



Potential Paths to Instability in Jordan

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What is NSI Reachback?

The Joint Staff, Deputy Director for Global Operations (DDGO), jointly with other elements in the Joint Staff, Services, and United States Government (USG) Agencies, has established a Reachback capability based on the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) team's global network of scholars and area experts. It provides Combatant Commands with population-based and regional expertise in support of ongoing operations. The Reachback team combines written and interview elicitations with additional research and analyses to provide concise responses to time-sensitive questions. This report responds to one of a series of questions posed by USCENTCOM about the strategic implications of destabilizing population dynamics within the Central Region.¹

Table of Contents

Questions of Focus	3
Potential Paths to Instability in Jordan	3
<i>Bottom Line</i>	3
<i>Introduction.....</i>	4
The Setting: Historic Sources of Turbulence in Jordan	4
How Would We Know Whether Jordan Is On a Path to Regime Crisis or Revolt?	6
<i>Jordan Pathways™ Analysis.....</i>	7
Antecedent Conditions in Jordan Today Favor a <i>Deliberate Change</i> Pathway	7
Catalyzing Events for All Paths but <i>Military Coup</i> Have Occurred Equally Since 2011	10
The Balance of Markers of a Regime Crisis Most Strongly Point Towards.....	12
Military Coup	14
Buffers.....	14
<i>Regional Implications of a Challenge to the Hashemite Regime</i>	16
<i>Wrap-Up.....</i>	19
<i>Recommendations.....</i>	19
<i>Works Cited</i>	20
<i>Appendix A: Four Internal Sub-Paths to Regime Crisis in Jordan</i>	24

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Questions of Focus

[A3] What would be the strongest catalyst leading to a civil war/revolt in Jordan? Will His Majesty King Abdullah (HMKA) and his tribal affiliates be able to contain the level of violence? Who/what would succeed HMKA? How would a civil war/revolt impact the broader region?

[A4] What pressure point would cause Jordan to permanently stop cooperating on security, border and economic issues with Israel?

Potential Paths to Instability in Jordan²

Bottom Line

What would be the strongest catalyst leading to a civil war/revolt in Jordan?

It is highly unlikely that a single catalyst could lead to a civil war or revolt in Jordan. Significant regime crisis in Jordan would more likely require a ‘perfect storm’ of severe popular grievance aimed at the government (including the monarchy), multiple catalysts, and the failure of the regime’s considerable sources of resilience (i.e., buffers).

Will His Majesty King Abdullah (HMKA) and his tribal affiliates be able to contain the level of violence?

Yes. In all likelihood, HMKA and his tribal affiliates would be able to quell a civil uprising, unless significant numbers of the tribal affiliates themselves took part in the violent opposition.

Who/what would succeed HMKA?

The answer to this question depends wholly on whether the pathway to regime change involved primarily institutional change or violence. Thus, those who assume control could range from members of Parliament and government ministers (more likely) to violent extremists ruling over a fractured state (less likely).

How would a civil war/revolt impact the broader region?

Violent non-state actors are likely to be the only “winners,” as a violent uprising in Jordan would present opportunities for resurgence in ungoverned spaces. This in itself would present significant security threats to Israel, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and other actors currently battling these groups. The most stricken would be the Jordanian people and well over one million refugees in Jordan who would quickly become the victims of a massive humanitarian crisis.

² The following subject matter experts kindly contributed to this analysis: **an Anonymous Senior Government Official**, **Ghaith Al-Omari** (Washington Institute), **Ben Fishman** (Washington Institute), and **Dr. Sean Yom** (Temple University).

Introduction

Each of the Hashemite Kings of Jordan—Abdullah, Hussein, and Abdullah II—has been plagued by “perpetual crisis” (Khalil, 2017), namely, frequent public protests and occasional civil and international warfare. Still, unlike many of its geographic neighbors, the spate of regional protests that began with the 2011 Arab Spring in Jordan has continued to simmer but not boil over. Nevertheless, what these protests may suggest about Jordan’s longer-term stability remains an important concern.

There are two main schools of thought regarding the outlook for Jordan’s long-term stability. Many long-time Jordan scholars argue that prolonged social turbulence is to be expected in Jordan. For decades, Jordanians have protested government policies and have overwhelmingly called for changes to political and economic *policies* rather than an overthrow of the system. Protests should be monitored but are unlikely, these scholars believe, to pose a threat to the regime (Yom, 2020; Anonymous, 2020; Al-Omari & Fishman, 2020).

Other scholars, however, note that protests from 2011 to the present have included a wider span of the Jordanian population, which is a significant departure from the pattern of prior protests and, thus, presents a cause for concern. In particular, their concern centers on the participation of members of the monarchy’s traditional support base, who have added their voices to those criticizing the government (see Harel, 2019; Milton-Edwards, 2017).

This report begins by exploring internal conditions that could portend regime crisis in Jordan. We conduct a brief NSI Pathways™ analysis to evaluate these in combination with sources of regime resilience. Next, we consider the regional implications of regime crisis in Jordan, and finally, the conditions under which Jordan might withdraw from security coordination with Israel. To begin, however, a brief discussion of the sources of internal challenges to the Hashemite regime is warranted.

The Setting: Historic Sources of Turbulence in Jordan

There are three interrelated and enduring sources of unrest in Jordan: a small and often weak economy, national identity and demographics, and desire for a voice in how government policies are decided.

Small, structurally weak economy. Jordan has few natural resources; it is mostly desert with less than 3% arable land (Jordan—Arable land, 2016) and is dependent on imported fuel. Consequently, the Jordanian government’s revenue relies on mineral extraction, remittances from overseas workers, and foreign aid (Milton-Edwards, 2017). One of the largest draws on its budget are public sector workers’ salaries; it is estimated that the Jordanian government employs 33-66% of the working population in Jordan (Sharp, 2019). Nonetheless, the unemployment rate in Jordan has remained at 18-19% over the past three years (Jordan unemployment rate, 2019), with the rate among young people peaking at a striking 40% (Safi, 2019; The World Factbook, 2020). In recent years, the working population and middle class have been increasingly squeezed by stagnant wages, which have not kept pace with the rising cost of living (Brown et al., 2014). This has led to serious underemployment among an educated population³ and generated feelings of deprivation, despair, and powerlessness among Jordanian workers unable to secure jobs commensurate with their skills (Brown et al., 2014; Bar’el 2019).

³ Safi (2019) calculates that one in every 65 Jordanians has an engineering degree

Jordan's economic challenges have been further aggravated by years of conflict on its borders, which have interrupted regional trade and hindered international investment. Regional conflict has also led to a mass influx of refugees in Jordan since June 2011. An estimated 1.4 million refugees, or 14% of the Jordanian population, have flooded into the country (Salameh & Hayajneh, 2019). Moreover, a 2015 World Bank report estimated that refugees cost Jordan \$2.5 billion per year, or about 6% of Jordan's GDP (Malkawi, 2016). In addition to the monetary cost, the rapid inflow of people has led to increased poverty rates both among refugees and Jordanian citizens, adding to the already high unemployment rate and applying pressure to Jordan's underfunded, insufficient healthcare and educational systems (Salameh & Hayajneh, 2019). The result of the refugee flows, an over-staffed public sector, and other economic pressures is that around 13% of Jordanians live in persistent poverty, with an additional 27%—nearly one third of Jordanians—living in transient poverty (Roeder, 2017).

National identity. In his interview, conducted in support of this report, Dr. Sean Yom (2020) argues that one of the regime's greatest fears is a situation that would highlight the Palestinian majority and throw Jordanian national identity into question. At first blush, Jordan appears to be a homogenous state; the overwhelming majority (some 97%) are both Arab and Muslim (The World Factbook, 2020).⁴ So, it may be surprising that demographics have been such a critical vulnerability of the Hashemite regime. Yet, Jordan's history is replete with periods of significant tension and even warfare⁵ between the Palestinian majority (West Bankers), and descendants of the original Transjordanians (East Bankers), who are the traditional bulwark of the Hashemite monarchy.⁶ In generalized terms, East Bankers tend to be more conservative and not as worldly as the West Bankers, as East Bankers comprise the majority of public sector workers (military and government bureaucracy). Palestinian and Jordanian-Palestinian communities, on the other hand, tend to be more liberal and educated (Tell, 2015). They also form the powerful core of the Jordan's private sector economy. As the regime's support base (and military muscle), significant effort been applied to maintain the favor of East Bankers, particularly by King Abdullah's father, King Hussein. However, the need to grow Jordan's economy has required King Abdullah to retain the favor of the Palestinian-dominated business elite as well. Maintaining a balance between these groups' interests is a key feature of governance in Jordan.

