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Parliamentary Elections in Jordan: An Analytical Study of the Development of the House of Representatives and Its Impact on the Democratic Process from 1921 to the Present

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Abstract: This study examines the evolution of parliamentary elections in Jordan and evaluates the role of the House of Representatives in the country's democratic process since the establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan. The study seeks to answer key questions: How has the Jordanian parliamentary system developed over time? What are the main drivers of change? And how has the parliament influenced Jordan's democratic trajectory? Using a qualitative approach, the research analyzes data from primary and secondary sources, covering the period from 1921 to 2024, divided into five key phases: the Emirate period (1921-1945), the independence period (1946-1967), the martial law period (1967-1988), the political thaw period (1989-2010), and the Arab Spring period (2010-2024). The findings reveal that popular protests and struggles were key drivers of democratic reforms. However, the parliament's power has remained limited due to executive dominance, frequent dissolutions, electoral laws, and security interventions. Despite regular elections, Jordan continues to be classified as an "authoritarian regime" by the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index. The study concludes that Jordan's political system remains in transition, requiring significant reforms to ensure a fully democratic system with the capacity for peaceful political transitions.

Keywords: Parliamentary elections; Jordan; House of Representatives; democratic process; political development; electoral system; political participation

Introduction

The relationship between elections and democratization has been a central topic in recent academic discussions. Elections are often considered a key element of democracy, defined as "government by the people, for the people." While elections are vital, some scholars argue that focusing solely on elections offers a limited view of democracy. They suggest that democracy extends beyond electoral processes to include political, social, and institutional factors. These critics call for a broader understanding of democracy that incorporates these elements.

The concept of democracy has developed over time to address emerging challenges and opportunities faced by democratic systems. It is clear from the literature that there is no universal agreement on its definition. David Collier and Steven Levitsky reviewed 550 subtypes of democracy. Collier and Levitsky (1997) studied how scholars labeled democratizing regimes in more than 150 studies. The concept of democracy has been used to refer to a political phenomenon, which created a lot of diversion among scholars. Joseph Schumpeter, defined democracy as "a system for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for the people's vote" (Schumpeter, 1947).

In his book *polyarchy*, Robert Dahl argues that polyarchy has two dimensions: opposition (organized contestation through regular, fair and free elections) and participation “the right of everyone to participate in the system by running for office and voting” (Dahl, 1971). Dahl defines the “procedural minimal” conditions essential for modern political democracy, or “polyarchy.” Key conditions include the constitutional control of government decisions by elected officials, chosen through free and fair elections with minimal coercion. Almost all adults must have the right to vote and run for office. Additionally, citizens should be able to express political opinions without fear of punishment and access alternative sources of information, protected by law. Finally, citizens must be able to form independent associations, like political parties or interest groups, to advocate for their views (Dahl, 1971).

In this context, the research will contribute to understanding the relationship between parliamentary evolution and Jordan's democratic development, offering insights into the broader challenges and prospects for democratic consolidation in the Arab world. By tracing the trajectory of Jordan's parliamentary history, this study seeks to address the following questions: How has Jordan's parliamentary system evolved over time? What have been the major drivers of change? And what role has the parliament played in shaping the democratic path of the Kingdom?

The objective of this study is to examine the evolution of parliamentary elections in Jordan and assess the role of the House of Representatives in shaping the country's democratic process. By analyzing historical developments from the establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan in 1921 to the present, the study seeks to identify the key drivers of change and explore how the parliamentary system has influenced democratic governance in Jordan. Ultimately, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between parliament and democracy in Jordan and offer insights into the political and electoral reforms necessary for achieving a fully democratic system.

Literature Review

Democracy is an ideology more than just a set of tools. It has a goal or an ideal which should be maximized and through which values, institutions and practices can be evaluated as either democratic or undemocratic. In this era, some institutions and practices are part of people's understanding of democracy, for example, parliaments, elections, devolution of power, etc. However, if these institutions and practices do not serve or maximize the goal of democracy, then they are not democratic practices and institutions. For instance, Tilly (2007) notes that associations such as trade unions, for instance, do not necessarily hold the key to democratic participation. Authoritarian regimes often establish civil institutions and practices which appear as democratic in order to add more legitimacy to their regimes. Yet, these institutions and practices are not democratic since they do not aim at increasing the power of the people but rather the power of the regime. In many cases, these institutions and practices hinder democracy by eliminating or competing with anti-authoritarian institutions and practices.

