Extremist radicalisation towards non-state political violence in Jordan

Emilie Combaz
04.09.2015

Question

Identify literature on extremist radicalisation towards non-state political violence in Jordan. Present key drivers that have caused individuals to move towards using non-state political violence in the country. Where possible, note any trends.

Contents

1. Overview

Jordan observers commonly note that the Jordanian regime has faced few radical contestations, whereas uprisings have taken place in most of the region since 2011. In fact, much of the literature seeks to explain the seeming paradox of regime continuity and limited non-state political violence in the country. Jordan is widely identified as an authoritarian monarchy staunchly allied to Western governments, who have supported its reign since the early 20th century. Its national and international context is rife with structural economic, political and social problems that could be expected to feed popular protest, if not violent action. There is indeed a history of involvement in non-state political violence by some citizens, refugees and residents, with the most recent high-profile case being the 2005 bombings by al-Qaeda in Amman.[1] Yet, there has also been notably little political violence on the part of non-state actors within Jordan since – distinct from Jordan-based actors who travel abroad to engage in political violence (e.g. to Syria).

---

[1] Many of the terms used around these issues have been contentious, such as "radicalism", "extremism", "terrorism" and "jihadism". For this rapid review, any discussion of political violence in public space was considered, and the authors' approaches to these concepts were simply mirrored in the syntheses.

At the same time, commentary warning about risks of (mostly religiously identified) radicalisation towards non-state violence in Jordan abounds. How much rigorous knowledge on this is available? What does it show about key drivers and trends in radicalisation towards non-state political violence?

This rapid review of academic and grey literature published in the past 10 years established that there is a **dearth of rigorous empirical research** on this topic. Within available evidence, there are a number of **knowledge gaps** on issues, social structures (such as gender), and geographic areas (see section 2). To reflect this state of knowledge and to be precise about the sources of specific findings, this report presents references in the form of an annotated bibliography. General themes are as follows:

- There has been **little non-state political violence in Jordan since the 2005 Amman bombings**. Individuals and groups that have turned to such violence have remained in small numbers (there are an estimated 1,000 to 2,000 jihadist Salafis in the country).

- Even **ideological support for such violence is not enough** to make individuals actually use violence, as the difference between quietist and jihadist Salafis shows. Some Jordanian and foreign actors have also exaggerated the risk posed by Salafists (Yom & al-Khatib, 2014).

- **Drivers of recruitment** into jihadist Salafist groups remain debated. Individual life experiences and backgrounds shape people's paths into, within, and out of jihadi Salafism. Several authors identify as key drivers, poverty, corruption, and the lack of effective democratic channels to obtain an improvement in living conditions for the poor and working class. Repression and surveillance are mentioned as having opposite effects for different persons and contexts: in some cases, they have reinforced jihadists' commitment to their ideology and groups, whereas in other cases they have led people to retreat from violent action. In addition, mainstream Islamist movements are delegitimised in the eyes of some as too integrated, politically, economically and socially, into the political economy of the status quo and the regime. Leadership and internal debates among Salafists also seem to play a role, as does proselytising and the circulation of ideas. International problems related to Arab and Muslim issues, especially Palestine, matter too.

- **Sociologically**, most jihadist Salafists have been of low economic and educational background. Jihadi Salafist groups have been strong in Zarqa; Salt; Ma'an; Irbid (especially in Palestinian refugee camps); and several sectors in Amman (especially in poorer neighbourhoods in eastern and southern Amman).

- **Understanding the history of jihadist Salafist movement**, and its current legacies in terms of recruitment and legitimacy, is important. The movement rose from the early 1990s, was largely delegitimised by the 2005 bombings, but continues to operate minimally. Continuities include its involvement in violence committed abroad, and the role that repression and surveillance, low membership, and internal disagreements seem to play in limiting violence.

- **Powerful structural factors have prevented radicalisation** towards non-state political violence, some coming from the regime, others from Jordanian society. The most widely named factors are: rent distribution, co-optation, State repression, social divisions (especially between East Bankers and Jordanians of Palestinian origin), and middle-class aspirations. Some of these factors are paradoxical, both preventing a turn towards violence and feeding into conditions that lead individuals to non-state political violence.

Map 1. Jordan
(Source: University of Texas at Austin (2004). Jordan. University of Texas at Austin, Perry-Castañeda Library, Map Collection.
http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/jordan_pol_2004.jpg)

2. State of knowledge

Jordan is an under-researched country in the Levant than most others. Even when extending literature searches back to the past 10 years, rather than since the 2011 start of the Arab uprisings, **only a handful of reference focused on the specific topic** could be found in academic and grey literature. Many references about violence were excluded due to the focus requested by DFID, which was violent extremism. For example, references on occasional violence against state authorities in relation to poor basic services, and violence against Syrian refugees due to tensions around such services, were excluded (see e.g. Mercy Corps, 2014; Saferworld & Conciliation Resources, 2014). So were a few references about popular violence against security forces in response to those forces' presence or repression, among others around football games (see e.g. Abu-Rish, 2010; Achilli, 2013). Much of the literature about non-state violence deals with interpersonal violence at home, schools, universities, and hospitals.