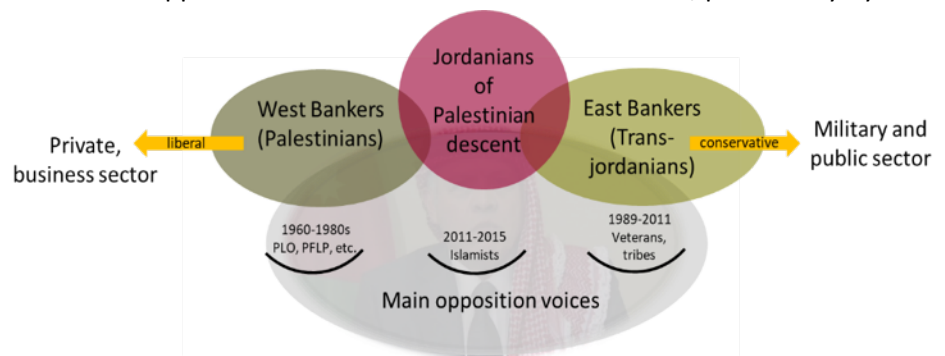


Figure 1. Major segments of the Jordanian population

⁴ Jordan is also home to small minorities of Druze, Armenians, Assyrians, Circassians, and Chechens.

⁵ King Abdullah I was assassinated by a Palestinian subject in 1951, and multiple assassination attempts and a civil war were conducted by Palestinian forces against his grandson, King Hussein.

⁶ In 1945, Jordan was not an independent state, and Jordanian national identity had to be manufactured among the Transjordanian population. This was both aided and frustrated by the influx of refugees from the West Bank, who had no allegiance to the monarchy and tended to look down on its "unrefined" Bedouin supporters. These first refugees were Palestinians who were displaced in 1948-1949 by the fight over the new Jewish state of Israel. Those numbers increased in 1951 when Jordan officially annexed the West Bank of the Jordan River and East Jerusalem, making (West Bank) Palestinians the majority population in Jordan. Subsequent waves of Palestinian refugees fled to Jordan during the 1967 war and from Lebanon during the 1975-1991 civil war. Refugees arrived in Jordan from Kuwait and Iraq during the Iraqi invasion and first Gulf War in 1991 (as well as some 30,000 Jordanian ex-patriots working in the Gulf), from Israel as a result of the second Palestinian intifada and Israeli annexation of large tracts of the West Bank in 2000, and from Iraq during and after the Second Gulf War in 2003.

Calls for political reform. The Hashemite monarchy has encountered occasional violent opposition to its rule since the beginning. Beginning in the 1960s, and most drastically during the lead up to the 1970 civil war, primarily Palestinian protestors and critics called for democratic reform, improved governance, and representation in parliament, as well as the removal or a reduction in the powers of the King. The most persistent voice of late has come from the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood and its political arm the Islamic Action Front (IAF), who has tended to be careful to avoid calling for the deposition of the King outright. The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan instead calls for the transformation of Jordan into a parliamentary democracy with the King as a figurehead, rather than the current absolutist parliamentary monarchy (Milton-Edwards, 2017). However, a wider population of protesters, including youth groups, unions, professional organizations, and former government officials, has also consistently pushed for less drastic political reforms and the ability, in practice, to enjoy constitutionally-granted freedoms (Harel, 2016; Dahan, 2018; Younes, 2018; Bar'el, 2019; Salameh & Hayajneh, 2019).

How Would We Know Whether Jordan Is On a Path to Regime Crisis or Revolt?

Significant regime crisis can have two sources: opposition that is primarily *internal* to the state or forces that are primarily the work of *external* sources (e.g., cross-border warfare, external funding of proxy forces). We posit two types of paths leading to the removal or significant alteration of the regime (non-violent and violent), each with two sub-paths:

- **Deliberate Change**, in which the King and political elite work through institutional channels to devolve significant power to the elected government and/or civil society to the extent that the type of government is changed.
- **Reactionary Change**, in which the King offers limited concessions to ease public frustration only when pressures heighten (i.e., a situation in which the King offers reforms that could, over time, change the nature of governance in Jordan). This is the status quo sub-path.
- **Popular Unrest**, in which civilian non-state group(s) become violent/take up arms against the government in a coordinated manner.
- **Military Coup**, in which members of the military seize control of the government and depose the King.

Interpreting Pathway Models

The elements of the path models are derived from structured case analyses of similar subpaths to regime crises. For this quick analysis, we relied on cases of regime collapse or crisis in North Korea, Pakistan, Somalia, China, Poland, the USSR, and Yugoslavia.

Path models answer the question: *Historically, what events or conditions have served as antecedents, catalysts, markers of, or buffers against regime crisis?* They are thus neither definitive indicators of crisis, nor additive, but show which elements are present currently and which are missing but still might emerge.

We used the NSI Pathways™ model in condensed format to assess the balance of evidence consistent with each sub-path.⁷ The approach uncovers four types of



Figure 2. NSI Pathways™ Analysis elements

information: antecedent conditions that are necessary but not sufficient for a particular sub-path to occur, catalysts that have the power to propel movement on a particular path, path markers that indicate conditions

⁷ The NSI Pathways™ model is designed to assess the position of a state or region along a path to a prospective outcome of interest (e.g., regime collapse). A pathway is founded in a series of structured, in-depth case studies of states facing similar paths to the one of interest. Case studies include both successes and failures relative to the outcome of interest (e.g., whether a collapse happened or if there was concern regarding a collapse, but one did not occur). For this analysis, we relied on case studies of regime collapse or crisis in North Korea, Pakistan, Somalia, China, Poland, the USSR, and Yugoslavia.

and events consistent with the existence of the path, and buffers that impede progress down the path. Gaining an understanding of these elements can shed light on conditions that would either increase or decrease the probability of each pathway's future occurrence. It is important to note that although paths are shown as linear and uni-directional, they are not be conceived as such; not all elements are necessary to achieve an outcome, and paths are not chronological (e.g., markers may emerge before antecedents). The presence (or absence) of a pathway element adds to the body of evidence that is consistent with the occurrence of that path over another. In the following discussion, model elements are indicated by quotation marks, and references to the four pathways are shown in italics. Full sized images of the pathway models can be found in Appendix A.

Jordan Pathways™ Analysis

Antecedent Conditions in Jordan Today Favor a *Deliberate Change* Pathway

Are the antecedent conditions for regime change present in Jordan? As shown in the summary table in Figure 3, “popular grievance aimed at the regime” is an antecedent condition for each of the sub-paths and certainly exists in Jordan. Public anger at ineffective governance was on display during the 2018-2019 protests, particularly with regard to economic and quality of life issues (i.e., taxes, food costs, unemployment), as well as nepotism in Jordan.⁸

Without necessarily leading to change, the *Reactionary Change* sub-path is essentially the government status quo. A key feature particularly of King Abdullah's response to popular protest and unrest has been “granting concessions.” At times, these have been as minor as appointing an inquiry committee, to more major decisions such as removing government ministers and dissolving the government. These have not tended to have any impact, however, on the structure or functioning of the government, nor the absolute power of the monarch for reasons discussed below. There is also evidence of an antecedent condition unique to the *Violent Change* sub-path: “External sources of funding for opposition groups.”

Antecedent conditions associated with *Deliberate Change*—“institutional/constitutional mechanisms for altering the government” and “means of deliberation/contact between the monarchy and political/civil leaders or groups”—are also present. The third, the “King's willingness to devolve authority,” remains unclear. In the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring, King Abdullah published a series of seven papers (Jordan's “Path Towards Democracy”) between 2012 and 2017 intended to “inspire a national dialogue on the reform endeavor and the democratic transformation process that Jordan is undergoing” (Abdullah, 2012-2017). Harel (2016) reports that the prospective reforms discussed in these papers include transition to a parliamentary democracy. Jordan remains a highly centralized system, although the passage of the Decentralization Law and Municipalities Law in 2015 was a first step toward decentralizing reform. It established elected councils in municipalities and governates to help identify local development priorities and need for services (OECD Open Government Review, 2017). On the other hand, governors, extensions of the central government, are still appointed by the King. Furthermore, in 2016, King Abdullah (with help from some in Parliament) pushed through a controversial constitutional amendment that increased, rather than devolved, powers of the King (Younes, 2018). The sincerity

⁸ In March of 2019, intended appointments to positions at the Ministry of Justice—at salaries nearly five times the average in Jordan—did however spark public anger after news of the appointments went viral on social media, forcing King Abdullah to intervene and Prime Minister Al-Razzaz to rescind the offers. The real issue, however, was anger in response to the evident nepotism in the Jordanian civil service, especially in light of tensions during the previous summer over government plans to raise taxes (After public anger, 2019).

of the King's commitment to the reform path laid out in the papers was widely called into question, and for the purposes of this analysis, suggests that the prospect of the reforms raised by the King may have been in line with *Reactionary Change* after all.