In Cunningham's (2001) pragmatic view, democracy is progressive rather than conservative as it is a continuous process of problem solving, which aims at expanding people's preferences. Since democracy has an ideal goal - increasing the power of all people - then there must be continuous work and progress to reach that goal. Hence Cunningham's understanding of democracy fits with the essential meaning of democracy to a greater degree than Harik's understanding. Cunningham (2001) assumes that a state, for instance, becomes more democratic “when more of the people who make it up come to have effective control over what happens to and in it through joint actions they take to this end”. Harik (2001) also pays attention to family values in Arab societies and the important role of tribes in sustaining communities and solving conflicts and problems.

A common disagreement among theorists of democracy is the relation between democracy, freedom and equality (Cunningham, 2001). This is opposite to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (2010) understanding of democracy where he argues that “anyone who refuses to obey the general will is to be compelled to do so by the whole body”. Harik (2001) strongly and convincingly criticizes the influence of abstract ideologies on democracy by arguing that freedom and equality, as democratic concepts, are socially defined concepts, rather than abstract ontological ones. In his examination of countries which remain in the gray “between being outright authoritarian and being fully democratic”, Sorensen (2008) recognizes four characteristic features of

those countries: partially fair and/or free elections; weak states; elite domination; and popular mobilization and organization for the struggle of democracy.

Dahl (2005) outlines six essential institutions that must be strengthened for democratization in undemocratic or newly democratic countries. As Tilly (2007) points out, these institutions represent a "minimum set of processes" necessary for a democracy to function. Dahl argues that the core requirements for polyarchy democracy include: i) elected officials who hold constitutional control over government decisions; ii) free, fair, and frequent elections; iii) freedom of expression, allowing citizens to voice political opinions without fear of severe punishment; iv) access to alternative sources of information, ensuring independent media and diverse viewpoints; v) associational autonomy, enabling citizens to form independent political organizations; and vi) inclusive citizenship, guaranteeing equal rights to all adult citizens.

O'Donnell (1996) argues that according to Dahl's criteria, a country remains democratic if elected politicians are subject to severe constraints, vetoes, or exclusion from certain policy domains by other, nonelected actors or when their constitutional mandated terms is ended arbitrarily. Hereby, O'Donnell suggests that in polyarchy democracy constitutionally mandated terms of elected officials and their authority in certain policy domains should not be subject to arbitrary termination and/or severe constraints, vetoes, or exclusion by other, nonelected actors. In Jordan the two objections appear significant. The King, for instance, dissolves the elected parliament often before the end of its mandated term (Aristotle, 1999; de Tocqueville, 2002), understand democracy as the rule of the majority.

Puspasari et al. (2024) They argue that social media plays a key role in enhancing democratic engagement by enabling broader and more accessible political participation. Ani (2024) identified inconsistencies in election reporting and highlighted how protests during the election period disrupted nation-building efforts and influenced electoral behavior across various regions of Nigeria. Despite extensive research on democratic processes and parliamentary systems in the Arab world, few studies have focused specifically on the evolution of parliamentary elections in Jordan and their impact on the democratic trajectory of the country. While scholars have examined the general relationship between elections and democracy (Dahl, 2005; Tilly, 2007), there is a lack of in-depth analysis that traces the historical development of Jordan's parliamentary system and the role of the House of Representatives in shaping democratic governance.

