essential to meet their economic demands” (Jordan Strategy Forum, 2017). In other words, Jordan had to rely on its regional and international relationships; this dependency on aid and assistance led to budget and trade deficits. “They have made the economy ‘reliant’ on external factors over which policy-makers had little control” (Mansur et al., 2020).

Consequently, Jordan’s economic strategies are usually affected by trends within the region that force it to take reactive policies. These reactive policies are due to Jordan’s limited natural resources and the economic reform programs implemented under the supervision of international organizations such as the IMF or World Bank, reform programs introduced by Gulf countries and the United States (Mansur et al., 2020).

Socially, Jordan consists of Bedouin, Seminomadic, Hadari, and village settlers. Culturally and politically, they are connected to the King in an inevitable bond. Indeed, “by 1950, analysts believed that the tribal ethos (communal, solidarity, hierarchical organizations) was not only compatible, but synonymous with monarchical rule” (Yom, 2014). Tribal–king relations have been sustained since the colonial era. They had to be sustained against the colonists in order to survive (Yom, 2014). The structure of Jordanian society is different. At the top of society sat the Hashemite King, “sheikh al-mashayikh,” while the Jordanian tribes were beneath him, where their bond was based on “unquestioned obedience and sacrifice for the monarch” (Yom, 2014). Various historical events shaped Jordan’s identity and emphasized the divides between East Bankers (trans-Jordanians) and West Bankers (Palestinians).

The problem started in 1960 when the Palestinian-Jordanians became the majority defined as outsiders given their “outsider status” (Yom, 2014). The Jordanian government made use of the “Tribal affiliation to East Banker identity” (Brand, 1995: 48). Their identity and affiliation are usually linked to the state where “King Abdallah and Hussein viewed the trans-Jordanians as more loyal and reliable than the recently uprooted and newly enfranchised Palestinians” (Brand, 1995: 48). The trans-Jordanians had concerns about the elites who were around the King. However, they only demanded anti-corruption reforms as they considered the King as a national identity, who they have “equated with the homeland” (Doughan, 2020).

Politically, the opposition within Jordan is described as fractious. On one hand, the West Bankers (Jordanians with Palestinian origins) supported the Muslim Brotherhood. On the other hand, the East Bankers (the native Jordanians) supported the government and the monarch (Brand, 1995). Prior to the Arab Spring, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), which was composed primarily of Jordanians of Palestinian origin, was considered the most organized opposition to the government and advocated for political reforms (Helfont and Helfont, 2012). In fact, from 1989 to 2011, the IAF claimed many seats in the legislative elections. “Out of 80 deputies that were elected, 22 were Islamist with a participation rate of 53.1%. This marked the arrival of the IAF as a major player on the Jordanian political scene” (Jaber, 2017). The relationship between the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood and the Jordanian monarchy can be summarized as: “The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood always enjoyed the backing of the regime that treated the values
of religion and activities of the Muslim Brotherhood in a positive way. The movement’s legitimacy was never in question after its inception in 1946” (Ghanem and Mustafa, 2011).

With social and political problems and limited economic resources, Jordan did not fall during the peak of instability in the Middle East caused by the Arab Spring. If sustained oil prices, foreign aid, and other resource-rich property factors helped Gulf countries survive the Arab Spring demonstrations, then why did Jordan, with critical internal problems and limited resources, survive the uprisings and the Covid-19 pandemic? How does Jordan manage to hold on internally? Do regional and international factors influence the environment surrounding Jordan and lead to its stability?

In order to study the capability of Jordan to adapt to the changes in its external environment without risking its stability during the Arab Spring and the COVID-19 pandemic, the research applies a system approach presented by David Easton. The system approach according to Easton consists of a set of rules that can be defined through the political dimensions of the act. Also, the main goal of political analysis is to "implicit the notion that each part of the larger political canvas does not stand alone but is related to each other part ... no one part can be fully understood without reference to the way in which the whole itself operates" (Easton, 1957: 383). Consequently, applying the basic terms of this approach to the study is as follows.

