

Domestic Reform Still Top Issue for Jordanians; Most Reject New Peace Deals with Israel, but Perceived Value of U.S. Ties Up Sharply

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Brief Analysis

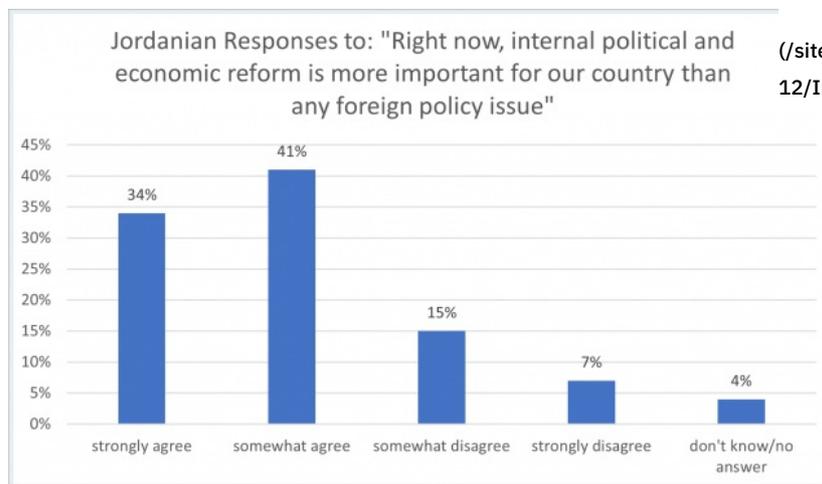
Jordanians expressed their views on Israel, domestic challenges, and the United States in a recent Washington Institute poll.

A new poll commissioned by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy reveals the Jordanian public to be internally focused in a year marred by socioeconomic and political strife. Despite Jordan's initial successes in curbing coronavirus, the latter half of 2020 saw rising infection rates, swelling unemployment, and government crackdowns on dissent. On the heels of Prime Minister Omar Razzaz's resignation in October, as this poll went into the field, the fledgling al-Khasawneh government inherited a sluggish economy and sporadic political unrest. Parliamentary elections in November yielded just a 30% official turnout figure.

On foreign policy, survey findings demonstrate wide dissatisfaction with the recent peace agreements with Israel by the UAE and Bahrain—or with the prospect of increased Jordanian contact with Israelis. Surprisingly, these attitudes are only marginally less negative among the younger Jordanian generation. In contrast, polling revealed a sharp rise in how many value good relations with the United States—almost certainly a product of the recent U.S. election.

Domestic Issues Endure as Principal Issue for Jordan's Public

A solid majority of Jordanians (75%) agree with the statement that “internal political and economic reform is more important for Jordan than any foreign policy issue,” a statistic that has remained virtually unchanged for three years. The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated social discord in Jordan and helped trigger the sharpest contraction to the kingdom's economy in two decades. Unemployment **reached 23.9%** (<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/12/jordan-2021-state-budget-deficit-coronavirus-economic-crisis.html>) in the third quarter—the highest official rate of joblessness in the country's recent history. Meanwhile, business closures as a result of coronavirus lockdowns continue to threaten Jordan's middle class.



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Low Voter Turnout Signals Apathy Toward Parliament, while Protests Gain Popularity

The recent parliamentary elections held on November 10 yielded a voter turnout of just 30%. Though not significantly lower than the 37% turnout for previous parliamentary elections in 2016, consistently low engagement demonstrates the ambivalent relationship Jordanians have with their electoral process. In contrast, when polled before the election, almost half (47%) of Jordanians reported viewing “the anti-corruption street protests in Lebanon, Iraq, and other Arab states” as a positive development—notable support given the low voter turnout.

In the aftermath, some supporters of both losing and winning candidates openly rioted and engaged in acts of violence in defiance of the kingdom’s strict **Defense Orders** (<http://jordantimes.com/news/local/defence-order-no-22-stiffens-penalties-holding-gatherings>) against public gatherings.

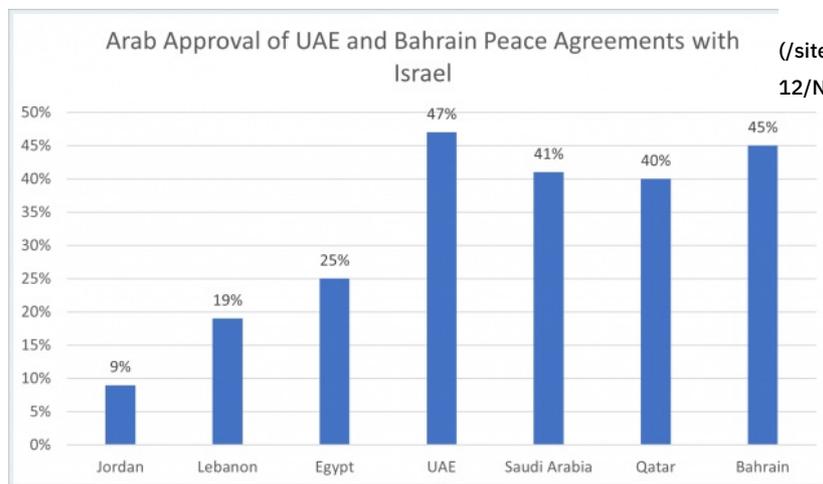
Muslim Brotherhood Appeal Stuck at Just a Quarter of Citizenry