Furthermore, existing studies often focus on broader regional trends or specific phases of Jordan's history, without fully exploring how the dynamics between the parliament and the executive power have influenced Jordan's transition toward democracy. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of parliamentary elections in Jordan from 1921 to the present, offering new insights into the political and electoral reforms needed to achieve a fully democratic system.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, focusing on a historical analysis of the evolution of parliamentary elections in Jordan and their impact on the democratic process. The data collection process involves utilizing primary sources such as government documents, electoral records, and constitutional texts, alongside secondary sources like scholarly articles, books, and international reports that offer external assessments of Jordan's political system. These sources were selected based on their relevance to understanding democratic reforms, electoral laws, and governance dynamics in Jordan.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on key themes such as executive control, tribal influence, and electoral changes throughout different periods of Jordan's parliamentary history. The literature review was conducted by selecting sources that directly address democracy, electoral systems, and the political environment in Jordan. The criteria for the literature review included the relevance of the sources, the timeliness of the data, and the academic credibility of the authors. The findings were synthesized to identify patterns and shifts in the political landscape that impacted Jordan's democratic trajectory.

The Findings

1. Phases of the Development of Parliamentary Elections and Their Impact on the Course of Democracy in Jordan

Phase One: Parliamentary Elections during the Emirate Period (1921-1945)

The roots of political life in Jordan, specifically in the modern era, can be traced back to the first legislative council. The history of the beginning of democratic life was thus linked to the establishment of the first legislative council, which coincided with the founding of the Emirate of Transjordan. Political life during this phase was characterized by the absence of dominance of the executive authority over the key aspects of political life in Jordan. The purpose of establishing the first legislative council in 1929 was to ratify the Jordanian-British Treaty (Jarrar, 2017b).

On February 20, 1928, a Jordanian National Conference was held in Amman, which considered itself the legitimate representative of the Jordanian society. A Jordanian National Charter was issued, outlining the general principles for political action and setting the framework for political life in Jordan. The charter also called for political independence from British colonial rule, which was effectively achieved on May 25, 1946 (Mahafza, 1990).

The Jordanian-British Treaty of 1929, imposed by the British Mandate, led to the establishment of the first legislative council, which required ratification by the parliaments of both nations. However, many Jordanians, including activists and political intellectuals, rejected the elections for this council, viewing its provisions as serving British interests. During the Emirate period, the councils were more advisory than supervisory or legislative (Jarrar, 2017a).

In 1927, the first political party in Jordan, the Jordanian People's Party, was established in opposition to British colonial rule and in pursuit of independence. During this period, political parties were fragile, weak, and lacked continuity, yet they played a role in political mobilization, raising awareness, and participating marginally in power transitions (Al-Azzam, 2016). In 1931, Britain tasked (Club Pasha) with the mission of establishing the Border Force to ensure security and stability in the desert and impose sovereignty over the Jordanian tribes that were rebelling against the British colonizer and demanding independence (Al-Saadi, 2014). This period saw the complete absence of opposition parties in Jordan, following the defeat of the Jordanian-Palestinian revolt. Political and national life was dominated by "Club Pasha" and British officers, who positioned the Jordanian military against the people (Al-Saadi, 2014).

In early 1940, under the leadership of Tawfiq Abu al-Huda, the Jordanian government adopted a harsh approach to suppress the national movement, declaring a state of emergency and martial law. However, with the end of World War II in 1945, the Jordanian political system began to move toward democratic openness and political pluralism, albeit within the constraints of the law (Al-Azzam, 2016). Table 1 shows that the number of legislative councils elected during the establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan was five. Parliamentary life began in 1929, and during that period, the first legislative council (1929-1931) did not complete its constitutional term, as it was dissolved due to its opposition to the government. Two councils were extended, while two others completed their constitutional terms. Although the Emirate was established in 1921, the beginning of the legislative councils occurred in 1929, the same year as the Jordanian-British Treaty.

Table 1. Legislative councils during the emirate period in Jordan

Number	Council Name	Duration	Notes
1	First Legislative Council (1929-1931)	Two years	The constitutional term for legislative councils at that time was 3 years. It was dissolved due to government opposition.
2	Second Legislative Council (1931-1934)	Three years	Completed its constitutional term.
3	Third Legislative Council (1934-1937)	Three years	Completed its constitutional term.
4	Fourth Legislative Council (1937-1942)	Five years	Its term was extended by two years.