Inputs of the system in Jordan include internal factors such as economic, social, and political factors. Then, all these inputs interact with their changing environment, regional and international, on a mutual basis. The outputs are the new patterns resulting from the interaction of the input elements with the regional and international environment. Lastly, feedback is analyzed by linking the three components inputs, outputs, and the environment on the one hand. Feedback ensures the preservation of the system’s presence on the other hand.

Accordingly, the study will adopt the approach of systems analysis, specifically the model presented by David Easton, because it is most appropriate to the nature of the study, along with the ability of this approach to highlight the dynamic nature of the system with the surrounding environment, which depends on inputs and outputs, and to analyze the effectiveness of the system in performing its functions.

There are six types of comparative methods as introduced by Arend Lijphart (1971) in his book *Comparative Politics and Comparative Methods*. The research applies “deviant case analysis.” In other words, “Extreme or deviant case sampling means selecting cases that are unusual or special in some way, such as outstanding successes or notable failures” (Rod Laird Organisation, 2012). Jordan is thought to deviate from the established generalization that Arab monarchies rely on their oil-rich resources to sustain their rule because it is related to the prophet and its monarch has faced significant uprisings and implemented significant political reforms.

The comparative approach is applied to compare Jordan’s state practice during both periods in order to sustain its stability. That is, the extent of internal and external factors in Jordan that sustain its stability in the presence of an imminent threat. In other words, what are the determinants of Jordan’s stability during the Arab Spring and the COVID-19 pandemic?

In order to analyze a threat, Bethlehem in Akande and Lieflander (2013) highlights four main components: “(1) type—what kind of attack is threatened? (2) how probable is it that the attack will occur? (3) gravity—how severe will the attack be? and (4) timing—when will the attack occur?” (Akande and Lieflander, 2013: 564).

Securitization is one of the critical reasons for the correlations between severity of a threat and authoritarianism. There are three outputs that securitization theory seeks; namely, adding security
character to a public problem, creating new policies, and social collective social approval and commitment (Balzacq et al., 2016). For instance, “the scope of regime security in Jordan experienced a dramatic shift from appeasement to coercion around 2014 because of the eroding social order in neighboring states” (Kikkawa, 2021: 290). In fact, securitization theory is well-equipped for articulating the security aspects of new transnational or global challenges like environmental degradation, diseases, or migration, as well as comprehending the political implications—i.e. social commitments and accountability practices—of labelling such occurrences as threats (Balzacq et al., 2016).

The article starts with how Jordan perceived the threat, then how the monarchy acted, whether the international community supported or pressured Jordan and finally the determinants of Jordan’s stability. In analyzing the threat, the article looks for: type of the threat, timing of the threat, gravity of the threat, and likelihood that the threat affects Jordan’s stability, namely, the internal elements in the monarchy. In terms of Jordan’s state practice, the research looks for the changes and practices the monarchy applied to overcome the threat. Finally, the role of its allies is discussed, as Jordan’s economy relies on financial support and aid from external sources. I suppose that the more the threat is imminent to Jordan’s security, the more the authoritarian practices are applied to sustain its stability.

**Arab Spring in Jordan**

The Arab Spring started in January 2011 in Jordan. A group of daily-wage workers and hundreds of Jordanian activists decided to protest at the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Agriculture, demanding reforms in the political sphere, including elimination of corruption and mismanagement (Doughan, 2020). A group of youth from the Eastern Bank tribes launched the Hirak movement as a form of political opposition. Their main demand is to apply democratic reforms in Jordan. By initiating this movement, “they generated major change in their communities, especially tribal state relations … This changing dynamic of tribal politics holds enormous implications for politics and stability within the Hashemite Kingdom” (Yom, 2014: 228).