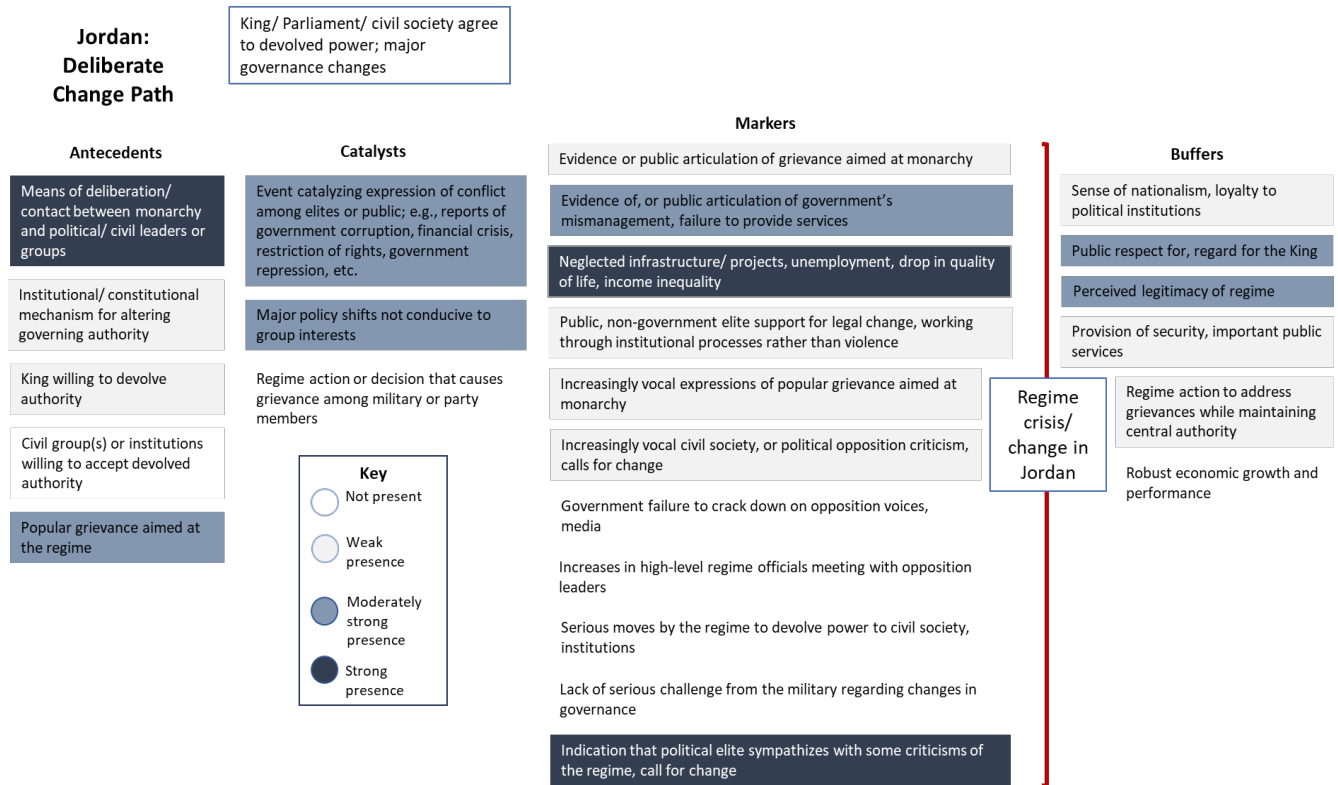


Figure 3. Deliberate Change path for Jordan

		Deliberate Change	Reactionary Change	Popular Unrest	Military Coup			Deliberate Change	Reactionary Change	Popular Unrest	Military Coup
Key											
○ Not present											
○ Weak presence											
● Moderately strong presence											
● Strong presence											
Antecedents											
Means of deliberation/ contact between monarchy and political/ civil leaders or groups		●						●			
King willing to offer concessions to protestors, opposition groups			●					●			
Institutional/ constitutional mechanism for altering governing authority		●						●			
King willing to devolve authority		●						●			
Popular grievance aimed at the regime		●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
External support/ funding of opposition groups				●						●	
Catalysts											
Major policy shifts not conducive to group interests		●	●	●				●	●	●	
Event catalyzing expression of conflict among elites or public; e.g., reports of government corruption, financial crisis, restriction of rights, government repression, etc.		●	●	●				●	●	●	
Markers											
Evidence or public articulation of grievance aimed at monarchy		●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Evidence of or public articulation of government's mismanagement, failure to provide services		●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Government corruption, predation, patronage, etc.				●						●	
Indication that political elite sympathizes with some criticisms of the regime, call for change		●	●					●	●		
Presence of armed political resistance, opposition groups				●						●	
Neglected infrastructure/ projects, unemployment, drop in quality of life, income inequality		●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Government crack down on opposition voices, media				●						●	
Increasingly vocal civil society or political opposition criticism, calls for change		●	●	●				●	●	●	
Regional instability											
Public, non-government elite support for legal change, working through institutional processes rather than violence		●						●			
Public scapegoating of groups with wealth or power				●						●	
Existence of social group(s) that lack voice, self-determination, or independence				●						●	
Perceived or real unequal development or treatment for specific groups				●						●	
Public support for out grouping, extremism or violence				●						●	
Evidence of opposition groups appealing to issues or identities that cross typical cleavages or divisions				●						●	
Buffers											
Sense of nationalism, loyalty to political institutions		●	●	●				●	●	●	
Public respect for, regard for the King		●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Government security services maintain balance of coercive power, capacity to quell unrest			●	●					●	●	
Perceived legitimacy of regime		●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Provision of security, important public services		●	●	●				●	●	●	
Regime action to address grievances while maintaining central authority		●	●	●				●	●	●	
Preferential treatment, health and other benefits for service members versus general population										●	
Respect for, loyalty to the King among service members										●	
Monarchy willing and able to institute changes, address grievance, inequities of non-elite										●	●

Figure 4. Summary table of Pathway elements present in Jordan

Review of the full NSI Pathways™ model in Appendix A indicates the antecedent conditions that do not appear to have emerged in Jordan. Most notably, an antecedent condition for the two violent paths (*Popular Unrest* and *Military Coup*), a “charismatic or unifying opposition leader or leaders able to motivate protestors across typical social cleavages,” has not yet emerged. It should be noted, however, that protests driven by seemingly leaderless groups of youths that congregated via social media have become more common, possibly suggesting the diminished importance of this particular antecedent relative to historical cases of violent regime opposition.

Catalyzing Events for All Paths but *Military Coup* Have Occurred Equally Since 2011

Multiple catalyzing events have occurred in Jordan over the past 53 years. In only one case, however, has the confluence of antecedent conditions—beginning with the loss of the Arab armies in the 1967 Six Day War—and catalyzing events⁹ led to civil warfare in Jordan. Since the end of that civil war in 1971, neither major policy shifts nor government crackdowns have served to catalyze popular grievance sufficient to throw the regime into crisis. Moreover, both King Hussein and King Abdullah—each having military experience themselves—have worked hard to avoid grievance among the Jordanian military. Thus, the government remained resilient to these events and retained control (this will be discussed further in the “Buffers” section below).

There are eight generic catalyzing events suggested by the regime crisis case studies that underpin the Jordan Pathways Models. Two (i.e., “major policy shifts not conducive to group interests” and an “event catalyzing expression of conflict among elites or public”) have sparked popular protest in Jordan. In fact, three of the five periods of protest (2012, 2016-2020, 2018-2019) were initially sparked by changes in economic policy or conditions, and one (2016-2020) was sparked by alterations to political power and governance. Expressions of public frustration with the government have also prompted a variety of responses from the government,

Some Antecedent Conditions and Catalysts for Jordan’s 1970 Civil War

In June 1970, US Secretary of State Rogers announced a plan for renewing Middle East peace talks. By the end of July, both Egyptian President Nasser and Jordan’s King Hussein had accepted the Rogers Plan—a turn of events that provided an occasion for uncharacteristic unanimity among Palestinian resistance groups, now united in the goal of preventing Jordan and other Arab states from concluding an agreement with Israel on their behalf. At the time, those Palestinian groups were directly contesting King Hussein’s authority in Jordan. For the previous two years, Hussein had resisted the counsel of his advisors to shut down the PLO guerillas in hope that he might consolidate his domestic position and avoid antagonizing other Arab states by eventually co-opting the Palestinian resistance. However, by the end of the summer of 1970, even the loyalty of King Hussein’s army was becoming uncertain as the ranks were increasingly demoralized by the King’s reluctance to respond to PLO provocations. On September 6, Palestinian commandos hijacked two airliners to Jordan followed by a third plane three days later. While the Jordanian government and military stood powerless, the commandos destroyed all three planes on the ground. Simultaneous with the hijackings, chaos had overtaken the streets of Amman and the Palestinian resistance seemed perilously close to seizing control of Jordan. It was at this point that King Hussein finally released his army against the PLO forces. When serious fighting broke out on September 16, King Hussein and his advisors expected that the Palestinians would fall quickly to Jordan’s regular forces. However, within 48 hours an armored brigade from Syria invaded Jordan in support of the embattled PLO fighters.

— Excerpted from Astorino-Courtois, 1998

⁹ While these were the immediate triggers of the Jordanian Civil War, the antecedent conditions of “Black September” first appeared three years earlier during the 1967 Six Day War and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, which dramatically increased the number of Palestinian refugees in Jordan and placed a large population under military control.

oftentimes directly from the King acting from a position intended to rest outside the political machinations of the government.