5	Fifth Legislative Council (1942-1946)	Five years	Its term was extended by two years, and the declaration of independence was made.
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Source: al-Qudah, Yahya Saleh (2020)

Phase Two: Parliamentary Elections during the Independence Period (1946-1967)

On March 22, 1946, the Jordanian political system signed the Jordanian-British Treaty of Alliance and Friendship, paving the way for independence and the emergence of Transjordan as a sovereign state (Al-Saadi, 2014). In 1947, parliamentary elections were held in Jordan under exceptional laws and emergency regulations, although the 1947 Constitution guaranteed freedom of speech and expression in Articles 16, 17, and 18 (Al-Saadi, 2014). During this period, the unification of Jordan and Palestine significantly altered the political and social landscape, leading to increased political activism among farmers and workers, thus broadening the political base for national and democratic liberation (Jarrar, 2017b).

In 1956, political parties played a prominent role in political life in Jordan, as for the first time in the history of the political system and the state, the first parliamentary government was formed under the leadership of the Secretary-General of the Socialist Party, Suleiman al-Nabulsi, based on parliamentary majority, and as a principle of the peaceful transfer of power (Al-Azzam, 1998). In 1957, political parties were banned in Jordan following an attempted military coup. The prevailing belief within the Jordanian political system was that the opposition parties were behind the coup, leading to the declaration of martial law (Aruri, 1972).

Table 2 shows that there were 8 parliamentary councils during the establishment phase of Jordan. Five of them were dissolved before completing their constitutional term due to their opposition to the government, while one council was extended for one year. This indicates the dominance of the executive branch over the legislative branch through the dissolution of elected councils, reflecting a setback in Jordan's democratic progress.

Table 2. Parliamentary councils during the independence period in Jordan

Number	Council Name	Duration	Notes
1	First Parliamentary Council (1947-1950)	Three years	Did not complete its constitutional term, it was dissolved.
2	Second Parliamentary Council (1950-1951)	One year	Dissolved due to government opposition.
3	Third Parliamentary Council (1951-1954)	Four years	Issued the 1952 Constitution.
4	Fourth Parliamentary Council (1954-1956)	Three years	Dissolved due to government opposition.
5	Fifth Parliamentary Council (1956-1961)	Five years	Extended by one year.
6	Sixth Parliamentary Council (1961-1962)	One year	Dissolved due to government opposition.
7	Seventh Parliamentary Council (1962-1963)	One year	Dissolved due to government opposition.
8	Eighth Parliamentary Council (1963-1966)	Four years	Completed its constitutional term.

Source: al-Qudah, Yahya Saleh (2020)

Phase Three: Elections during the Martial Law Period (1967-1988)

During the period of martial law, the Jordanian constitution underwent several amendments that impacted the course of democracy in Jordan. These constitutional amendments entrenched the dominance of the executive branch over the political life and the democratic process by declaring martial law and banning political parties until 1989 (Bani Salameh, 2013).

In 1967, the ninth parliamentary council was elected, which became the longest-serving parliamentary council, undergoing extensions, suspensions, dissolution, and reinstatement within 18 years. It was one of the weakest parliamentary councils due to the declaration of martial law, with the country being governed by temporary decrees issued by the government, in addition to exceptional laws and defense regulations (Mahafza, 1990).

Table 3 shows that there was only one parliamentary council during the martial law period in Jordan from 1967 to 1988. It was dissolved and extended several times, and some of its members who opposed the Jordanian government were dismissed. This indicates the dominance of the executive branch over the legislative branch, as elected councils were sidelined and security control prevailed in managing public political affairs during this period, at the expense of democratic transformation.

Table 3. Parliamentary councils during the martial law period in Jordan

Number	Council Name	Duration	Notes
1	Ninth Parliamentary Council (1967-1974)	Seven years	Extended, and more than two-thirds of its members were dismissed due to government opposition.
2	Tenth Parliamentary Council (1984-1989)	Five years	The Ninth Council was reinstated by royal decree, and by-elections were held to fill the seats of deceased members and those dismissed from the previous council.