Within relevant literature, **very few references meet minimal standards of rigour**, such as being transparent about their methodology or data sources. As a result, the references selected are written by a very small number of individuals who have conducted rigorous empirical research. Most data is qualitative, though a few references used mixed methods. One strength of the evidence base is that, as a whole, its draws on both primary and secondary data (in Arabic and other languages).

Even within relevant and rigorous literature, there is very little discussion of the politics and sociology of individuals and groups drawn towards violence. Most references focus on macro-level security debates, profile the most prominent figures, or offer speculation about potential for violence based on macro- and meso-level factors. There seem to be nearly no micro-level studies on the trajectories of individual members who are not leaders, so factors that have been identified as important in radicalisation towards violence in other countries are not considered, such as the role of personal networks (friendships, family). A significant part of the literature is also descriptive and narrative rather than analytical, and different authors' assessments contradict each other.

This may partly be because researching non-state political violence in Jordan is difficult. Obstacles include the groups' secrecy, state surveillance, and a lack of publically shared data, as noted by several authors. More broadly, research on Jordan has historically been biased towards 'high politics', which neglects informal politics and social movements, and towards a focus on Amman (Abu-Rish, 2012a & 2012b). Another gap in knowledge is caused by the lack of attention to some structures of inequality: while the literature does discuss, to varying degrees, socio-economic class, cultural identity and age, it largely fails to consider how gender, migration, health status and (dis)ability may interact with radicalisation.

Overall, given the above issues with the knowledge base, findings and causalities should be understood as **indicative rather than conclusive**. Limiting the search to English-language literature also meant that relevant references, in Arabic and other languages, could not be learnt from.

3. Assessing and understanding radicalisation towards violence

Identifying non-state political violence in Jordan

One consistent message from the literature is that there has in fact been **little non-state political violence in Jordan**. The literature also emphasises that several strong structural factors that have prevented a turn towards violence even among groups and individuals that hold radical views (be they

grounded in religious conservatism, nationalism or other worldviews). Whole segments of the population are not radicalising, but are placated by the regime through a combination of rent and repression (e.g. Beck & Hüser, 2015). Others have regularly disengaged from being active politically, such as a number of Palestinians in al-Wihdat refugee camp (Achilli, 2014). Some major actors in Jordan and the West have also tended to inflate the threat of non-state political violence, especially that posed by Salafi fighters (Yom & Al-Khatib, 2014). While there have been instances of non-state political violence in Jordan over the past 10 years, the number of individuals involved has remained small, as several authors point out.

There is also a consensus in the literature about the **importance of thinking in specifics and rigorously** about the question. First, just because an individual holds extremely conservative or radical views (even views that, in principle, justify violence), this does not automatically translate into his/her willingness to actually turn to violence. Studies on radicalisation towards violence thus cannot work speculatively, but rather can only work retroactively from cases where people have effectively used violence, not just defended or threatened it. Second, different forms on violence are identified in the literature: organised violence by groups drawing on extreme religious justifications – which is the focus of this report – is distinct from unplanned violence against State institutions, for example in response to security forces' violence (though motives can overlap). Lastly, non-state violence used abroad by Jordanians, especially in Syria, is outside the remit of this report, while in-country violence is the scope of this report. This report discusses the connections between both as relevant. In that regard, as of the time of writing this report, there has not been strong blowback from Jordanians' armed activities abroad since the 2005 bombings, with no large-scale terrorist attack on Jordanian soil.

Assessing the social strength of jihadist Salafists

Inflating the Salafi Threat in Jordan.

Yom, S., & Al-Khatib, W. (2014). Atlantic Council, MENASource blog, 5 December.
http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/inflating-the-salafi-threat-in-jordan

In this blog post for the US-based policy institute Atlantic Council, two Jordan specialists draw on their first-hand knowledge to criticise alarmist analyses of the size and strength of Salafists in Jordan.

They acknowledge that the **regime has faced significant challenges**: demonstrations in 2011 and 2012, including from tribal communities' long portraits as loyal supporters of the state; supporting 1 million Syrian refugees; struggling with budget shortfalls, which has led to enormous foreign debt and dependency on Western and Gulf aid. They also acknowledge that the 20,000-strong movement stands for a brand of more conservative Islamism than that of the larger Muslim Brotherhood. They note that some Salafists do back ISIL and support toppling the Hashemite regime and replacing it with an "Islamic State" (over 2,000 Jordanians have left to fight in Syria).

However, **it does not follow that credible threats against the regime exist** in Jordan. Salafists in the country "have far less revolutionary potential than imagined": Islamists are one of several political trends in Jordanian politics; among Islamists, Salafists are one "small (if outspoken) branch"; and among Salafists, active jihadists who want to "Islamize" society through violent means "are a tiny minority, and virtually all are under careful watch by security forces". While media have hyped up images of "angry bearded men in poor tribal towns like Ma'an", this does not make an Islamic revolution. If Salafism were as widespread as presented, "then surely thousands more Jordanians would be flooding the battlefront".