During the protests, the Hirak movement demanded legislating constitutional laws that decrease the power of the royals, instituting new elections laws, holding new elections in the monarchy, and curbing corruption. These demands were requested by nonviolent means (Yom, 2014). Although Islamist groups are part of the opposition, the Hirak movement is described as unique. It is considered rare for tribal Jordanians to organize a non-violent movement that aims to introduce democratic reforms in the system. Another unique feature of the movement is that it put Palestinian “xenophobia” aside and focused on democratic reforms that could develop the monarchy. In other words, its solidarity was not based on identity, rather on its request for democratic reforms. This consequently challenges the old norms (Yom, 2014). Other opposition movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and March 24 were present on the streets of Jordan during the Arab Spring. They share with the Hirak movement the desire for strategic reform rather than immediate change (Yom, 2014).

**Jordan’s state practice during the Arab Spring wave**

**Type of threat: Longstanding economic crisis**

In fact, the longstanding economic crisis in Jordan is linked to political and geographical elements. At the beginning of the Arab Spring, the influx of Syrian refugees to Irbid and Mafraq in Jordan affected governmental services, such as water availability and quality, health, education, employment, and education (Buryan, 2012). Consequently, Jordan’s economy suffered more, given that it
was already under challenge before the influx of Syrian refugees in 2011. The Minister of Water and Irrigation described this period as: “We live in a chronic water problem and we are now on the edge of moving from a chronic water problem into a water crisis” (Francis, 2015).

In other words, the timing of the Arab Spring wave was not in favor of the Jordanian economy: “Just when the kingdom was struggling to bring its own economic house in order, it found itself dealing with the additional economic, social, and political costs of hosting hundreds of thousands of desperate Syrian refugees” (Ryan, 2014: 145).

The severity of the impact of the Arab Spring wave on Jordan’s stability

The severity of the Arab Spring in Jordan can be described as a limited, non-violent wave. In other words, it is “limited in scope and end game … nonviolent protesters calling for fixing the existing regime, rather than its overthrow” (Barari and Satkowski, 2012: 41). On one hand, the protests initiated by the Hirak movement “did not call for changing the system into republican but limiting the absolute power” (Barari and Satkowski, 2012: 42).

Protests in Jordan were not the same as those that took place in republic states during the Arab Spring. Jordanians feared the uncertainty of rapid democratic change and preferred stability caused by the monarchy (Yom, 2014).

On the other hand, the Muslim Brotherhood and its Political Wing, the IAF, historically shared the “backing of the regime that treated the values of religion and activities of the Muslim Brotherhood in a positive way. The movement’s legitimacy was never in question after its inception in 1946” (Ghanem and Mustafa, 2011: 396). In addition, the performance of the Muslim Brotherhood in other countries gave mixed feelings to Muslim brothers in Jordan. Furthermore, “In 2007, the group withdrew from Jordan’s municipal elections, claiming fraud. It again boycotted legislative polls in 2010 and 2013” (Jordan’s Brotherhood-linked party considers boycotting legislative poll, 2020).

The aftermath of the Arab Spring: The COVID-19 pandemic in Jordan

The economic crisis continues with the existence of an imminent health threat

By the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, “As a resource-starved and semi-rentier country, Jordan is likely to face a deep challenge” (Singh, 2020). The percent of unemployment, revenues, and the budget deficit increased (Saraireh and Muslim, 2021). Consequently, “the immediate impact of this situation was deeply felt by daily wage laborers and those working in the private sector experienced a total loss or 30 to 60 percent loss of income” (Badarin, 2020: 4). The economic crisis continues as, according to statistics, there are “2.1 million registered Palestinians refugees, 0.5 million Iraqis and 1.6 million Syrians; that is, Jordan has around 4.2 million refugees. This results in acute population pressure on the limited national resources.” (Singh, 2020).