Source: al-Qudah, Yahya Saleh (2020)

Phase Four: Elections during the Political Relaxation Period (1989-2010)

In 1989, Jordan witnessed a widespread protest movement that began in the south and spread to other regions. Through this movement, the political system in Jordan felt the need to review its policies, positions, and popular practices at all levels (Mahafza, 2001). This period is marked by the absence of clear majority and minority factions in parliament, primarily due to electoral laws that have undermined the democratic process in Jordan (Jarrar, 2017b).

After the elections held in 1989, a new government was appointed that played a significant role in democratic life. The Prime Minister announced the return of confiscated passports to their owners, emphasized the freedom of movement for all citizens, and declared the government's intention to release political prisoners. Additionally, a committee was formed to review the conditions of all convicts and to study the laws of martial law and the emergency law (Mahafza, 1990).

In 1993, the state's official agencies adopted a hostile approach towards opposition party candidates, preventing them from holding campaign rallies. Meanwhile, security and government agencies supported a number of independent candidates through various means (Al-Tal, 1996). During this period, the executive authority continued to dominate political life, while a culture of silence, acceptance, fear, and passivity prevailed among the majority of citizens (Bani Salameh, 2017).

On October 17, 1994, the Jordanian government signed a peace agreement with Israel, known as the "Wadi Araba Agreement" (Mahafza, 2001). The Jordanian regime took a stance against the opponents of the peace treaty, with King Hussein himself launching an attack against them, labeling them as the "forces of darkness." He accused them of being hostile to the Jordanian state and its interests. Additionally, he called for a review of the professional unions law, suggesting that membership should be optional rather than mandatory (Mahafza, 2001). Despite the introduction of political pluralism features and the issuance of the Political Parties Law in 1992, it became evident that the political system was not genuinely committed to democratic openness, the peaceful transfer of power, party pluralism, or combating corruption and favoritism (Al-Azzam, 1998).

In 1996, press freedom in Jordan sharply declined, with writers and editors being summoned to courts for allegedly violating the Penal Code or the Press and Publications Law, often for publishing content deemed harmful to national interests (Mahafza, 2001). In 1997, new parliamentary elections took place, during which boycotting parties and social forces called for political and economic reforms, aiming to prevent executive authority from dominating both legislative and executive branches and ensuring the right to peaceful power transitions. Additionally, the activities of professional unions continued to concern the government and the king politically. In response, the government moved to amend union laws to eliminate compulsory membership, control their finances, and weaken their influence by creating pro-regime unions. Unionists strongly opposed these measures, prompting King Hussein to visit all the unions in 1998 in an attempt to ease tensions (Mahafza, 2001). After the events of September 11, 2001, Jordan's democratic life witnessed a

significant setback. The parliament was dissolved, parliamentary life was sidelined, and there was increasing suppression of civil society, with security institutions dominating key aspects of the political life in Jordan (Bani Salameh, 2013).

Table 4 illustrates the presence of five parliamentary councils during Jordan's political liberalization period, suggesting a degree of stability in parliamentary life, except for the fifteenth parliament, which was unable to complete its term due to rising protest movements. However, the executive branch continued to dominate the legislative branch, as indicated by election fraud, flawed electoral laws, and the suspension of parliamentary life from 2001 to 2003, alongside temporary laws and an increase in political detainees. This period marked a regression in the democratic process and the strengthening of security control over political affairs, hindering democratic transition. Additionally, the signing of a peace treaty with Israel further influenced Jordan's political landscape, leading to heightened human rights violations, suppression of opposition groups, and increased security interventions in political life.

Table 4. Parliamentary councils during the period of political liberalization in Jordan

Number	Council Name	Duration	Notes
1	Eleventh Parliamentary Council (1989-1993)	Four years	Completed its constitutional term.
2	Twelfth Parliamentary Council (1993-1997)	Four years	Completed its constitutional term.
3	Thirteenth Parliamentary Council (1997-2001)	Four years	Completed its constitutional term.
4	Fourteenth Parliamentary Council (2003-2007)	Four years	Completed its constitutional term.
5	Fifteenth Parliamentary Council (2007-2010)	Three years	Dissolved due to protest movements.