Nevertheless, public support for the Muslim Brotherhood—the main opposition party in Jordan—remains at a steady low. More than three-quarters (77%) of Jordanian respondents expressed at least a “somewhat negative” opinion of the transnational Islamist movement, a similar margin to **last year’s polls** (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/jordans-public-still-focused-on-economic-problems-but-opposition-has-little>). Despite historically amicable ties between Jordan and the Brotherhood, which has been operating legally in the kingdom for 75 years, regional and domestic pressures have led the relationship to gradually deteriorate.

Since the Arab Spring, the Jordanian government’s relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood has been eroding. And fitting with the demands of Saudi Arabia and the UAE—who have lately regarded the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization—Jordan moved to cut back ties with the group earlier this year. On July 16, Jordan’s Court of Cassation officially dissolved the country’s branch of the Muslim Brotherhood for failing “to rectify its legal status under Jordanian law.” The Islamic Action Front, Jordan’s political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, was nevertheless allowed to run in November’s parliamentary election—but lost almost half its seats.

Solid Majority of Jordanians Against Recent Peace Agreements with Israel

When asked about the recent normalization agreements with Israel signed by both the UAE and Bahrain, 85% of Jordanians regard the deals as at least “somewhat negative”—the highest margin of disapproval in any of the seven Arab states polled. This is an important outlier, as Jordan has had a peace treaty in place with Israel for more than a quarter-century.



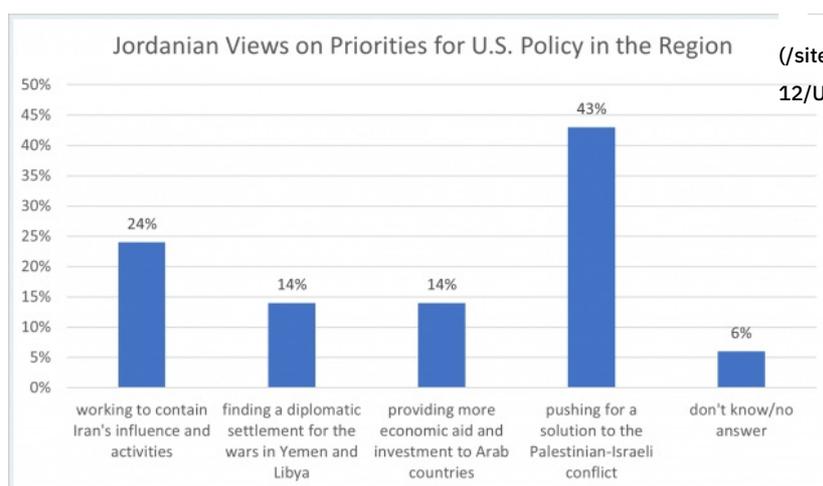
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Only Small Differences Between Age Groups or Country Region

Surprisingly, findings reveal neither generational nor regional attitudinal gaps among the Jordanian public, especially when it comes to Israel. There was little variance between the responses of adults under or over 30 years of age, or among citizens in Jordan’s northern, central (with a majority of Palestinian origin), and southern governorates. On the Abraham Accords with Israel, 80% of Jordanian youth consider the deal to be at least “somewhat negative,” as compared to 89% of those over the age of 30. And whereas attitudes towards the Jewish state are becoming more favorable among youth in the Gulf states, a resounding 89% of young Jordanians continue to disagree—as reported the [June 2020 survey](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/Jordan-Public-Opinion-Middle-East-USA-Israel-Annexation) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/Jordan-Public-Opinion-Middle-East-USA-Israel-Annexation>)—with the statement that “people who want to have business or sports contracts with Israelis should be allowed to do so.”