The timing of the COVID-19 pandemic was not in favor of either the economic or health systems in Jordan. In fact, “strict lockdown was applied, leading to internal economic activities being cripple” (Badarin, 2020). The fact that the pre-COVID-19 socio-economic tensions combined with deteriorating health conditions aggravated the conditions in Jordan.
**Elements that supported Jordan’s stability**

There are internal elements that supported Jordan’s stability against threats. Bank et al. (2013) concluded that historical and religious claims sustain the monarch’s position in Jordan and Morocco, while dynastic gulf monarchies rely on revenues and family participation. It is important to mention that they believe in the insufficiency of only one element as the main reason for their stability (Bank et al., 2013). The Jordanian government invested heavily in its culture and heritage through enforcing its symbolic strengths; and proved its tremendous ability to interact skillfully with local, regional, and international pressures, and to absorb demands and respond to some of them. Patriotism is linked directly with the monarch. “To be patriotic meant to be aligned with the monarch—a form of patriotism summed up in the expression ‘al-wala’ wa-l-intima’ (allegiance [to the King] and belonging [to the homeland]” (Doughan, 2020). Moreover, King Hussein and King Abdullah succeeded historically in sustaining a commitment towards Arabism. They focused on Arabism more than internal affairs through “frequent reference, periodic appeal to Arab, especially the Bedouin values, greater integration among Arab states through mediation and, most importantly, is the Palestinian case” (Brand, 1995: 51). Consequently, popular support for the Hashemite rule among the overwhelming majority of Jordanian civilians was created, and the Islamic nationalists seized power (Kharbush, 2014).

This does not mean that the Jordanian system is considered a constitutional monarchy like monarchies in Central and Western Europe. In fact, the left-wing opposition does not present a huge challenge to the monarchy and the party system in Jordan provides the King with the authority to choose the prime minister without restrictions when a party or party coalition cannot obtain a majority in the House of Representatives. It makes the King obliged to assign the prime minister from this party or coalition. Furthermore, the Muslim Brotherhood ruled in Egypt, and its failure impacted the rest of the region, sustaining the Jordanian monarchy’s authority (Kharbush, 2014).

There are factors other than traditional Islamic rule that kept these regimes surviving, including: the formation of political institutions, the type of the regime, and the promise of democratization that monarchs give to their citizens. In fact, tradition is not the reason for the stability of Arab monarchies, but the state institutions’ capability to manage their supporters and society in general (Lucas, 2004). Moreover, Lucas (2004) maintained the critical role of the middle class and social base in providing support. In addition, oil-rich monarchies and those dependent on external support will not survive unless they manage their “social base.”

To analyze the persistency of Jordan, Barany (2012) claims that weak opposition exists in Jordan. Also, political opposition divisions in Jordan weakened protestors’ ability to revolt. The opposition forces are not organized and did not have a clear view of any change. Thus, the King’s control of power continues. In other words, having popular legitimacy, a weak political opposition, and division in both societies reduces the likelihood of a revolt (Barany, 2012).

Not only did the Jordanian monarchy dismiss the government, but it also dissolved the parliament and amended the constitution and electoral law to achieve free elections. In 2011, King Abdullah II announced his package of political reforms that included selecting the government through the parliament majority and strengthening political parties (Ryan, 2011). The reforms included forming a committee that aimed to review the constitution, forming a union for teachers, forming an Electoral Committee described as independent, and “constitutional court law, bringing those responsible for corruption to justice” (Al-Atoum et al., 2017: 15). Some scholars believe that these reforms succeeded in calming the streets, but there are still demands that need to be fulfilled (Al-Atoum et al., 2017). Even after the amendments were introduced, the authorities of the
Jordanian monarchs’ authorities are still supported by articles in the constitution (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, The National Assembly, 1952). Furthermore, the Jordanian King solidified his position even further in 2014 and 2016 by introducing more amendments: “In the 2014 amendments, the king appoints and dismisses the army chief and the director of the general intelligence department” (Ghabon, 2016). Therefore, the Jordanian monarchy may have succeeded in introducing reforms; however, “the monarchy was trying to satisfy its citizens by liberalizing instead of democratizing. They have turned to controlled political openings cloaked in the language of freedom but intended to perpetuate the Status quo” (Cramer, 2012).