Source: al-Qudah (2020).

Phase Five: Elections in the Arab Spring Era to the Present (2010-2024)

By the end of 2010, amidst the Arab Spring, Jordan's popular movement evolved from a localized, economically focused initiative to a nationwide movement with political aims (Bani Salameh, 2017). As a result of the protest movements, King Abdullah II decided to form a royal committee to review the constitution and recommend the necessary constitutional amendments to achieve the desired political reform and develop the political life in the country. The total number of constitutional amendments proposed amounted to 42 articles, which is nearly one-third of the total 131 articles in the constitution (Bani Salameh, 2013).

During this phase, the political system failed to amend the Press and Publications Law in a way that would guarantee freedom in accordance with the constitutional provisions. Instead, it continued to suppress public freedoms and restrict press freedom (Mahafza, 2001). Despite the challenges and obstacles faced by professional associations in Jordan, they have sought to engage in political activities. As a result, these associations became a representative framework for the general public and the middle class, serving as a mechanism for expressing citizens' interests. To the extent that some have referred to them as the "unnamed party" of the middle class (Hourani, 2000).

A study of the history of parliamentary elections in Jordan reveals that all parliamentary councils, except for the 1989 parliament, were marred by electoral fraud. Therefore, in practical terms, the laws passed by these councils do not represent the will of the people, but rather the interests of the bodies that manipulated those elections (Al-Tal, 2017).

In 2012, arrests of activists and changes to the Press and Publications Law occurred. By 2014 and 2016, constitutional amendments expanded the king's powers, undermining the concept of parliamentary government and challenging the democratic transition (Jarrar, 2017a). In 2019, Jordan experienced its longest teachers' strike, lasting 30 days, demanding a 50% salary increase, which disrupted the education of 1.5 million students. In 2020, the Defense Law was enacted in response to COVID-19, granting the Prime Minister powers to impose restrictions on freedom and arrest individuals deemed a threat. The same year, the Jordan Teachers Syndicate was dissolved, with its leaders arrested. In 2021, a committee proposed updates to Jordan's political system, including new election laws and recommendations to enhance youth and women's participation. In

2024, the Partnership and Salvation Party was dissolved, and parliamentary elections were held, with the Islamic Action Front securing 31 seats, including women, Christian, and minority quotas.

Table 5 highlights the presence of five parliamentary councils in Jordan from the Arab Spring era to the present, reflecting the impact of popular protests on the democratic transition. Notably, in 2012, public protests led to the dissolution of the 16th Parliament, early elections, and constitutional amendments. Despite symbolic consultations on selecting the prime minister, these changes demonstrated the political system's response to demands for democratic reform. Additionally, the 2024 parliamentary elections introduced a national party list, granting 41 seats in the House of Representatives, marking a significant shift in Jordan's political landscape.

Table 5. Parliamentary councils during the arab spring era to the present in Jordan

Number	Council Name	Duration	Notes
1	Sixteenth Parliamentary Council (2010-2012)	Two years	Dissolved due to popular protests.
2	Seventeenth Parliamentary Council (2013-2016)	Four years	Completed its constitutional term, and formal consultations were held on selecting the Prime Minister.
3	Eighteenth Parliamentary Council (2016-2020)	Four years	Completed its constitutional term, and the Defense Law was issued due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
4	Nineteenth Parliamentary Council (2020-2024)	Four years	Completed its constitutional term.
5	Twentieth Parliamentary Council (2024-Present)	Ongoing	This is the first council following the approval of the Royal Committee's recommendations for political system reform, including the addition of a national list for political parties, which was allocated 41 seats in the House of Representatives.

Source: al-Qudah (2020).

2. The Form of the Political System in Jordan

The Jordanian Constitution of 1952, along with its amendments, specifies in Article (1) the form of government as follows: "The system of government is parliamentary, hereditary monarchy" (The Jordanian Constitution Law No. 1 of 1952). This means that the form of government in Jordan, according to the constitutional text, is a parliamentary, hereditary monarchy. What is evident from the constitutional text is the prioritization of the parliamentary principle, which is considered the true guarantor of the principle of popular sovereignty. This is explicitly stated in Article (24), paragraph (1), which asserts that "the people are the source of all powers" (The Jordanian Constitution Law No. 1 of 1952).