Table 1. Episodes of unrest in Jordan, proximate causes, and government response

	Catalysts & Participants	Response
2011	Protests calling for government reform, anti-corruption following Arab Spring unrest. Participants included: Muslim Brotherhood/Islamic Action Front, youth groups, and trade unionists.	From January to April 2011, King Abdullah authorized economic aid, raised military and public workers' salaries, dismissed the Prime Minister and Cabinet, met with poor Jordanians, raised some restrictions on public protests, appointed a committee to consider constitutional reforms, and arrested over 100 protesters once violence broke out.
2012	Lifting fuel subsidies in advance of IMF loan. Participants included: Islamists, unions, and tribal opposition.	The government increased security around the country, and security forces took on violent protestors and vandals by firing tear gas and making arrests.
2016-2020	Deal to import natural gas from Israel. Participants included: Islamists, Palestinian political groups, members of parliament (MPs) from Parliament Reform Bloc.	Security forces blocked protests by using tear gas and making arrests.
2016	Constitutional amendment. Participants included: MPs, a former justice minister, a former foreign minister, political activists, Muslim Brotherhood/IAF, newspapers, individuals debating on social media (#constitutional_amendments).	Security forces dispersed and arrested protestors.
2018-2019	Proposed tax increases and IMF-directed austerity measures, failure to provide promised political reforms, corruption. Participants included: labor unions, professional associations (e.g., doctors, lawyers), unemployed youth, shop owners, Bedouins, high-tech employees.	King Abdullah froze fuel prices; PM Mulki was replaced by Education Minister Omar Razzaz, who later announced withdrawal of the proposed tax bill.

Several issues could serve as catalysts in the future, including economic pressures like increased taxes and fuel prices (Bar'el, 2019) or other downward pressure on standards of living generated by Syrian refugees in Jordan,¹⁰ a political action or decision that causes grievance among military members, unrest that is handled poorly by the government (e.g., use of extreme violence resulting in protester fatalities), and/or the embarrassment or failure of the Jordanian military. A major stumbling block, based on past experience, could also come if the government were to support a "peace plan" that does not include Palestinian presence in Jerusalem, especially the old city, and/or does not address the Palestinian right of return or other hot button issues.

¹⁰ The ongoing civil war in Syria has caused a significant Syrian refugee population to flood into Jordan. More than 670,000 Syrians have registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (10 Facts, 2019). These refugees are often hired to fill low paying jobs, as unemployed Jordanians are often not willing to take these jobs due to the nature of the work and the disparity between the skill set required for this work and their education level (Brown et al., 2014). However, only a limited number of refugees obtain these work permits, so most of these families rely on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs (10 Facts, 2019). Moreover, the influx of Syrian refugees has caused "freedoms [to be] curtailed" and security services to "[expand] their control over public life to ensure quiet and stability" (Salameh & Hayajneh, 2019).

The Balance of Markers of a Regime Crisis Most Strongly Point Towards *Popular Unrest*

There are currently several markers consistent with each of the sub-paths. There is ample evidence of popular, public anger at what is perceived as the “government’s mismanagement” of the economy and its “failure to provide basic services.” Active protests on these issues are markers common to each of the four sub-paths. Relatedly, “neglected infrastructure/projects, unemployment, drops in quality of life, and income inequality” represent markers that commonly appear prior to *Reactionary Change*, *Popular Unrest*, and a *Military Coup*. Each of these markers is evident in Jordan today.

While these markers are common to multiple paths and thus provide a sense of the overall conditions historically associated with regime crisis, other markers, unique to specific sub-paths, serve to distinguish one from another.

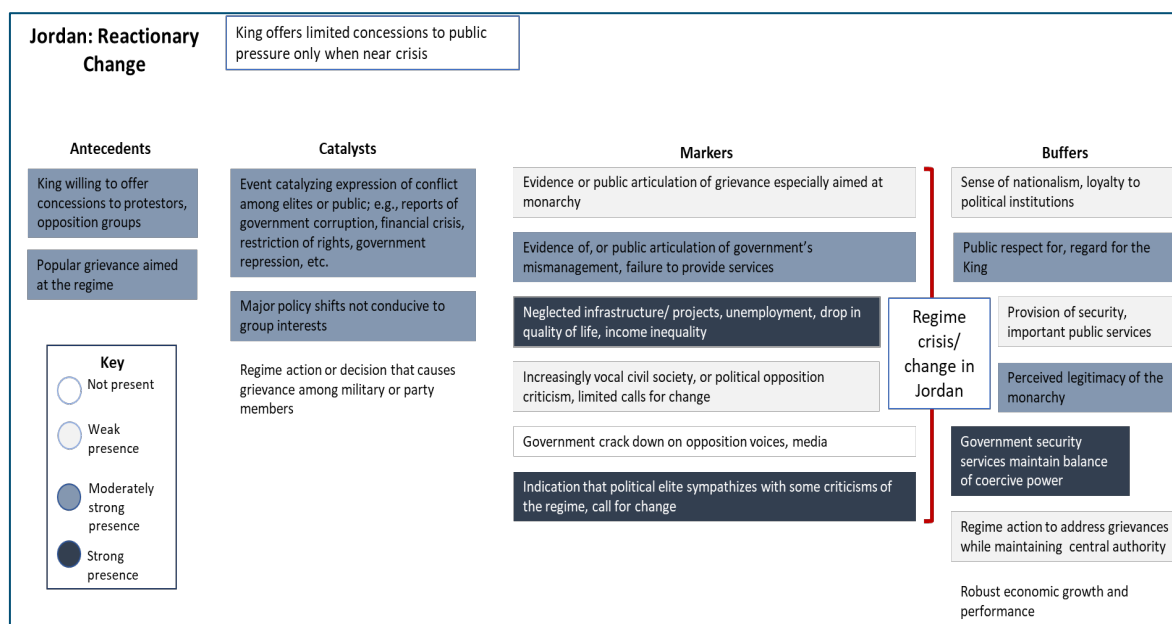


Figure 5. Reactionary Change path for Jordan

Deliberate Change

There is evidence that “political elites [in Jordan] sympathize with some criticisms of the regime.” A number of former senior officials and military officers joined civilians in calling for change, especially regarding the 2016 constitutional amendment that further concentrated power into the hands of the King and recent increases in taxes and fuel prices (Bar’el, 2019). It remains unclear, however, whether the same range of elite voices would raise in opposition to future events, or under which conditions they would do so. It bears noting that while a main point of opposition to the 2016 constitutional amendment was that the King was backtracking on his own promises of political reform, many of the political elite and government insiders who criticized the action did so in favor of *conserving* the current system of governance, rather than changing it. This extension of the King’s powers, they argued, was unnecessary and undermined the sanctity of the nation’s constitution (Harel, 2016).

Popular Unrest

“Government corruption, predation, and/or patronage,” “government crack downs on opposition voices and the media,” and the “presence of regional conflict”—historically, conditions strongly associated with subsequent

violent unrest—are all quite present in Jordan. Government officials in Jordan, including MPs, have been widely accused of corrupt practices, such as benefitting from large government contracts awarded to their own or family members' private companies. Moreover, a persistent narrative among political critics and protestors links the country's economic woes to corruption within the government. Thus, as the economy falls, accusations that the King or wealthy government officials benefit from corrupt practices take on more weight (Jounes, 2019). Unemployment is also connected to corruption in public discourse by way of nepotism, personal connections, and bribery as avenues to high-paying jobs (Harel, 2019; Vidal, 2020). Although this is lower in Jordan than in other Middle Eastern countries, the 2019 Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer found that 24% of Jordanians surveyed had experienced bribery firsthand, and 26% had experienced vote-buying. On the other hand, relative to the region, anti-corruption efforts by the Jordanian government have kept "levels of bribery down and trust in government comparatively high" (Schoeberlein, 2019).

Since 2011, the Jordanian government has identified "Islamism" as the most significant threat to Jordan's security (Milton-Edwards, 2017). In doing so, it has failed to distinguish "mainstream" expressions of Islam and the Jordan Muslim Brotherhood itself, which have demonstrated electoral appeal in Jordan, from violent Salafi-jihadists, who pose a real threat to Jordanian security (Milton-Edwards, 2017). An estimated 3000 Jordanians—many of them unemployed and marginalized youths—fought in Iraq and Syria with jihadist groups, and hundreds have returned home to Jordan (Barrett, 2017). As a result of this and continuing conflict in the region, Jordanian security services are much more concerned with the threat of a terrorist attack than a serious challenge to the regime. There is certainly recognition that the latter may emerge, however, particularly if a violent extremist group were to gain territorial control and become established in Jordan (Przyborowski, 2018). Nonetheless, government leaders have frequently accused the IAF and other "Islamists" of manipulating public grievances to spark protests and push their own political agendas. Though these groups have undoubtedly acted as such, the major episodes of protests in Jordan suggest the presence of organic sparks as well.