Palestinian Issue Remains Top Foreign Policy Priority for Jordanians

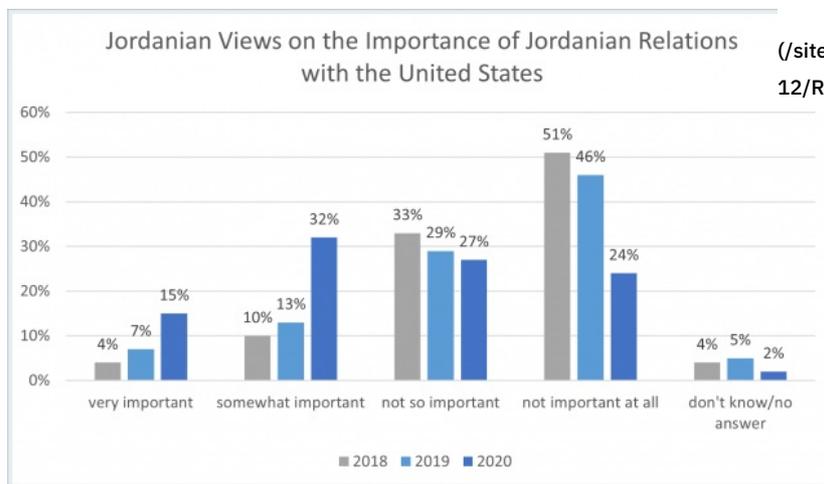
Whereas internal economic and political reform rank above any global concern in the eyes of the Jordanian public, the Palestinian issue remains of primary importance in terms of foreign policy. When asked what the top priority for U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East should be, 43% choose “pushing for a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.” Jordanians believe that finding a solution to the conflict should outrank “working to contain Iran’s influence and activities” (24%), “finding a diplomatic settlement for the wars in Yemen and Libya” (14%), or even “providing more [U.S.] economic aid and investment to Arab countries” (14%).



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Attitudes Toward U.S.-Jordan Ties Improve; Antagonism Toward Iran Persists

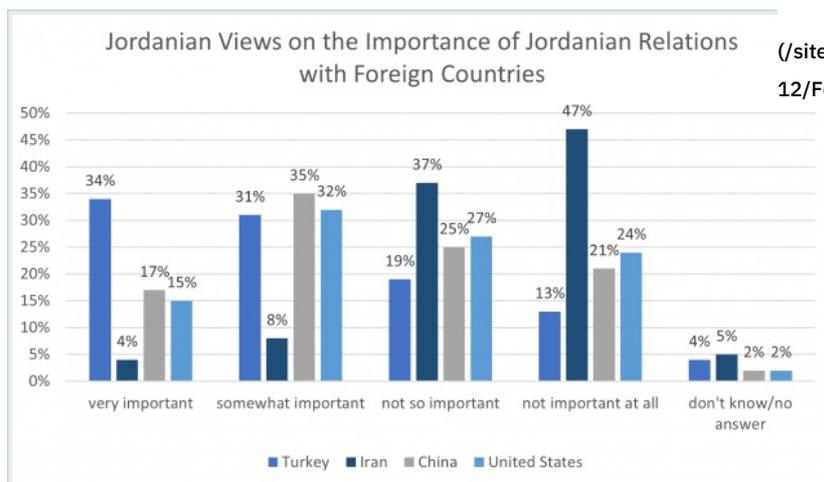
Less than a year ago (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/Jordan-Public-Opinion-Middle-East-USA-Israel-Annexation>), a mere 20% of Jordanian respondents considered it even “somewhat important” for Amman to maintain good ties with Washington, regardless of whether their opinion of the United States was positive or negative. Today, 47% of respondents regard Jordan’s relationship with the United States as important, a significant increase of more than 25 points. This timing strongly suggests that the October/November American election campaign—which corresponded with the fieldwork for the latest survey—has impacted the Jordanian perspective on relations with the United States.



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And on the subject of the recent U.S. election itself, an overwhelming 82% of Jordanians disagreed with the statement that “it would be better for Jordan if Donald Trump is reelected as U.S. president in November.” Thus, the prospect of an incoming Biden administration probably played a role in Jordanian respondents’ more favorable opinion regarding the U.S-Jordan bilateral relationship. King Abdullah II became the first Arab leader to officially speak with President-Elect Biden following his election. Unlike his predecessor, Biden has consistently expressed a more sympathetic viewpoint to Palestinian concerns and to a two-state solution.

In sharp contrast, opposition toward Iran and its regional proxies is decisively high. A full 84% of Jordanians believe it is “not important” for Jordan to maintain good ties with Iran, and an even higher 95% express a negative opinion of its Lebanese client, Hezbollah. What is more, 75% of Jordanians consider the end of the UN arms embargo against Iran to be at least “somewhat negative.”



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Methodological Note

These findings are from a survey conducted October 17- November 9, 2020 by a highly reputable, independent, entirely apolitical regional commercial market research firm among a representative national sample of 1,000 Jordanian citizens. The survey comprised face-to-face interviews with a true random (geographic probability) sample of the total population, yielding credible results fully in line with the highest international professional standards.

The statistical margin of error for such a sample is approximately 3 percent. Comprehensive methodological details, including sampling procedures, quality controls, the complete questionnaire, and other pertinent information are readily available upon request. ❖

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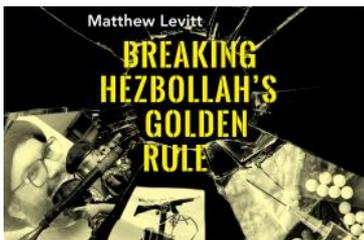
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