3. The Democracy Index

according to the reports of the Economist Intelligence Unit from 2010 to 2024, Jordan's political system is classified as authoritarian. Despite the presence of parliamentary elections in Jordan, the political system monopolizes the peaceful transfer of political power by appointing the Prime Minister without referring to the parliament. Table (6) illustrates the Democracy Index in Jordan. It is evident from Table (6) the following:

- i. The classification of Jordan's political system as an authoritarian regime from 2010 to 2023.
- ii. The Democracy Index indicates that the political system has maintained a relatively low score, never exceeding a score of 3 out of 10 throughout the study period. This score falls within the category of authoritarian political regimes, despite the presence of a Jordanian parliament.

Table 6. The democracy index in Jordan

Number	Year	Score (out of 10)	Classification of the Political System in Jordan
1	2010	3.74	Authoritarian
2	2011	3.89	Authoritarian
3	2012	3.76	Authoritarian
4	2013	3.76	Authoritarian
5	2014	3.76	Authoritarian
6	2015	3.86	Authoritarian
7	2016	3.96	Authoritarian
8	2017	3.87	Authoritarian
9	2018	3.93	Authoritarian
10	2019	3.93	Authoritarian
11	2020	3.60	Authoritarian
12	2021	3.50	Authoritarian
13	2022	3.20	Authoritarian
14	2023	3.00	Authoritarian

Source: The table is prepared by the researcher based on the Economist Intelligence Unit (2023)

Discussion

1. Democracy as an Ideal and Process

Democracy is more than a mere set of institutions; it is an ideal that should be maximized to ensure broad-based political participation. Scholars like Tilly (2007) note that institutions like trade unions, though appearing democratic, may not enhance people's democratic power but instead serve the interests of regimes. This distinction is crucial when considering the nature of parliamentary institutions in Jordan. While the country has had parliamentary elections since the Emirate period, the evolution of these institutions has often been constrained by authoritarian impulses that limit true democratic participation. Cunningham (2001) adds that democracy is not a static system but a progressive one, aiming to expand the power and influence of all citizens. This aligns with Jordan's legislative history, where electoral reforms and parliamentary life often have been shaped by external pressures rather than genuine progress toward broader democratic control. Cunningham's model provides a better framework for understanding Jordan's parliamentary evolution than more static models of democracy, such as Aristotle (1999) and de Tocqueville (2002), who defined democracy mainly as rule by the majority, a simpler, often limited view of democratic practices.

2. The Role of Social Structures in Democracy

Harik (2001) introduces an essential critique of Western liberal democratic ideals when applied to Arab societies. Harik emphasizes the role of family values and tribes in Arab communities, which can sustain local forms of governance and conflict resolution, but also hinder the development of broader democratic systems. This is evident in Jordan, where tribal influence and the monarchical system have shaped and often limited the role of parliamentary bodies, despite electoral processes being in place.

3. The Dynamic Relationship Between Democracy, Freedom, and Equality

The debate between freedom and equality in democratic theory is central to understanding Jordan's parliamentary history. Rousseau (2010) argues for the primacy of the general will, suggesting that individual freedom must be subordinated to collective decisions. This view contrasts with the more pragmatic, gradual understanding of democracy in Cunningham's (2001) framework, which seeks to broaden the scope of political power to more citizens. The tension between these ideals has played a critical role in the limited expansion of democratic practices in Jordan. Sorensen (2008) provides a framework for understanding countries like Jordan that lie in the gray zone between full authoritarianism and democracy. These countries often have partially free elections, but elite control, weak states, and a lack of popular mobilization can prevent the consolidation of democracy. Jordan's parliamentary history clearly reflects this pattern, where elections and the House of Representatives have often served as a facade for a largely authoritarian system dominated by royal prerogative.