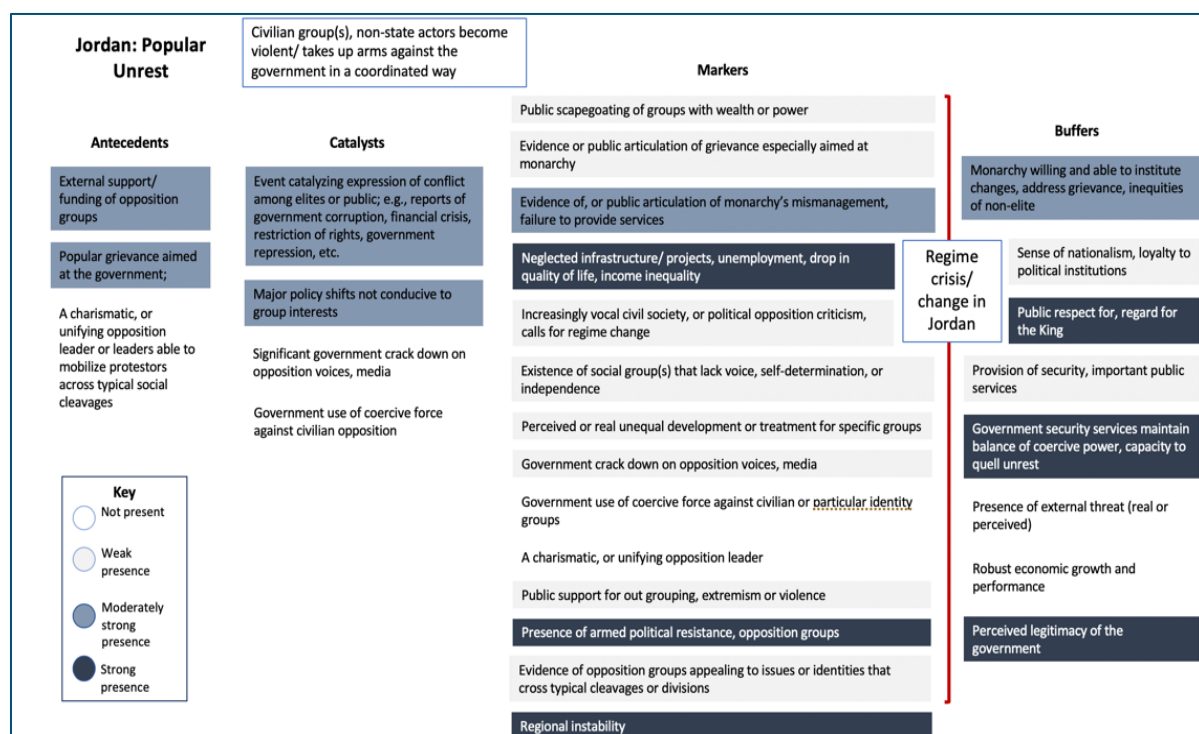


Figure 6. Popular Unrest path for Jordan

Military Coup

There is sparse open-source information on the demographics and morale of the Jordanian Armed Forces. In 2007, limited conscription for an initial commitment of two years was implemented in an effort to provide job training to young people (Military Conscription Policy, 2020; Countries with Mandatory Military Service, 2020). One can surmise, however, that the general demographic of young soldiers has shifted from what it was when the military was a volunteer force. Still, currently, there are no overt markers that point to the possibility of a fracture within the military or a move from within the military against the regime (Chapter Seven, 2020). King Abdullah II is the Supreme Commander of the Jordanian Armed Forces and, like his father, has been attentive to the sentiments felt among the military and East Bank groups who still make up its core. The King also has the authority, according to the constitution, to appoint and remove senior military officials, giving him significant ability to control potential senior officer rivals.

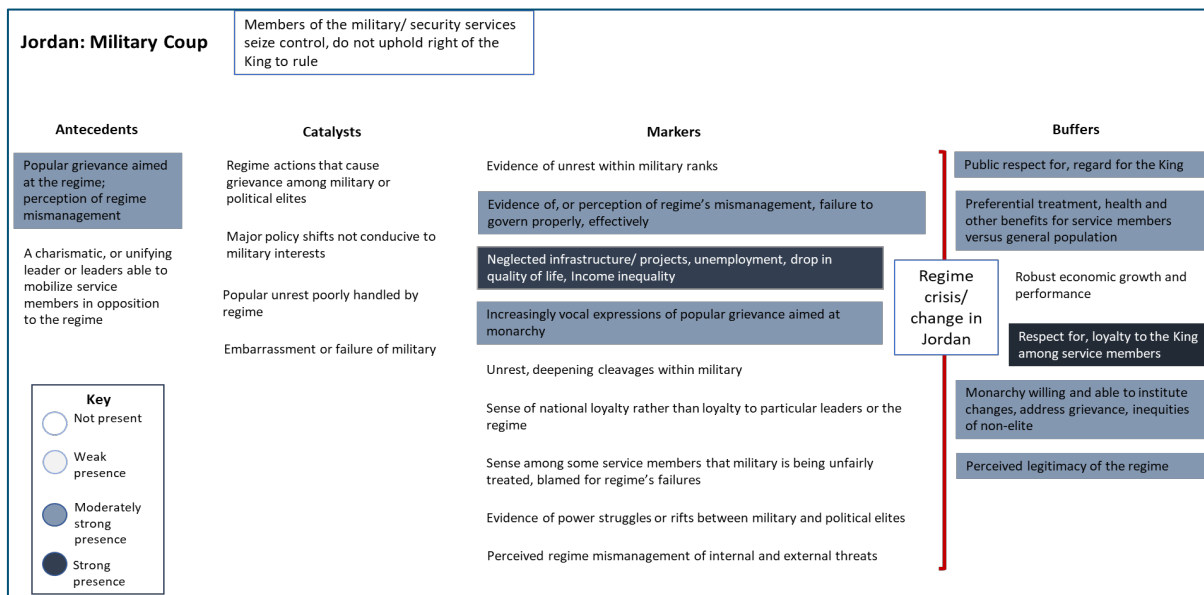


Figure 7. Military Coup path for Jordan

Buffers

Examination of antecedent conditions, catalyzing events, and path markers (indicators and warnings) of regime crisis in Jordan indicates that all of the signs for imminent violent popular uprising currently exist. Important antecedent conditions are present, Jordan has a history of the type of catalyzing events that have led to regime crises in other countries, and there are numerous markers of violent unrest. However, this is only half of the story and misses the countervailing forces, or buffers, that modulate popular grievance and push in the opposite direction from violent revolt. The explanation for why regime crisis is unlikely under current conditions can be found in the multiple buffers to unrest that are also present in Jordan.

“Provision of Security, Important Public Services”

Jordanians value the stability and security that their government provides. Provision of security services and the government’s ability to maintain sovereign control of the entirety of Jordan, especially in comparison to the warfare and chaos in neighboring nations such as Iraq and Syria, diminish the impact of existing antecedents, catalysts, or markers. According to 2015, 2016, and 2017 nation-wide surveys of Jordanian public opinion, 65-66% of respondents identified stability and security as a key source of their political satisfaction (Survey of Jordanian Public Opinion, 2017). In 2018, that number dropped to 37%. However, satisfaction with political appointments—only 5% in 2017—rose to 19% in the wake of Prime Minister Hani Mulki’s resignation at the beginning of June 2018 following nation-wide protests against his government’s economic austerity policies.¹¹

What is the main reason you responded that things in Jordan are going in the right direction or somewhat in the right direction?

(Respondents who think Jordan is going in the right direction: n=737)

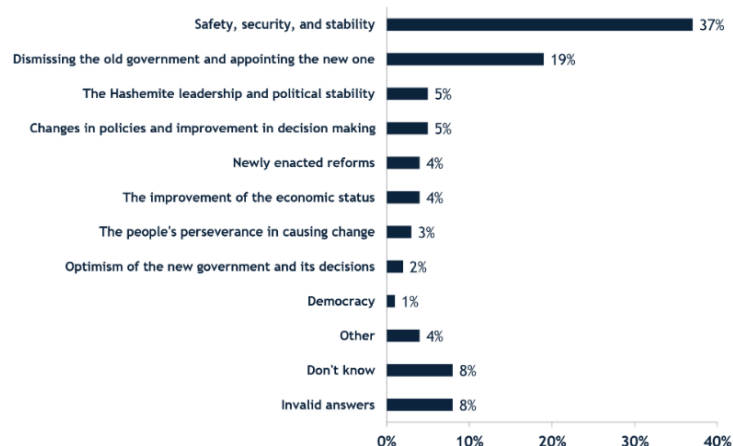


Figure 8. 2018 CISR Jordan National Poll

Source: International Republican Institute, www.iri.org

“Public Respect for, Regard for the King,” “Perceived Legitimacy of Regime,” and “Respect for, Loyalty to the King Among Service Members”

The perceived legitimacy of the Hashemite regime remains fairly constant, and respect and regard for the King—though it varies between the general population and service members—persists as well (Al-Omari & Fishman, 2020). The results of the 2019 CISR poll support this assessment of broad support for the King’s legitimacy and authority over the government (Public Opinion Survey, 2019). Only 9% of those surveyed reported a preference for a weaker role for the monarch and only 14% for a parliamentary democracy, while 72% considered the current system best. In addition, the current political structure and processes in Jordan isolate the King from the “business of government,” allowing him to remain above the fray of unpopular politics and government policies. Even during the prolonged protests and nationwide strike in Jordan in 2018, protesters expressed support for the King and his security services while simultaneously calling for the government to deny proposed austerity measures and end

Concerning forming governments in Jordan, which of the following options do you consider the best?