The Jordanian King made compromises with all sides to keep them from threatening the regime. The East Bank tribes were supporting the regime and were against any reform that may affect their advantages. Consequently:

They have produced a militant and influential ultranationalist movement which is devoted to the eradication of Palestinian influence and of real and perceived Palestinian economic advantage … The conservative tribal populations see the GCC model as appropriate for Jordan and oppose all efforts to bring the Arab Spring to Jordan. (Helfont and Helfont, 2012: 85–86)

There are external elements that supported Jordan’s stability and decreased the severity of threats. Rousselet (2014) focuses on Saudi Arabia under a GCC initiative in partnership with Jordan and Morocco. Regarding Jordan, she believes it is necessary and acceptable given its geo-strategic destination. In fact, the Arab Spring revolts are considered an opportunity by the GCC and especially by Saudi Arabia to influence the region. Furthermore, the GCC saw the Arab Spring uprisings as a forthcoming threat, so they implemented repressive methods and offered economic incentives depending on societal pressure (Kamrava, 2012). They aimed to form alliances with other Sunni monarchies; Jordan and Morocco are the only monarchies that are not part of the GCC, so Saudi Arabia launched an initiative to join the organization as an alternative to the Arab League (Kamrava, 2012).

Another study by Yom and Gause (2012) offers an explanation of Arab monarchies’ stability besides cultural legitimacy and an institutional approach. They assume that Arab monarchies in general are built on cross-cutting coalitions, hydrocarbon rents, and foreign patrons. Yom and Gause (2012) believe that Jordan and Morocco rest on their relations with other states. The GCC countries are considered one of the most important allies as they offered Jordan and Morocco up to “5 Billion Dollars and allowed these regimes to behave as if they had oil wealth” (Yom and Gause, 2012: 83).

During the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia aimed to unite with other monarchies who share “like-minded regimes” and the United States feared instability in the region (Ryan, 2018). "It is the ultimate win-win for Jordan: a beefed-up Peninsula Shield would provide a large number of well-paying jobs for able-bodied Jordanians with almost all of the salaries paid by the Gulf States" (Helfont and Helfont, 2012: 91).

The United States has important interests in Jordan historically, and therefore it took steps to reduce the possibility of a major threat to Jordan’s stability in the near future: “The most contributing factor to instability in Jordan is mostly economically, especially if the security situation in the region worsens” (Satloff and Schenker, 2013: 1).

Jordan received international aid and support as a response to the influx of Palestinian, Iraqi, and Syrian refugees. In 2016, Jordan announced the terms of the Jordan Compact. Jordan is required to provide jobs for Syrian refugees as they have not been allowed to work in the Kingdom for five
years. In return, “the international community provides Jordan with 2.1 billion dollars from 2016–2018” (Luck, 2016).

International community responses to the amendments vary. Western allies, for instance, did not pressure the Jordanian monarchy to introduce domestic reforms (Ryan, 2014). The United States and the European Union encouraged internal reforms:

To secure continued and even deepening support for the Hashemite regime … USA and EU were satisfied with small procedural reforms rather than democratization while local allies such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the other GCC monarchies might exercise a reactionary influence on Jordan’s reform program. (Ryan, 2014:152)

The severity of the COVID-19 threat did not only affect Jordan, but is considered a global threat, causing a recession and a decrease in aid donors. “Jordan is also facing a potential loss of foreign aid as other countries tighten their own budget” (Singh, 2020). Therefore, external assistance decreased (Badarin, 2020). Indeed, the likelihood that COVID-19 affects Jordan’s stability is high because of the pre-economic conditions in Jordan and the economic conditions regionally and internationally. The timing and magnitude of the threat reflect the situation’s immensity.