While most Jordanians are suspicious of Israel and Western states, they do not embrace an extreme Islamist militant network. In addition, the Jordanian State effectively regulates religion and opposition, by

licensing organisations, employing its own Islamic scholars, monitoring mosques and all Salafist activity, and using arrests for repression.

In fact, the state has recently arrested 150 Salafists under charges of inciting violence. While some of them were members of ISIL, many others were guilty by association but will face state security courts. More broadly, the state has cracked down on the Muslim brotherhood, despite this organisation's "longstanding support for Hashemite legitimacy". Yom and Al-Khatib conclude with a warning against "the familiar trap of prioritizing security over democracy": the regime has used the anti-Islamist climate at large to delay political reforms and to drastically restrict freedoms under the guise of national security.

Understanding the sociology, geography and history of jihadist Salafists

The "Islamic Solution" in Jordan: Islamists, the State, and the Ventures of Democracy and Security.

Abu-Rumman, M., & Abu Hanieh, H. (2013). Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Jordan & Iraq Offices.
http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/10360.pdf

This detailed report maps the different strands of Islamism in Jordan, and their ideology, key historical figures and events, relationship with the State, and implications for democracy and security. It draws on both authors' expertise on Islamist movements in Jordan to present qualitative findings from primary and secondary sources. The report was published by a German policy institute linked to the social-democrat party in Germany (SPD).

One overarching point the authors make is that it is essential to **differentiate between various Islamist movements** in Jordan. For the purpose of this helpdesk report, only chapters which address radicalisation towards violence among jihadist Salafists are drawn from (chapters 6 and 7, pp. 325-419, and 420-451 respectively, and final appendix). Within those extensive chapters, only elements that focus on individuals' use of violence within Jordan are highlighted.

Sociological background of the movement

The jihadist Salafist movement has **no wide social following** nor legitimacy in Jordan. Instead, it has been "active and effective only at the margins of society", where it has targeted and influenced "angry, discontented young men that ache for a fundamental change in their reality" (p. 393). Abu-Rumman and Abu Hanieh note that it is difficult to estimate the size of the jihadist Salafist movement in the country, and suggest it may number between 1,000 and 2,000.

The greatest concentration and expansion of the movement takes place in **five major areas**: Zarqa; Salt; Ma'an; Irbid (especially in Palestinian refugee camps); and several sectors in Amman (especially in poorer neighbourhoods in eastern and southern Amman). The current presence of the movement in other areas where it did exist is less clear, for example in al-Mafraq governorates and in the al-Baq'a refugee camp.

Factors that affect the size and strength of the jihadist Salafist movement include differing degrees of commitment by individual sympathisers and members, the intensity of security services' crackdowns and heavy surveillance, and Jihadi Salafists' recruitment activities and advocacy. Due to the secretive and closed nature of the movement, a dominant characteristic in its functioning is individual relationships based on personal trust. In particular, connections – between areas, communities, relatives and friends – are fundamental in building consensus to form an underground violent group. Macro-level factors at play are political (such as the lack of democracy, failures of mainstream Islamism, international affairs), economic (especially poverty and restrictions for the poor and lower-middle class) and cultural (such as the circulation of ideas).

In the report appendix, the authors also examine the **sociological characteristics of 136 jihadist Salafists** who were tried by the Jordanian state security court on charges of terrorism and armed activity between 2003 and 2009. While the sample does not claim to be representative, it does provide insights into a number of jihadist Salafists who became involved in significant activities to prepare or commit political violence. The authors find that:[2]

- the majority of defendants do not hold an undergraduate university degree.

- 17 per cent were under 20 years old, 43 per cent between 20 and 30, 31 per cent between 30 and 40, and 10 per cent 40 or older.

- 44 per cent were Jordanian (34 percent of Palestinian origins, 10 percent East Bankers), 21 per cent Iraqi, 5 per cent Syrian, and 30 per cent of other nationalities.

- 25 per cent resided in Amman, 9 per cent in Al-Salt, 4 per cent in Zarqa, and 32 per cent in Irbid (the remainder of the locations are not mentioned). 29 per cent of defendants are from Palestinian refugee camps, with the majority from al-Baq'aa Camp (outskirts of Amman), Jabal al-Husein Camp (in Amman), and Souf Camp (outside Jarash).

- 64 per cent were married, 36 per cent single.

Socio-political trajectory since the 1990s and present implications

In the **early 1990s**, a number of Jordanian fighters who have participated in the fight against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan returned to Jordan. Upon their return, they joined various organisations, including armed militias and the organisation created jointly by al-Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi (called by outsiders "*Bay'at al-Imam*", i.e. allegiance to the imam). "Bay'at al-Imam" attracted numerous followers and members through preaching (*da'wa*). The organisation offered an intellectual and organisational framework which pre-existing Salafist small groups dispersed across Jordan could join, and radicalised them into legitimising, and sometimes using, violence. Major locations where jihadist Salafis were recruited were al-Salt, Ma'an, al-Mafraq, as well as some poorer neighbourhoods in eastern Amman and various Palestinian refugee camps in the country.