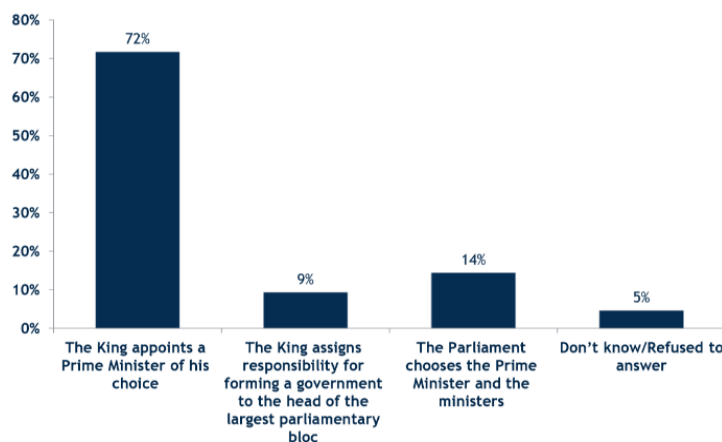


Figure 9. 2019 CISR Jordan National Poll

Source: International Republican Institute, www.iri.org

¹¹ The USAID-funded survey was conducted by the Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR) on a nationally representative sample consisting of n=1,525 face-to-face interviews with Jordanians aged 18. It was carried out between June 20th and 29th 2018. The sample excludes Jordanians living in student housing, prisons, nursing homes, and factory accommodations (Public Opinion Survey, 2018).

corruption (Luck, 2018). Finally, national pride and “respect for and loyalty to the King” remain strong among the military, the most respected organization in the government, as well.¹²

“Regime Action to Address Grievances While Maintaining Central Authority” and “Monarchy Willing and Able to Institute Changes, Address Grievance, and Inequities of Non-Elite”

As discussed, King Abdullah has generally responded quickly to protesters’ calls for government policy changes and reform (see Table 1). When violence breaks out, crowds are dispersed, and arrests are made to maintain order and mitigate any emerging instability. However, the Jordanian economy continues to struggle, despite the reactionary measures taken by the King in response to protests regarding changes in economic policy. Consequently, one critical buffer is missing: “robust economic growth and performance.” The absence of this buffer presents a real vulnerability for the government, as deteriorating economic conditions could lead to more frequent and more violent protests, and consequently, make maintaining central authority more difficult for those in power.

Regional Implications of a Challenge to the Hashemite Regime

In addition to examining potential pathways leading to instability in Jordan, USCENTCOM expressed interest in exploring the implications of civil warfare in Jordan for the broader region. There is, at present, no indication of serious cleavages within the military, so we presume that any revolt capable of threatening Jordanian security forces would most likely be led by externally funded non-state actors. Currently, the most likely candidates would be violent extremist organizations (VEOs). If the Jordanian military was unable to put down the revolt quickly, the resulting unrest could present an opportunity for the resurgence of ISIS or other VEOs, or even the emergence of new groups. In fact, VEOs are the only regional actors that would stand to gain from violent challenges to the regime and the chaos and ungoverned spaces that would ensue.

The national security interests of both regional states and the United States could be severely threatened by a challenge to the Hashemite regime, especially a violent one. From the United States’ perspective, a stable Jordan limits Iranian influence in the region, helps stabilize one of Israel’s borders, and preserves a regime that has provided a moderate voice in Middle East events. From Saudi Arabia’s perspective, a stable Jordan maintains the buffer that it currently enjoys from conflict in Syria and from anti-monarchists both in the region and Saudi Arabia itself. The prospect of a collapse of the Hashemite regime could additionally provide a negative mark against monarchism as a durable form of political rule in the post-Arab Spring Middle East and inspire opponents of other regional monarchies to pursue regime change as well (Yom, 2020). Even the Assad regime in Syria—a longtime and sometime violent critic of the monarchy in Jordan—has more to lose than to gain from serious unrest and regime crisis in Jordan. A stable Jordan helps to secure the Syria-Jordan border region and aid Assad in the battle against ISIS’s and al-Nusra’s influence. Additionally, an important sanctuary for Syrian refugees will remain available as long as Jordan remains stable.

Unlike the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, some of Iran’s interests may be served by unrest in Jordan, while others are better served by continuity. Economic opportunities and avoiding the emergence of a hardline

¹² 83% of respondents to the 2017 national CISR poll reported that they had a “large degree of confidence” in the military, with a further 14% reporting moderate confidence. By contrast, only 3% reported having significant confidence in Parliament (Survey of Jordanian Public Opinion, 2017).

Sunni state are served by continuity of the moderate regime in Jordan. On the other hand, the chaos that would surround regime collapse could provide another base from which Hezbollah could operate, which could have a negative impact on Iranian security.

Al-Omari and Fishman (2020) argue that Israel would be the most affected by unrest in Jordan. Jordan has been a consistent partner in establishing border security, and a serious threat to the regime would send Israel into high alert against movement or attacks across the border, in addition to uprisings among the Palestinian populations of the West Bank and Gaza. Jordan provides both a home and a potential pressure release for displaced Palestinians and serves as a buffer against Iranian influence (Al-Omari & Fishman, 2020; Anonymous, 2020).

Even allowing for the potential negative impact on Israeli security, the surest victims of armed conflict in Jordan would inevitably be Jordanians, Palestinians, and multiple nationalities of refugees who would quickly be thrown into a severe humanitarian crisis. Major segments of the population would be displaced from their homes and livelihoods, with little sanctuary to turn to other than open desert. This new population of displaced persons would further stress already insufficient civil services. The international aid on which many refugees currently depend would also be disrupted as the number of people requiring assistance increased.

A Closer Look: What Pressure Point Would Cause Jordan to Permanently Stop Cooperating On Security, Border, and Economic Issues with Israel?

The security of the border between the West and East Banks of the Jordan River remains critical to Jordanian national security. It forestalls terror attacks by Palestinians and others emanating from the West Bank, and it prevents Israeli retaliation for attacks launched from or through Jordanian territory. Moreover, Jordan and Israel regularly engage in senior-level military exchanges and intelligence sharing, and Jordan allows Israel to fly through Jordanian air spaces (Al-Omari & Fishman, 2020; Anonymous, 2020). Thus, while the relationship may become less obvious, limited, or strained, and despite domestic political costs, it is unlikely that the King would sever ties entirely (Al-Omari & Fishman, 2020). If King Abdullah were to do so, Jordan would be sacrificing the vital military and defense capabilities that Israel provides, which it does not possess on its own (Anonymous, 2020).

Jordan and Israel's security coordination does not extend to the political and economic domains, however. There is little trust between King Abdullah and Prime Minister Netanyahu, and the relationship is at an all-time low (Al-Omari & Fishman, 2020; Abdullah, 2019). Furthermore, several acts of political violence and the capturing of both Israeli and Jordanian prisoners have poisoned the well within the past few years, as have discussions regarding a potential future Palestinian state (Al-Omari & Fishman, 2019). With regards to Jordanian-Israeli economic relations, limiting or severing economic cooperation as a political statement in the event of a provocation from Israel would have less significant consequences for Jordan than terminating security cooperation would (Anonymous, 2020; Al-Omari & Fishman, 2020). Economic cooperation between Jordan and Israel is vulnerable (Anonymous 2020; Al-Omari & Fishman, 2020; Coren, 2019), and Jordan and Israel do not benefit equally from their economic relationship (Anonymous, 2020). There is a minor degree of Israeli tourism in Jordan, and Israelis often use Jordanian airports for cheap flights abroad. On the other hand, Israel has placed restrictions on Jordan's access to the West Bank market (Al-Omari & Fishman, 2019), preventing Jordan from taking advantage of the economic opportunities access would provide.

There is one condition, however, that would provoke Jordan to suspend security cooperation with Israel: When the threat to the stability of the Hashemite regime becomes greater from continuing security cooperation with Israel than it becomes from suspending it. Interestingly, the most likely causes of such a tip in the balance are not internal to Jordan, but rather a result of Israeli and US policy and the domestic pressure these put on the King. There are two relevant redlines to consider:

- *The loss of access to Muslim holy sites in the West Bank.* The Al Hashemi have historical claims to the custodianship of Islam's holiest sites. In fact, one of the most salient selling points of the Peace Accord with Israel in 1994 to the Jordanian population was the access that it would have to the holy sites in Jerusalem and Hebron, rather than the promised economic advantages the Jordanian government was pushing at the time (Astorino-Courtois, 1996). Jordanians fear a long-term denial of access to prayer on the Temple Mount in particular (Anonymous, 2020). They see this landmark as a source of legitimacy for the regime and the royal family, and they believe that they have a historical right to this land. Consequently, an Israeli denial of access to the Temple Mount and Al Aqsa Mosque more specifically would be a redline for Jordan (Anonymous, 2020).
- *Israeli annexation of the Jordan Valley and/or parts of the West Bank.* Al-Omari and Fishman (2020) argue that the Israeli annexation of additional lands is unlikely to fully destroy the Israel-Jordan relationship. However, as explained above, confiscation of key areas of the West Bank could cause large-scale and violent protest in Jordan and force the King to respond more strongly than he might otherwise. If the United States' 'Deal of the Century' were to move forward, its proposed solution could revive the "Jordan is Palestine" line of argument that has enflamed both East Bankers and West Bankers in Jordan in the past.