4. Polyarchy and Political Institutions

Dahl (2005) outlines a set of six essential institutions required for democracy, which include regular elections, freedom of expression, access to diverse information, and inclusive citizenship. However, as O'Donnell (1996) notes, these institutions often face significant constraints in hybrid regimes where elected officials may be subject to vetoes or arbitrary removal by unelected actors, such as monarchies or military elites. In Jordan, the executive branch, especially the monarchy, has often dissolved or manipulated parliamentary sessions to maintain control, undermining the democratic potential of the House of Representatives.

5. Jordan's Parliamentary Evolution

Over the decades, Jordan's parliamentary system has reflected the broader dynamics of political control. From the Emirate period (1921-1945), when legislative councils were often dissolved for opposing the government, to the martial law period (1967-1988), when parliamentary life was effectively sidelined, the House of Representatives has been constrained by the royal family's dominance over political affairs. Even during the political relaxation period (1989-2010), although parliamentary councils were more stable, there were still significant flaws, including election fraud, corrupt electoral laws, and the suppression of dissent.

Conclusion

This research has analyzed the evolution of the Jordanian Parliament and its impact on the democratic process in Jordan from 1921 to 2024, by studying the various historical stages of parliamentary elections in the country. The research is divided into several historical phases, beginning with the Emirate period, through the period of independence, the martial law era, political relaxation, and up to the Arab Spring and beyond. During the Emirate period (1921-1945), legislative councils were established in 1929, marking the beginning of political life in Jordan under the influence of British colonial rule. This period saw the appointment of a foreign army commander, and the formation of legislative councils was closely tied to the Jordanian-British treaty. Political party activity became a central aspect of the national struggle against colonialism, reflecting an early sense of political awareness within Jordanian society.

The period following independence (1946-1967) witnessed the executive branch asserting dominance over the legislative body, dissolving the parliament whenever it opposed the government. This phase also marked the political system's response to popular movements, leading to the adoption of a modern constitution in 1952, a result of widespread protests. Despite attempts to establish a parliamentary government, executive control over the parliament hindered the continuation of democracy, resulting in limited legislative autonomy. From 1967 to 1988, during the period of martial law, political life in Jordan was heavily controlled by security agencies. Political parties and unions were banned, and elected councils were suspended, leading to a significant decline in democratic practices. Human rights violations increased, and the Jordanian parliament faced considerable challenges under the constraints of martial law, limiting its role in governance and decision-making.

The period from 1989 to 2010, known as the political relaxation period, saw relative stability in parliamentary life, even though some councils failed to complete their constitutional terms. Despite

widespread protests and opposition movements, the executive branch continued to dominate the legislature. A peace treaty with Israel was signed during this period, deeply influencing the political situation in Jordan and exacerbating divisions regarding democratic transformation. During the Arab Spring period (2010-2024), parliamentary elections were held alongside popular protests, leading the political system to amend the constitution and introduce changes to some laws. In 2024, the Royal Committee for Political Modernization introduced significant reforms, such as adding a national party list to the parliamentary council. However, despite these amendments, the executive branch remained dominant, and the slow pace of democratic transformation persisted in Jordan's political system.

According to the Jordanian Constitution of 1952, the political system is defined as a "parliamentary hereditary monarchy." However, power is not transferred through the parliament, as the king appoints the Prime Minister without consulting the legislature. The principle that "the people are the source of all powers" emphasizes the importance of legislative authority, though in practice, this principle is often undermined by the executive's control over the political system. The Democracy Index has ranked Jordan as an authoritarian state from 2010 to 2024, with low scores (less than 4 out of 10). While parliamentary elections have been held, the political system remains largely controlled by the executive branch, with the king continuing to appoint the Prime Minister without parliamentary consultation, reflecting the country's weak democratic structure.

This study shows that the path of democratic transformation in Jordan has experienced many fluctuations. While some phases witnessed a response to popular struggle and political change, the continuous dominance of the executive over the legislative and political life in general has hindered the achievement of a real democratic transformation. Through this study, valuable insights can be gained on how to strengthen democracy in the Arab world, focusing on the importance of legislative independence, citizens' rights to active political participation, and the principle of peaceful power transition.

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