In the **1990s and 2000s**, Jordanian intelligence and security units successfully dismantled most of the jihadist Salafist networks that emerged locally. However, prisons where jihadist Salafi leaders were detained became places for promoting their ideas and gaining new followers, by showing strength towards the State and offering protection to inmates. Imprisonment also reinforced the ideological, organisational and personal bonds among existing members. Prisons and courts became jihadi Salafists' platforms to proclaim their ideology openly. At the same time, this period also saw the first ideological and political disagreements among leading jihadist Salafists on the use of violence, rifts which continue to this day. Some, aligned with al-Maqdisi, advocated building a more massive movement of support for Salafist ideas in Jordan without antagonising the State and only taking armed action in Palestine. Others, aligned with al-Zarqawi (and later with his posthumous legacy), advocated and practiced violence in Jordan and beyond.

In particular, the **2005 Amman bombings were a turning point**. They alienated Salafist factions other than al-Qaeda, because they threatened to damage the tolerance Jordan had shown to their activities. The bombings also turned significant segments of the Jordanian population against al-Qaeda and its various regional branches. In addition, the assassination of al-Zarqawi in 2006 and the decline of Al Qaeda in Iraq was a strong blow to the members and followers of the jihadi Salafist movement in Jordan. To this day, the movement has not found another charismatic and effective leader that could have countrywide

---

[2] The numbers are rounded-off so totals may not match the sample size or 100 per cent. The authors also offer statistics about the types of violent operations carried out, by target type, location etc. (pp. 503-505).

organisational and ideological impact, beyond particular neighbourhoods or cities. This being said, despite crackdowns and setbacks, the number of persons involved in the movement has remained stable and its ideology is still spreading. Abu-Rumman and Abu Hanieh suggest this may be due to the continued political and social economic problems in the country.

In response to the **Arab uprisings**, jihadist Salafists have put slightly more emphasis on politics within their overall religious discourse. Their demonstrations in March and April 2011 were eventually met with State repression, as well as used by the regime to create public fear of extremism and justify its crackdowns. Around this time, new leaders rose from the ranks of the jihadi Salafist movement. They are better educated, typically come from the *da'wa* (preaching) branch associated with al-Maqdisi's approach, and seem to want to move the movement away from armed action (at least on Jordanian soil) and towards some greater integration into local communities' schools and mosques.

Similar readings (the following reports cover similar points as specific chapters in the reference above):

Abu-Rumman, M., & Abu Hanieh, H. (2009). The Jihadi Salafist movement in Jordan after Zarquawi: identity, leadership, crisis and obscured vision. Amman : Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Amman Office. http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/06601.pdf

Abu-Rumman, M., & Abu Hanieh, H. (2010). Jordanian salafism : a strategy for the "islamization of society" and an ambiguous relationship with the state. Amman : Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Amman Office. http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/07758-book2.pdf

I Am a Salafi: a study of the actual and imagined identities of Salafis.
Abu-Rumman, M. (2014). Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/10938.pdf

This in-depth qualitative study is the only piece of micro-level research into individuals' trajectories that this rapid review identified. Abu-Rumman conducted numerous interviews with Salafists in Jordan, most of whom were members at grassroots level. This included jihadi Salafists (pp. 123-156). He offers a narrative-based analysis of this material to shed light on Salafists' background, paths, and motives. He lays out their diversity of motivations, social, economic and cultural contexts, and values, and ideas.

In short, the author finds that, beyond doctrinal rigidity shared by all jihadi Salafists he interviewed, variations in social, cultural, and psychological conditions, and different experiences in the movement, produced different tendencies among jihadi Salafists, from seeking moderation to seeking more extremism and isolation from the world (pp. 154-155):

- A large segment of the jihadi movement came from a Salafist background. They are interested in society, politics and modern life. Personal experience plays a major role in their adoption of jihadist ideology and in the transfer of opinions within the same jihadist circle.

- Some Jihadi Salafis "came from a non-Islamic secular ideological and political background; they appear to be more open and less rigid in their relationship to their social environment [...]".

- Another group has no Islamic or ideological background. Some "gravitated towards jihadism from a background that contradicted the ethical and religious commitments of jihadism. These are more extreme and more closed", and are zealously committed to jihadism.

Jihadist ideology "has flourished in lower-middle class and underprivileged neighborhoods and Palestinian refugee camps" (p. 155). "[F]rustration, political exclusion, autocracy, unemployment, poverty, social deprivation, and limited personal freedoms and public liberties fuel this movement" (*ibidem*). Exclusion based on tribal and kinship ties, and public corruption, have aggravated this. In

addition, the influence of jihadism has been amplified by a crisis of legitimacy in Arab politics and by Arab political establishments' inability to address internal and external challenges, particularly the Palestinian question. The absence of enlightened discourse has also facilitated the spread of the movement.

Salafi Jihadis in Jordan and the Effects of the Conflict in Syria.