Wrap-Up

Disagreement regarding the perceived risk of regime crisis in Jordan, as forecasted by scholars who do not see current protests in Jordan as exceptional versus those who do, ultimately lies in how resilient one believes the Hashemite regime to be. The abridged NSI Pathways™ analysis suggests that the dominant path for Jordan is currently violent *Popular Unrest* based on the markers present, but *Deliberate Change* based on antecedent conditions. It also reveals a network of sources of resilience that Jordan's monarchs have built up after decades of experience managing antagonistic halves of the country and maneuvering between Arab neighbors and Israel. There are also powerful state actors who stand to lose as a result of a precipitous and violent regime change in Jordan and would likely step in to avoid such an occurrence.

As events since 2011 have shown, even with antecedent conditions indicating significant popular political and economic grievances, there has not been a single catalyzing event sufficient to prompt either the domestic pressure or violence necessary to throw the Hashemite regime into crisis.

Instead, as was the case prior to Jordan's 1970 Civil War, a serious challenge to the regime would most likely require a 'perfect storm' of antecedent conditions, multiple simultaneous catalyzing events, and deteriorated buffers. In fact, although we assess that a deliberate or violent regime change is unlikely under present conditions, the removal of existing buffers could change the situation in Jordan quickly and drastically. Unfortunately, this confluence of factors may not be too far-fetched. Events to be particularly watchful for are any that damage "public respect for, regard for the King," affect the "perceived legitimacy of regime," and/or cause a fissure between the monarchy and East Bankers. A feasible 'perfect storm' might include public exposure of blatant and severe corruption, such as gross misuse or personal appropriation of funds, especially if such an event was associated with the Palace (Yom, 2020);¹³ alternatively, it might include the Israeli annexation of Jerusalem or aggression against holy sites that angers Palestinians, mainstream Islamists, and East Bank tribal leaders equally, in the context of already elevated economic or social frustration in Jordan, together with a response from the King that is seen as overly conciliatory to Israel or overly repressive to Jordanian protesters.

Recommendations

There are a few measures that the United States and USCENTCOM can take to help shore up the sources of the Jordanian Government's resilience to public frustration and protest.

Weigh the implications of US policy carefully. First and foremost, the United States must carefully consider the signals sent by proposed Palestinian-Israeli peace plans as viewed through the lenses of the major population groups (Palestinians) in Jordan. Specifically, the United States should be extremely careful to avoid putting King Abdullah in a position in which public disapproval of proposed plans forces him to adopt a harder line that undercuts the political moderation on which US policy in the region has depended on for so long.

Provide aid that eases public frustration, unemployment, and quality of life. One of the Hashemite regime's greatest internal threats is the state of its economy, driven by debt and spending on entitlements in exchange for East Bank tribal political support and loyalty. Given the economic strife that Jordan is currently

¹³ In the past, East Bank Bedouin leaders have focused particularly harsh criticism at Queen Rania, rather than King Abdullah, namely for being "too vocal and independent," "too Palestinian" (Ignatius, 2011), and corrupt (Zecchini, 2011).

experiencing, and the potential of these economic issues to ignite popular unrest, the balance of military to economic aid to Jordan should be considered carefully. The United States currently provides Jordan with over \$1 billion in military and economic aid annually, about around 2.5% of its GDP (Riedel, 2019; King Abdullah of Jordan fears, 2019). On the military side, the United States has worked with Jordan to build its internal security capacity with a newly established counterterrorism training center, for example (Bureau of Counterterrorism, 2019), and a training center for special operations opened in 2009 (Jordan and US Launch, 2018). The major part of United States annual aid, some 70%, however, is economic aid. Unfortunately, most of this goes to service Jordan's steeply rising debt, rather than to generating growth, which as Montgomery (2018) points out, highlights a significant shortcoming of US aid: neither military spending nor debt service increase economic growth. As a result, neither type of aid has any impact on the continued financial struggles, job creation, or the quality of life that the average Jordanian experiences, nor on the stability of the government.¹⁴

Reassure Jordan of the United States' long-term commitment. Finally, United States decision makers should consider providing Jordan with more certainty that the United States will be a steady, long-term partner (Al-Omari & Fishman, 2020). Economic aid from regional actors, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, has generally been unreliable (Bar'el, 2019; King Abdullah of Jordan Fears, 2019), and in order to boost the country's morale and improve its economic outlook, the United States must provide reassurance that the aid it promises is guaranteed.

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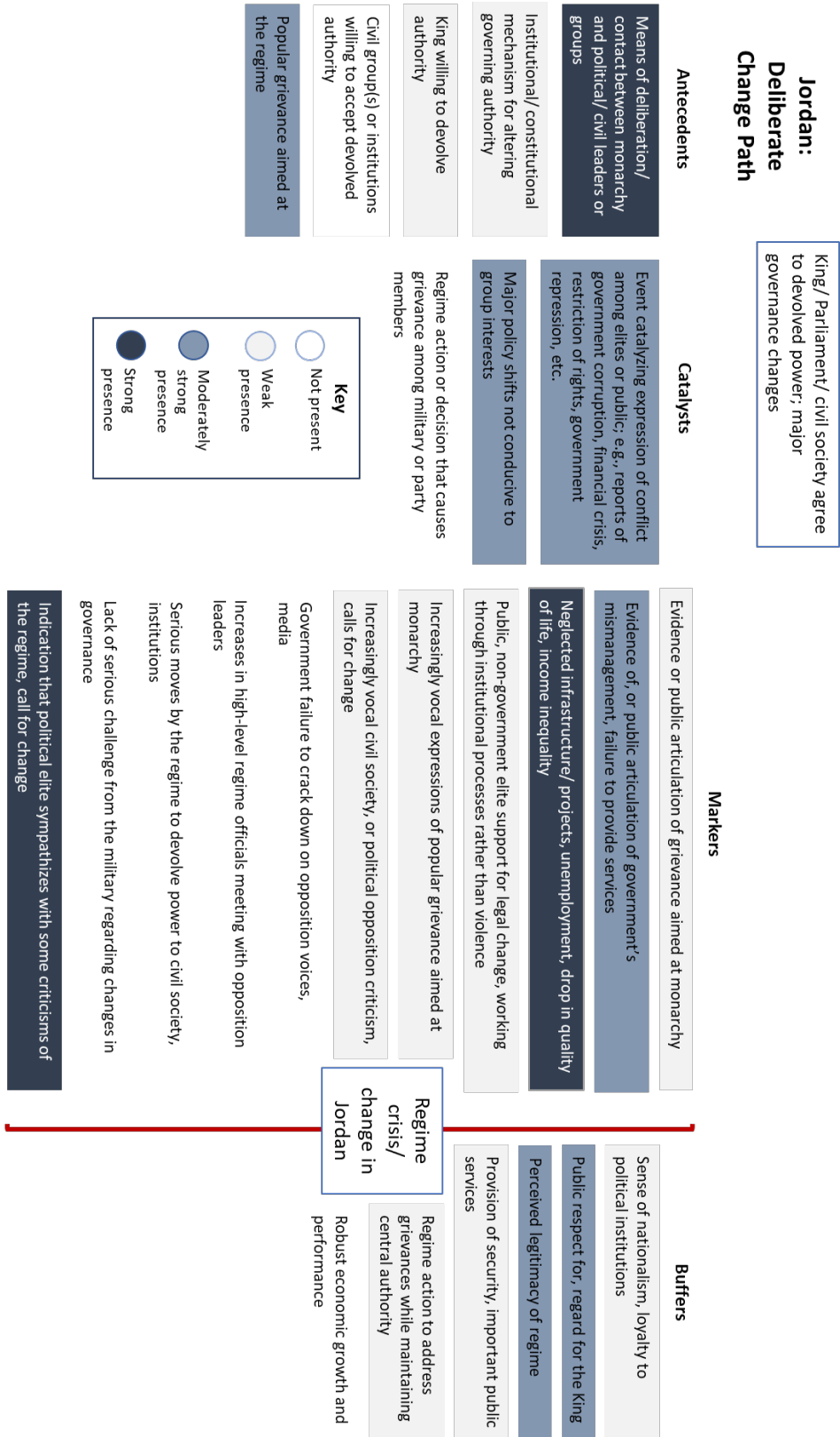
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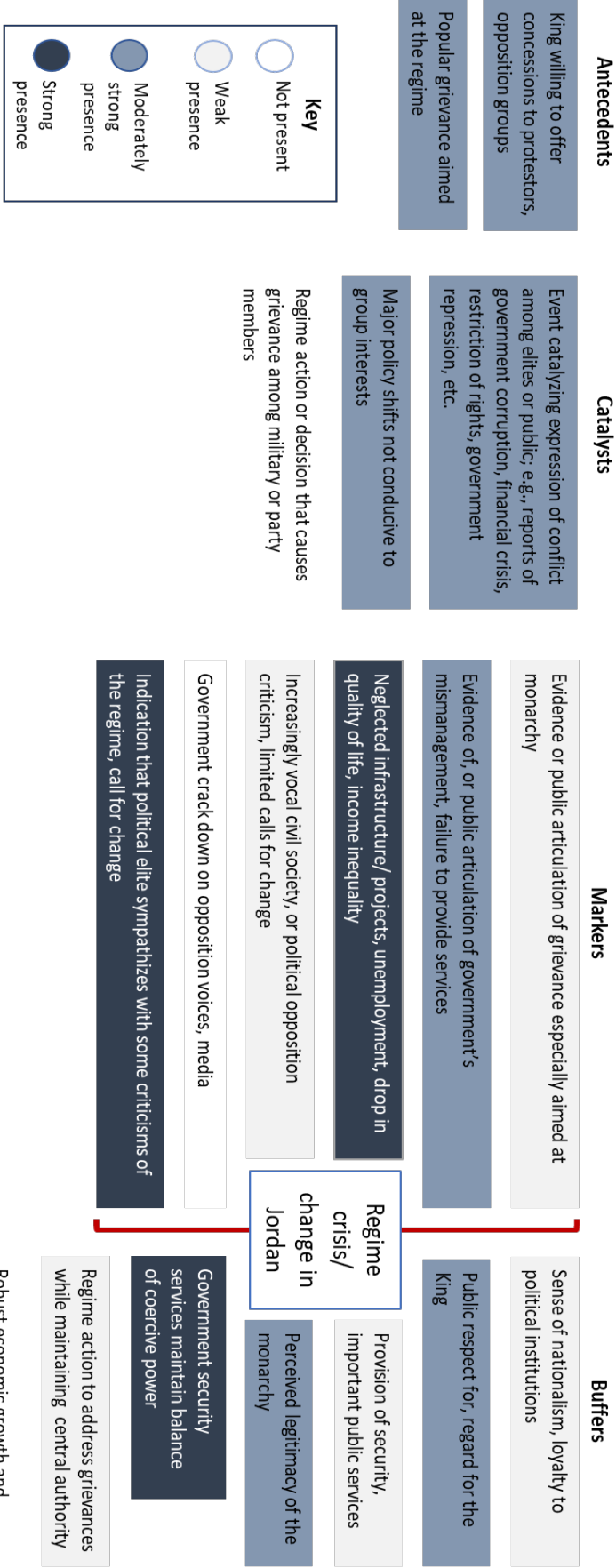
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Appendix A: Four Internal Sub-Paths to Regime Crisis in Jordan