Regional and international changes in positions aggravate the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although Jordan still suffers from “unresolved questions of political reforms, participation, and socio-economic pressures” (Emile, 2020), COVID-19 presented changes in the Jordanian external environment. These changes affect Jordan’s foreign and security policies.

On one hand, Israel succeeded in forming a coalition government and its main aim is “the annexation of 30 percent of the West Bank, including the whole Jordan Valley” (OHCHR, 2020, para. 2)). They decided that the start date would be July 2020. In fact, the West Bank and its annexation are an existential threat to the security of Jordan:

For Jordan Israeli annexation of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, as well as the strategically important Jordan Valley, constitutes an existential threat to the kingdom. Some Jordanian jurists and officials say it also violates the Jordan-Israel peace treaty. From a Palestinian and Jordanian perspective, Trump’s plan will lead to the creation of a non-viable, non-contiguous entity that lacks sovereignty and is completely dependent on Israel for its survival. (Al Sharif, 2020, para. 6)

As a result, King Abdullah II in a speech refers to the agreement as:

that annexation would trigger a “massive conflict” with Jordan and that he is “considering all options” in response (Der Spiegel, 15 May 2020). This warning indicates how critical this issue is and the difficult decisions that Jordan would have to take once Israel resumes the formal annexation plan, which will have longer-term impacts on Jordan’s foreign policy. (King Abdullah of Jordan warns of “massive conflict” if Israel proceeds with annexation, 2020, para. 1)

Another main change that has taken place is the agreement signed between Israel and the Emirate. Although Israel did not fulfil the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative (API), it did not withdraw from the land it occupied in 1967. An agreement with an Arab country was officially signed. “Israel agreed to temporarily suspend ‘declaring’ sovereignty over parts of the West Bank. It is worth stressing that only the declarative element was postponed rather than the actual annexation” (Badarin, 2021: 7).
On the other hand, Jordan’s main allies (the United States, the European Union, and the Gulf countries) supported the agreement. The United States supported its main ally in the region: “The Trump administration, an ally to both nations, has worked to bring the two sides together to achieve normalization, which would entail the establishment of political and economic ties for the first time in both countries’ histories” (Salama et al., 2020).

From the Emirati government perspective, “the accord immediately stops Israeli plans to annex parts of the West Bank and provides an opportunity for Israel and the Palestinians to renew negotiations to end their conflict” (Cook, 2020, para. 2).

The European Union faced structural limitations during the pandemic and could not act decisively. The Gulf allies, including the Emirate, concluded a critical deal with Israel regardless of API conditions (Badarin, 2020). As a result, Jordan’s security and foreign policy are critically affected due to regional and international changes.

Jordan’s state approach

Jordan quickly reacted to the imminent threat. The monarchy implemented economic measures. However, “the structure of the Jordanian economy – a large informal economy with high inequality – meant that these economic measures had limited effects” (Jensehaugen, 2020). Different measurements were applied to control the imminent threat. The measurements include:

- Public health infection prevention and control measures, called for social distancing, seized all forms of inbound and outbound movement and international travel, and enacted the Defense Law that transferred the authority to the Minister of Defense to work and formulate orders according to the situation. (Alqutob et al., 2020)

Externally, international financial institutions provided financial aid to Jordan against the unexpected pandemic. However, in Jordan, “the percentage of foreign aid compared to the GDP has decreased from 40 percent to around 7 percent … such reliance on aid is problematic in the long run, especially during the likely inevitable global economic downturn” (Singh, 2020).

Under the Trump administration, the USA was not supportive of Jordan’s stability in the pre-COVID-19 period given their historical ties with each other. “Jordan’s interests were sidelined from USA efforts” (Borck, 2021) during Trump’s administration. Specifically, the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, in addition to normalization relations with the Gulf States, led Jordan to question its position within US foreign policy and its traditional central role as an intermediary state (Borck, 2021). Even after the election of Biden, the US foreign policy towards Jordan did not change.