Batal al-Shishani, M. (2015). In N. A. The rise of religious radicalism in the Arab world : significance, implications and counter-strategies. Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Jordan & Iraq Offices. 2015, pp. 60-66. http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/11463.pdf

Many of the leaders of the international Salafi jihadist movement were Jordanian, from Abdullah Azzam in the beginnings, to theorists for al-Qaeda and Syria's Jabhat al-Nusra (Abu Musad al-Zarqawi and Sami al-Aridi respectively), to the influential ideological production of Abu Qatada al-Filistini and Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi. What has led to the rise of a Salafi jihadist movement in Jordan, and what has been its relationship with the State? This qualitative synthesis summarises the key features of the movement and its interaction with the State since the 1990s. It is based on the author's on-the-ground reporting, and primary and secondary research, and is published by a German policy institute linked to the social-democrat party in Germany (SPD).

Sociological background of the movement

Most Salafi jihadists, including sheikhs, come from **poor backgrounds**, with low economic and educational status. They work in informal sectors, such as handicraft and unskilled labour, due to a lack of social support and to their tense relationship with the state. The vast majority has completed education up to the end of general secondary school (*tawjihi* degree). The Salafi jihadist movement has formed distinct communities within Jordanian society, through education and mixed marriage for example.

To find out more about the sociology of this movement, Batal al-Shishani examined the **geographic and social background of around 75 jihadists** who have been sentenced in Jordanian courts since the 1990s. His preliminary analysis found that the majority of cases are Jordanians of Palestinian descent. However, a large number of Salafi jihadists, including leaders, have East Bank roots. This has had two implications for the Jordanian regime: Salafi jihadists constituted a security threat from a population segment with links to the regime, yet at the same time allowed for mediation between the movement and the state to alleviate the conflict.

The movement has its historical roots in cities such as Zarqa, Salt and Ma'an. Zarqa has remained its primary stronghold, and Salt a powerful refuge for it. At the same time, from 2003, attention shifted to Irbid in the North as an entry point into Syria, first in relation the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, and since 2011 in relation to the Syrian conflicts. In most of the 75 cases the author examined, jihadists resided in eastern Amman, Zarqa or the governorates. Lastly, in recent years, Salafi jihadists have gained newfound influence in Palestinian camps, such as Baqa'a Camp and Irbid Camp. This seems to have resulted from the declining influence of Palestinian organisations there.

Socio-political trajectory since the 1990s and present implications

A historical perspective matters because a number of influential leaders keep being active or have left an ideological and organisational legacy that still has weight in the current situation.

The Jordanian state has been in ambiguous conflict with the Salafi jihadist movement. Informal channels of communication between the movement and the Jordanian state, including security forces, have generally mitigated the intensity of the conflict between the two, due to "the social nature of the Jordanian state" (p. 60), the presence of jihadists in areas where they have had a historical presence (e.g. Salt, Ma'an), and tribal structures.

In the 1990s, the rise of the Salafi jihadist movement was shaped by:

- **The erosion of the Jordanian middle-class**, connected to market liberalisation, privatisations, modernisation policies, and a shrinking of the role of the state. Economic pressure shook Jordanians' confidence in the states safety nets that had traditionally been provided by their rentier states.

- **Major international events**, namely the second Gulf War (US military action in the region incented some people), fighters' victory over the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and the decline of nationalist and leftist ideologies. Jihadist ideology offered an attractive alternative for some Jordanian youth. Among people fleeing the Gulf War in Jordan, some were Salafi.

- **The strength of Salafi jihadists' political rhetoric**, which was new and striking at the time for its criticism of the regime and accusations of apostasy against judges in courts. Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi, who returned to Jordan from the Gulf in the 1990s, challenged Jordanian authorities ideologically and politically.

- **The changing role of Jordanian security and intelligence agencies**, and of their relationship to the US. After the end of the Cold War, the US relied increasingly on Jordanian intelligence agencies in the face of armed Islamist groups active after the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. At the same time, Jordanian agencies turned their attention away from Palestinian organisations which had been in decline, towards Islamist organisations.

Between 1990 and 2001, the Salafi jihadist movement established itself and attempted to theorise and spread its ideology. A number of the movement members migrated to Afghanistan and returned as trainers or proselytisers. The movement had limited and tense relationships to the state, with a number of cases brought before courts, such as the Bay'at al-Imam case. Following the September 11 attacks in the US, Jordanian security services increased their action against the group, in close coordination with the US and other states.

From 2003, with the US-led invasion of Iraq and the rising influence of al-Zarqawi's organisation there, the movement and the state went into open confrontation, manifest in the Amman hotel bombings in 2005 on the one hand and increased judicial prosecution on the other. The phase between 2003 and 2011 saw a demographic and geopolitical shift: the city of Irbid (northern Jordan) gained importance, because it became a significant entry points for jihadists going through Syria into Iraq to fight US-led forces.

With the Arab uprisings in 2011, movement ideologues reviewed the situation and attempted to win hearts and minds by demonstrating in major Jordanian cities for the first time. However, authorities did not seize on this new trend and approached this as a security problem. This resulted in confrontations in the city of Zarqa (east of Amman) in April 2011, followed by a campaign of arrests.