Jordan: Reactionary Change

King offers limited concessions to public pressure only when near crisis



Jordan: Popular Unrest

Civilian group(s), non-state actors become violent/ takes up arms against the government in a coordinated way

Markers

Antecedents

External support/ funding of opposition groups

Popular grievance aimed at the government;

A charismatic, or unifying opposition leader or leaders able to mobilize protestors across typical social cleavages

Catalysts

Event catalyzing expression of conflict among elites or public; e.g., reports of government corruption, financial crisis, restriction of rights, government repression, etc.

Major policy shifts not conducive to group interests

Significant government crack down on opposition voices, media

Government use of coercive force against civilian opposition

Buffers

Monarchy willing and able to institute changes, address grievance, inequities of non-elite

Sense of nationalism, loyalty to political institutions

Public respect for, regard for the King

Regime crisis/ change in Jordan

Provision of security, important public services

Government security services maintain balance of coercive power, capacity to quell unrest

Presence of external threat (real or perceived)

Robust economic growth and performance

Perceived legitimacy of the government

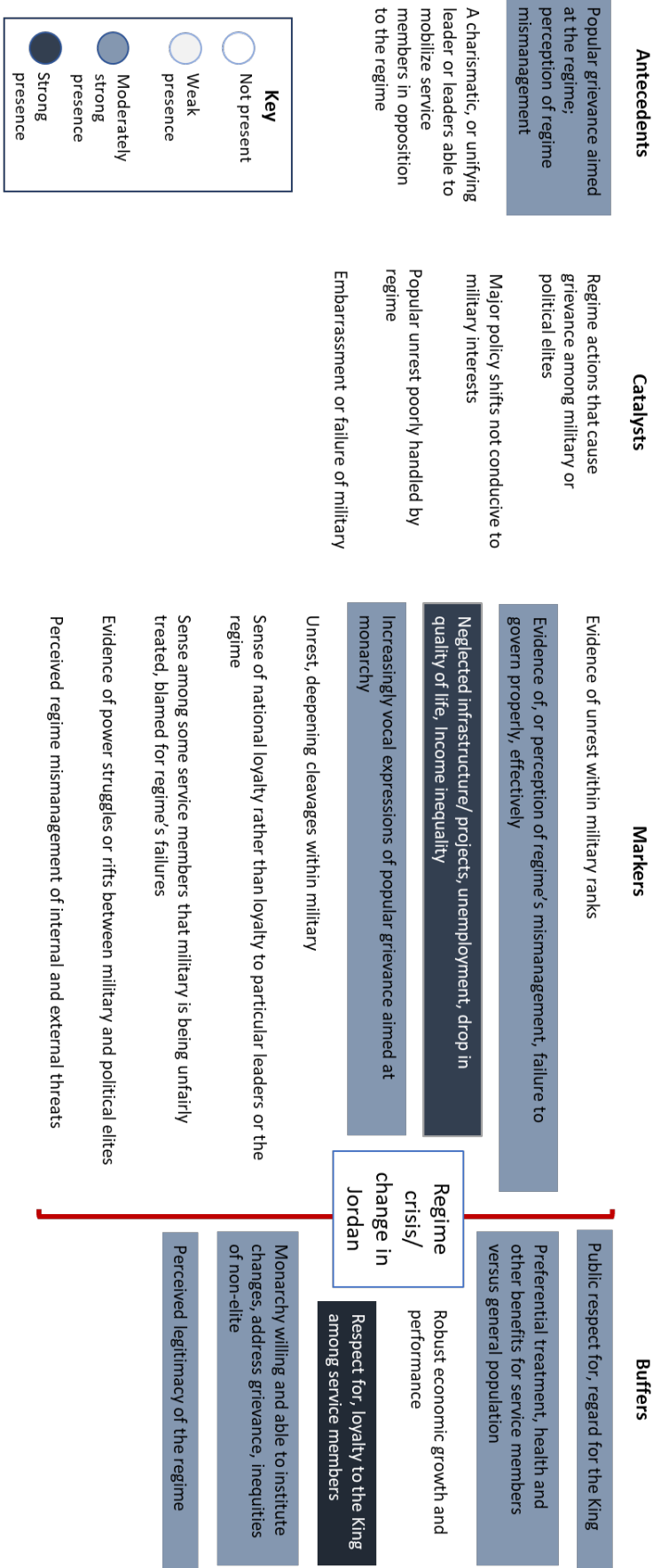
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





























- Not present
- Weak presence
- Moderately strong presence
- Strong presence

Regional instability

Jordan: Military Coup

Members of the military/ security services seize control, do not uphold right of the King to rule



		Deliberate Change	Reactionary Change	Popular Unrest	Military Coup
Key  Not present  Weak presence  Moderately strong presence  Strong presence					
Antecedents					
	Means of deliberation/ contact between monarchy and political/ civil leaders or groups				
	King willing to offer concessions to protestors, opposition groups				
	Institutional/ constitutional mechanism for altering governing authority				
	King willing to devolve authority				
	Popular grievance aimed at the regime				
	External support/ funding of opposition groups				
Catalysts					
	Major policy shifts not conducive to group interests				
	Event catalyzing expression of conflict among elites or public; e.g., reports of government corruption, financial crisis, restriction of rights, government repression, etc.				
Markers					
	Evidence or public articulation of grievance aimed at monarchy				
	Evidence of or public articulation of government's mismanagement, failure to provide services				
	Government corruption, predation, patronage, etc.				
	Indication that political elite sympathizes with some criticisms of the regime, call for change				
	Presence of armed political resistance, opposition groups				
	Neglected infrastructure/ projects, unemployment, drop in quality of life, income inequality				
	Government crack down on opposition voices, media				
	Increasingly vocal civil society or political opposition criticism, calls for change				
	Regional instability				
	Public, non-government elite support for legal change, working through institutional processes rather than violence				
	Public scapegoating of groups with wealth or power				
	Existence of social group(s) that lack voice, self-determination, or independence				
	Perceived or real unequal development or treatment for specific groups				
	Public support for out grouping, extremism or violence				
	Evidence of opposition groups appealing to issues or identities that cross typical cleavages or divisions				

	Deliberate Change	Reactionary Change	Popular Unrest	Military Coup
Buffers				
Sense of nationalism, loyalty to political institutions	●	●	●	
Public respect for, regard for the King	●	●	●	●
Government security services maintain balance of coercive power, capacity to quell unrest		●	●	
Perceived legitimacy of regime	●	●	●	●
Provision of security, important public services	●	●	●	
Regime action to address grievances while maintaining central authority	●	●	●	
Preferential treatment, health and other benefits for service members versus general population				●
Respect for, loyalty to the King among service members				●
Monarchy willing and able to institute changes, address grievance, inequities of non-elite			●	●