Biden has no plans to reverse U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the capital, and his administration has even offered praise for the Trump-brokered accords — a rare instance of the Democratic administration speaking positively of the former administration’s policy-making. (NBC News, 2021)

Implementation of authoritarian decisions

Indeed, the Jordanian monarchy applied more authoritarian policies. Firstly, the King announced a state of emergency. “The state of emergency was exploited to consolidate power in the office of the appointed prime minister and to weaken dissent and opposition. From this perspective, Jordan’s
approach appears as further innovation in the counter-revolt and counter-reform in the region” (Badarin, 2020: 8). Secondly, civil society did not participate in the crisis. In fact, “The reactions of the Jordanian government unfolded as a process of power consolidation in the office of the appointed prime minister while weakening the democratic institutions, organized socio-political dissent and civil society. (Badarin, 2020, para. 1). Thirdly, freedom of expression and movement was limited (Cook, 2020).

I.

One of the major decisions the Jordanian monarchy implemented is the de-legitimization of the Muslim Brotherhood. “In 2020, Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood was dissolved based on a decision of the Court of Cassation” (Al-Sharafat, 2021). There are different interpretations of this decision. The Muslim Brotherhood described it as “Undermining the path of reform, democracy, freedom and political life” (Jordan’s Brotherhood excluded from parliamentary committees, 2020, para. 8). Another interpretation of the decision claims that it is a reflection of the monarchy’s will to end a long “no peace, no war” relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood.

In conclusion

The uprisings that Jordan witnessed were limited in severity and their likelihood to challenge Jordan’s stability given its internal inherited elements sustained their stability. The reforms King Abdullah II implemented succeeded in calming the streets and gained the approval of the external powers. Moreover, the external support assisted in preserving the status quo.

In securing its stability during the Arab Spring, Jordan had to balance between keeping the status quo and stability. Consequently, in the absence of internal pressure for change and in the presence of internal and external support, Jordan state practice changed into a balanced approach of both authoritarian and revolution to sustain stability. In other words, “As noted in chapter 1, Jordan has remained a kind of middle case that is neither fully authoritarian nor fully democratic; the kingdom might therefore be best described as a hybrid regime or liberalizing autocracy, in which the regime has allowed moderate levels of political reform, with the aim of preserving rather than transforming the system” (Ryan, 2018: 158).

Jordan sustains its stability through a mix of internal and external elements. These elements interplay together, leading to its stability during the Arab Spring. Consequently, it cannot be deduced that it was only the internal elements that led to the stability of both monarchies, since both internal and external elements played a critical role in sustaining Jordan’s stability.

The determinants of Arab monarchy stability in Jordan during the Arab Spring can be classified into five categories: being economically supported by external states and organizations, being a historically supportive society to the monarch, having an unchallenged monarch, having a well-controlled political system, and being capable of adapting to the international environment.

Jordan is economically supported by external states and organizations. It suffers from economic problems that include having a small economy and a shortage of resources, and this has led it to depend on aid from regional or international organizations. Then, its economic burdens increased as a result of the Syrian revolution and its consequences; namely, the influx of Syrian refugees into Jordan.

Jordan is a tribal society which is historically supportive of the monarchy. In all its historical incidents, Jordanian society supported the monarchy and the monarch’s decisions. Jordan has a divided society but the trans-Jordanians always support the monarch. This led to the formation
of the elite who are in accordance with the King. Their main demands concentrate on improving the economy.

Having an unchallenged monarch led to the stability of Jordan during the Arab Spring. King Abdullah II gained historical and religious legitimacy that supported the monarchy. The constitution consolidates the position and the powers of King Abdullah II even after introducing reforms. During the uprisings in the neighboring countries, King Abdullah II rapidly responded and did not oppose change, although these changes were described as limited.

As a consequence, Jordan’s political system became well-controlled under the auspices of the monarch. Having strong security, weak opposition, introducing modern initiatives as well as not opposing change sustained King Abdullah II’s position.