At the same time, new fronts for armed fighting in Syria attracted jihadists from Jordan. As of 2015, 700 to 1,000 Jordanian youth are estimated to have fought in Syria. Recruitment was facilitated both by geographic proximity and the issuing of several fatwa calling for a jihad in Syria, the most important one being by Jordanian Abu Mohammad al-Tahawi in 2011. Jordanians wanted by the security forces – the majority of the movement supporters – travelled to Syria illegally via Deraa, and mostly joined Jabhat al-Nusra there. Those who were not wanted – i.e. the younger generation – travelled via Turkey and usually joined the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The link to ISIL may result from a combination of travel routes, ideology, and attraction towards ISIL's resources.

ISIL's expansion in Iraq and Syria, and its wealth of resources, pose a challenge to the traditional Salafi jihadists in Jordan, which may lead to a conflict between both. The ideological leadership of the Jordanian Salafi jihadist movement has rejected some of ISIL's practices. But ISIL has a presence through "Neo-Zarqawists" who consider they are following Zarqawi's legacy in ISIL.

Political commitment under an authoritarian regime: Professional associations and the Islamist movement as alternative arenas in Jordan.

Larzillière, P. (2012). International Journal of Conflict and Violence, 6(1), 11–25.
http://ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/view/186/pdf_47

In Jordan, professional associations and non-violent Islamist social movements have gained oppositional capacity. These political arenas are where alternative ideologies are produced. Mainstream Islamists are thus in a position of "hegemonic ideological producer with no hegemonic power and position". However, the kind of political commitment they can lead is framed and limited by repression, but also by their own economic and social roles, and their integration in the regime. They are in an ambivalent position, between challenge and integration.

When alternative arenas of contention become so integrated in the regime that they lose their contentious role, radicalisation processes appear. In particular, some youth perceive the Muslim Brotherhood as being too integrated with the regime, which makes more radical groups such as jihadist Salafists attractive to them. Similarly, the fact that the State represses the Brotherhood regardless of its cooperation with the regime has delegitimized it further.

The Reemergence of the Jihadist Salafis in Jordan.

Davis, J. (2011). Jadaliyya, 28 July. http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2256/the-reemergence-of-the-jihadist-salafis-in-jordan

This article, published in a prominent Middle East online journal, describes street action by Jihadist Salafis in Jordan in the first six months of 2011. Groups of a few hundred Jihadist Salafis openly took to the streets with knives and clubs, clashing with security forces. On 15th April 2011, such clashes around one of their largest demonstrations left dozens of policemen and a few other persons wounded.

While quietists are the majority among Salafis, a fraction of Salafis endorse violence as means to enforce their version of this. These jihadists have found increased popularity among Salafi youth, but also among some mainstream Islamist movements such as the Islamic Action Front (IAF, the political party of the Muslim Brotherhood). By mid-2011, the rank and file of the IAF increasingly supported a more conservative platform that would be more confrontational towards the Jordanian regime. While the IAF and Salafi movements function separately, their membership can overlap, and IAF deputies have sometimes supported jihadist figureheads.

The number of jihadist Salafis remains unknown, with Jordanian state intelligence estimating it at around 4,000 and experts at around 1,300. At the time of writing, the jihadist Salafi movement was seeing its support base grow as reforms of the State remained stalled. The barriers to genuine political participation that the regime set up can make the tactics of radical factions that rejects formal politics, such as jihadist Salafis, more appealing.

Further readings:

Abu Hanieh, H. (2008). Women & politics : from the perspective of islamic movements in Jordan. Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/05997.pdf

Boukhars, A. (2006). The Challenge of Terrorism and Religious Extremism in Jordan. Strategic Insights, V(4), April.
http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/32258/ichaptersection_singledocument/7135924e-5456-46f8-9dec-324d569b6516/en/boukharsApr06.pdf

Cavatorta, F., & Elananza, A. (2008). Political opposition in civil society: An analysis of the interactions of secular and religious associations in Algeria and Jordan. Government and Opposition, 43(4), 561–578.
http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2008.00263.x

International Crisis Group (2005). Jordan's 9/11: Dealing with Jihadi Islamism (Middle East Report No. 47). ICG, 23 November.
http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Jordan/Jordans%209-11%20Dealing%20With%20Jihadi%20Islamism.pdf

Wagemakers, J. (2014). A terrorist organization that never was: The Jordanian "bay'at al-Imam" group. *Middle East Journal*, 68(1), 59–75. http://doi.org/10.3751/68.1.13

4. Factors preventing radicalisation towards violence

To reflect the emphasis found in the literature available on Jordan, this final section briefly summarises references that explain which factors have largely prevented a turn to non-state political violence in Jordan, including among individuals and groups whose very conservative views are close to those committed to the use of violence. But most authors emphasise how effective factors such as the Jordanian regime's use of patronage, and many Jordanians' fear of political instability in a context of regional violence, have been staving off radical contestation among many segments of the population. Some authors do warn that the regime may not have much margin for manoeuvre left in its co-optation and clientelism. But for now, most authors suggest that understanding the political economy of the regime can help explain the limited growth of radicalisation towards non-state political violence in relation to both repression and acceptance among the population.

Rent, co-optation, social aspirations and repression

Jordan and the "Arab Spring": No Challenge, No Change?
Beck, M., & Hüser, S. (2015). Middle East Critique, 24(1), 83–97.
http://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2014.996996

Many of the factors that led to the 2011 Arab uprisings continue to be present in Jordan, such as widespread frustration with corruption, high unemployment among well-educated youth, growing inequality, and access to social media. Nevertheless, Jordan has experienced rather limited demonstrations and modest demands, which the regime could meet with clientelism and cosmetic reforms. Demonstrations in late 2012 were more radical, but fell short of being revolutionary. The structural particularities in Jordan have to do with the flow of rent revenues, which are significantly higher than those of Egypt and Tunisia. This contributes to regime stability by limiting protests in the first place, and enabling the regime to meet their demands. Yet, rent income as such does not fully explain stability. A further key is the institutional framework in which the streams for rent acquisition and distribution are embedded: the regime has successfully set up a self-preserving institutional environment for its rent politics domestically, regionally and internationally. In addition, it has benefited from the interplay of class with people's statuses as East Banker vs. Palestinian Jordanians.

Jordan: Propellers of autocracy: The Arab-Israeli conflict and foreign power interventions.
Kanaan, T., & Massad, J. (2011). In Makdisi, S. A., & Elbadawi, I. Democracy in the Arab World: Explaining the Deficit. IDRC (pp. 86–114).

The stable autocracy in Jordan has been supported by a range of internal and external factors. External factors include foreign power involvement around the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the influence of the oil-rich Gulf countries. Country-specific factors have also enabled the regime to remain in place. The regime has used "incentives and means, largely financed by rentier (non-tax) public revenue, to co-opt the elite and middle class", and relied on Western powers for financial, political and military support (p. 111). In addition, the regime has demobilised and divided the population, by using nationalistic public campaigns, manipulating the Constitution, electoral laws, and mobilising bureaucratic and security controls that restrict freedoms and determine people's livelihoods. The regime has also drawn on the support of tribal, ethnic and religious elites, who see their interests as vitally linked to having an undemocratic, strong central regime. Lastly, social fragmentation (especially the opposition between East Jordanians and Palestinians) has neutralised the educated middle class.

Militarizing welfare: Neo-liberalism and Jordanian policy.
Baylouny, A. M. (2008). Middle East Journal, 62(2), 277–303. http://doi.org/10.3751/62.2.15

Jordan's economic and political reforms since the 1990s have imposed neo-liberal economic policies. This has removed a key source of welfare for the population. It has also left the regime without a secure base of support, marginalising the previous backers — the East Bank population — and replacing them with a strengthened military, formerly only part of the regime's support. The military and security services have been the only sector growing during structural adjustment, while social welfare allocations have generally decreased. The military has been diversifying into sub-contracting and new economic enterprises. "Militarized liberalization" can thus serve as the foundation for semi-authoritarianism (article abstract).

Jordan's Arab Spring: The Middle Class and Anti-Revolution.
Tobin, S. A. (2012). Middle East Policy, 19(1), 96–109. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2012.00526.x

Based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, the author argues that the emergent middle class in Amman has been shaping national politics, especially anti-revolutionary positions during the Arab uprisings. This group has developed a heightened sense of its middle-class status and adopted "aspiring cosmopolitanism" as a significant way to organise its social life. As a result, it has reoriented itself politically, away from failed democratisation and from connection to worse-off Jordanians. Its material and ideological positioning as a class serves to reinforce the *status quo*, especially in a context of deepening domestic divisions and of regional turmoil where economics, insecurity and instability are visibly worse than Jordanian conditions.

Questions about regime's stability

The Myth of the Jordanian Monarchy's Resilience to the Arab Spring. Lack of Genuine Political Reform Undermines Social Base of Monarchy.
Khorma, T. (2014). (SWP Comments 2014/C 33). Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, July.
http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2014C33_kor.pdf

The political reforms announced by the Jordanian regime in 2012 do not reflect the priorities of either political forces or the masses. The socio-political scene is changing, with: "a new sense of national identity, popular outrage over corruption, a widespread loss of faith in the state as a result of poverty,

unemployment, […] the sell-off of productive state-owned companies, and the aggravation of conflicts within the regime" (p. 1). New social movements have been able to remobilise the masses. Demonstrations by public employees and independent trade unions have led to confrontations with the authorities. Therefore, stability in Jordan cannot be guaranteed for long without constitutional reforms and substantial socio-economic reform.

The New Landscape of Jordanian Politics: Social Opposition, Fiscal Crisis, and the Arab Spring.