Lastly, Jordan’s ability to adapt to the changes in its environment led to its stability during the Arab Spring. King Abdullah II sought to adapt through: seeking international economic assistance, introducing internal reforms, highlighting the weakness of the opposition especially the Muslim Brotherhood, and exhibiting the negative consequences of the Syrian revolution.

However, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Jordan faced a more imminent economic and health threat coupled with a change in the positions of its external allies. Consequently, the monarchy applied a more authoritarian approach to preserve its stability. The monarchy sought to securitize the COVID-19 pandemic to limit any further request for reforms and prevent internal as well as external threats. Instead of seizing this rare moment of public and international enthusiasm for resurrecting more participation, it opted for a more centralized strategy. It applied a long-term state of emergency to stifle political opposition. In other words, COVID-19 re-emphasized the region’s authoritarian regime.

Table 1 shows the determinants of Jordan’s stability during the Arab Spring. These can be divided into two categories; namely, internal and external determinants. (see Table 2). Table 3

| Society (social structure) | Monarch | Adaptable Jordanian system | International system (regional and international) |
|---------------------------|---------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Historically supportive society to the monarchy | Historical roots (religious and legitimacy) | Historical, religious, and political roots and legitimacy | The Jordanian system headed by King Abdullah II promptly responded to economic shortages through economic assistance from regional and international states and institutions |
| Divided society | Backed by a constitution and strong security apparatus | Supported the monarch through the constitution, the tribes and weak opposition | |
| Formation of elite that supports the monarch | Existence of weak opposition | Reflected threats caused by neighboring countries | |
| Limited economic demands and not to oust the monarch | Introduce modern initiatives | Obtained regional and international support | |
| | Not against change but still limited changes | | |
| | Reacted promptly to protestors’ demands | | |

Table 1. The determinants of Jordan’s stability during the Arab Spring.
shows the determinants of Jordan’s stability during the COVID-19 pandemic. These can be divided into two categories (see Table 4).

Therefore, the findings do not support the hypothesis. In both cases, Jordan faced critical internal and external threats. During the Arab Spring, international assistance supported Jordan. However, during COVID-19, a global pandemic and changing international positions, Jordan did not receive international assistance. Consequently, the Jordanian monarchy had to control the political system through authoritarian policies. Therefore, in a changing environment with shifting international

Table 2. Accordingly, the determinants for Jordan stability during 2011–2019 can be divided into two categories.

| Internally | Externally |
|------------|------------|
| Economically supported by regional and international powers (states and institutions) | Adapting to the international environment |
| Historically supportive society | |
| Unique characteristics of the monarch | |
| Well-controlled political system through security apparatus | |

Table 3. The determinants of Jordan’s stability during the COVID-19 pandemic.

| Society (social structure) | Monarch | Adaptable Jordanian system | Implementation of authoritarian decisions |
|---------------------------|---------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Historically supportive society to the monarchy | Historical roots (religious and legitimacy) | Historical, religious, and political roots and legitimacy | Due to changing regional and international positions |
| Divided society | Backed by a constitution and strong security apparatus | Supported the monarch through the constitution, the tribes and weak opposition | Due to a decrease in international economic aid |
| Formation of elite that support the monarch | Existence of weak opposition | Reflected threats caused by neighboring countries | |
| Limited economic demands and not to oust the monarch | Introduce modern initiatives | Obtained regional and international support | |
| | Not against change but still limited changes | | |
| | Reacted promptly to protestors’ demands | | |

Table 4. Accordingly, the internal determinants for Jordan stability during 2011–2019 can be divided into three categories.

Internally

Historically supportive society
Unique characteristics of the monarch
Well-controlled political system through authoritarian policies
positions, the more the threat is imminent to Jordan’s stability, the more Jordan’s internal inherited elements sustain its stability.

**Declaration of conflicting interests**
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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