Yom, S. L. (2015). British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 42(3), 284–300.
http://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2014.932271

The absence of regime change during the Arab uprisings obscured two critical trends transforming political order in Jordan. First, new opposition forces demanded democratic reform: not only youth, but also East Bank tribal communities, long loyal to the regime. Second, "worsening fiscal dysfunction and budgetary pressure have amplified the state's institutional weakness, and precluded the possibility that increased foreign aid could buy off dissent" (abstract). This double bind affects the foundations of stability in Jordan. It also means that the monarchy may soon be forced to initiate credible political reform, to avoid becoming a collapsing regime faced with mass insurrection.

Mainstream and radical opposition forces

Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen.

Schwedler, J. (2006). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
http://ebooks.cambridge.org/ref/id/CBO9780511550829

Does political inclusion produce ideological moderation? Political behaviour alone provides insufficient evidence, because political actors might act as if they are moderate while harbouring radical agendas. This comparative study, based on over three years of field research, examines the Islamic Action Front (IAF) party in Jordan and the Islah party in Yemen. The IAF has become more moderate through participation in pluralist political processes, while the Islah party has not. This is due in part to internal group organisation and decision-making processes. But particularly, a determinant was how the IAF could justify its new pluralist practices on Islamic terms.

Tribal politics in contemporary Jordan: The case of the Hirak movement.

Yom, S. L. (2014). Middle East Journal, 68(2), 229–247. http://doi.org/10.3751/68.2.13

During 2011-2012, East Bank tribal youths mobilised political opposition through the Hirak movement. These protest reflected generational change in their communities, as well as the historical erosion of relations between tribes and State. The groups demanded sweeping democratic reforms. They also used language and methods more radical than the established legal opposition, even questioning and mocking the regime as such. This changing tribal politics holds enormous implications for politics and stability in Jordan, because the strong opposition stemmed from the heart of the tribal countryside that has historically been allied with the monarchy.

Further readings:

Peters, A. M., & Moore, P. W. (2009). Beyond boom and bust: External rents, durable authoritarianism, and institutional adaptation in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Studies in Comparative International Development, 44(3), 256–285. http://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-009-9053-0

Ryan, C. R. (2012). The armed forces and the Arab uprisings: The case of Jordan. Middle East Law and Governance, 4(1), 153–167. http://doi.org/10.1163/187633712X626062

Shafiq, M. N., & Ross, K. (2010). Educational attainment and attitudes towards war in Muslim countries contemplating war: The cases of Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Turkey. Journal of Development Studies, 46(8), 1424–1441. http://doi.org/10.1080/00220380903428431

Simon, S. (2014). How Vulnerable is Jordan? Middle East Institute, 5 August. http://www.mei.edu/content/at/how-vulnerable-jordan

5. Other references cited in this report

Abu-Rish, Z. (2010). Football and Violence in Jordan. Jadaliyya, 31 December. http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/435/football-and-violence-in-jordan

Abu-Rish, Z. (2012a). On the Nature of the Hashemite Regime and Jordanian Politics: An Interview with Tariq Tell (Part 1). Jadaliyya, 22 August. http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/6979/on-the-nature-of-the-hashemite-regime-and-jordania

Abu-Rish, Z. (2012b). On the Nature of the Hashemite Regime and Jordanian Politics: An Interview with Tariq Tell (Part 2). Jadaliyya, 24 August. http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/7007/jordans-current-political-opposition-movements-and

Achilli, L. (2013). Fun, Football, and Palestinian Nationalism. Jadaliyya, 5 February. http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/9983/fun-football-and-palestinian-nationalism

Achilli, L. (2014). Disengagement from politics: Nationalism, political identity, and the everyday in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. Critique of Anthropology, 34(2), 234–257. http://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X13519276

Mercy Corps (2014). Tapped Out: Water scarcity and refugee pressures in Jordan. Mercy Corps, March. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MercyCorps_TappedOut_JordanWaterReport_March204.pdf

Saferworld & Conciliation Resources (2014). Jordan: Local Capacities for Peace. Summary of a workshop on analysis and response to conflicts and tensions emerging from the Syrian refugee crisis. Workshop report: Amman, Jordan, June 2014. Saferworld & Conciliation Resources. http://www.c-r.org/downloads/Jordan-%20Local%20Capacities%20for%20Peace.pdf

Key websites

- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung – Jordan: http://www.fes.de/international/nahost/inhalt/publ_jordan.php
- University of Jordan - Center for Strategic Studies: http://www.jcss.org/DefaultEn.aspx

Expert contributors

Murad Batal Al Shishani, BBC & independent
Joost Hiltermann, International Crisis Group
Sarah A. Tobin, Brown University
Joas Wagemakers, Radboud University
Sean L. Yom, Temple University

Two more experts contributed comments for this query but wished to remain anonymous.

Suggested citation

About this report

The GSDRC Research Helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of key literature and of expert thinking in response to specific questions on governance, social development, humanitarian and conflict issues. Its concise reports draw on a selection of the best recent literature available and on input from international experts. Each GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report is peer-reviewed by a member of the GSDRC team. Search over 400 reports at www.gsdrc.org/go/research-helpdesk. Contact: helpdesk@gsdrc.org.