

EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE  
**FIELD GUIDE**

**Jordan**



# About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 is the “Culture General” section, which provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the Levant.



Part 2 is the “Culture Specific” section, which describes unique cultural features of Jordanian society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement

other pre-deployment training).

For further information, contact the AFCLC Region Team at [AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil](mailto:AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil) or visit the AFCLC website at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/>.

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# PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

## What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.



Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

## Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to

focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

### **Cultural Domains**

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as “cultural domains” – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use



these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example,

by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

### **Social Behaviors across Cultures**

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

## Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are “people like me” or “people not like me.” Usually, we assume that those in the “like me” category share our perspectives and values.

## 12 Domains of Culture



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This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It

helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.



### Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and

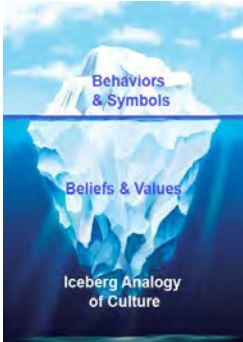
assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



## Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is



being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.



As you travel through the Levant, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

## CULTURAL DOMAINS

### 1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable, or which occurred prior to written language.

The Levant comprises Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian Territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Archaeological finds suggest humans inhabited the region as early as 194,000 years



ago. Around 9000 BC, inhabitants began domesticating animals, cultivating crops, and producing pottery. The region is home to some of the world's earliest continuous settlements, notably Jericho in the present-day West Bank and Byblos (modern-day Jbeil) in present-day Lebanon. These and other early settlements played an important role in the development of regional trade and culture.

The Levant came under the influence of several powerful empires in subsequent centuries, notably the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks. Beginning in the 1st century BC, the region was incorporated into the Roman Empire, and following the split between the Western Roman and Eastern (Byzantine) Empires, was ruled by the Byzantines from their capital at Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul).

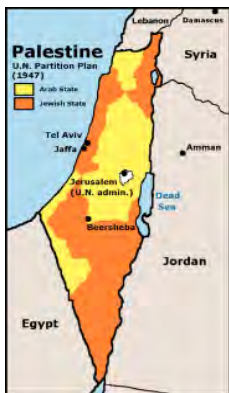
By 640, Muslim warriors from the Arabian Peninsula were expanding into the region. Islamic dynasties then controlled the Levant until the Roman Catholic Church pursued a series of religious crusades to capture territories in the region. However, the Crusaders were soon evicted, and Islamic dynasties from Egypt governed the Levant by the 13th century. In the 16th



century, the region fell to the Ottoman Empire based in present-day Turkey, which ruled the Levant, with some interruptions for the next 400 years.

Following the Ottomans' defeat in World War I, European powers took control of the former Ottoman territories in the Levant, with France occupying Syria and Lebanon and Britain occupying Jordan and Palestine. Concurrently, the British committed to establishing a "Jewish homeland" in Palestine. In the 1940s, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria gained independence (though Syria would briefly unite with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic from 1958-61). During World War II, British Palestine's Jewish population grew as many European Jews fled persecution.

In 1947, the United Nations (UN) voted to partition British Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, prompting conflict between Zionists (advocate development and protection of a Jewish nation in Palestine) and Palestinian Arabs. When Britain withdrew from the area and Israel declared independence as a Jewish state in 1948, further violence erupted with Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq declaring war against Israel. At the conflict's end in mid-1949, Israel had gained territory beyond



the 1947 UN plan, and Jordan occupied the West Bank and Egypt the Gaza Strip. Both of these territories had been allocated to the unrealized Palestinian Arab state. Further, the fighting caused some 700,000 Palestinians to flee Israel. Forbidden from returning, most settled in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Jordan.

After the 1967 war with Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, Israel gained control over additional territories, including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and the Syrian Golan Heights. Conflict continued through the 1970s, despite various peace talks and attempts to

establish a self-governing authority for the Palestinians, who still

sought their own state. In 1970, civil war erupted in Jordan between the Jordanian army and Palestinian guerillas supported by Syria. Between 1975-90, Lebanon also endured a devastating civil war in which Palestinian groups, Syria, and Israel played a large role. In 1988, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO – an umbrella organization of the various Palestinian activist groups) proclaimed the founding of the State of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, though many countries refused to recognize it, and Israel continued to build settlements in territories claimed by the PLO. In the 1990s, a



series of agreements transferred authority over some areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip from Israel to the newly-created Palestinian Authority (PA), though Israel continued to promote settlement in disputed areas.

In 2006, a 34-day war erupted between the Lebanese militia Hezbollah and Israel. A year later, Hamas, a militant Islamist group, forcibly took control of the Gaza Strip, intensifying tensions between the PA and Israel. In 2011, civil war erupted in Syria, triggering violence throughout the Levant. As of mid-2024, the Levant continues to face civil war, territorial disputes, and the destabilizing activities of non-state actors.

## 2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community.

Jordan is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy with its King holding ultimate executive, judicial, and legislative powers. Lebanon is a parliamentary republic with a unique “confessional” structure which divides political power among 18 Christian and Muslim sects. A presidential republic, Syria has been ruled by the al-Assad family for over 50 years. The PA governs the

Palestinian Territories through an elected President (presently, also chairman of the PLO) and legislative council and is housed in the West Bank. While Israel lacks a formal constitution, a set of “Basic Laws” defines it as a parliamentary democracy.

Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria are among 140 countries that now recognize the State of Palestine, though the US and Israel do not. Palestine is not a member of the UN but holds observer status. As of January 2024, the Gaza Strip remains contested, with the Palestinian militant group Hamas presently controlling it. Neither Lebanon nor Syria formally recognizes Israel. Instead, they consider themselves in a state of war with Israel, which occupies parts of their territories. In mid-2020, the PA announced it would end all security, economic, and political ties with Israel.



Regional security threats and mutual distrust motivate significant military posturing in the Levant. The ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, heightened by Hamas' occupation of the

Gaza Strip, and the Syrian Civil War have also significantly increased tensions. Israel and Jordan are key US allies, but the PA has cut most diplomatic contact with the US since 2017

While the citizens of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian Territories are predominantly Arabs, other groups, notably Armenians and Kurds, are present. Some three-fourths of Israelis are Jews of a variety of ethnicities. The Levantine territories host large numbers of refugees and displaced persons. As of 2023, Lebanon and Jordan together host almost 1.45 million refugees from Syria, while as of 2023, an estimated 6.6 million Palestinians live in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank.

### 3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also

create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

The Levant is the birthplace of both Judaism and Christianity. Today, Jews, Christians, and Muslims consider many Levantine sites sacred. For example, the Temple Mount, located in Jerusalem's Old City, is Judaism's holiest and Islam's third holiest site, while also holding significance for Christians.



Since its arrival in the 7th century, Islam has been a defining factor in shaping regional cultures and societies. Today, Syrians, Jordanians, and Palestinians are predominantly Muslim, though some are Christian. While Lebanon has a majority Muslim population, some one-third are Christian. As the self-proclaimed “Nation State of the Jewish People,” Israel has a predominantly Jewish population.

Religious affiliation continues to be an important marker of identity in the region. While the Levantine governments generally recognize religious freedom, discrimination and intolerance persist, especially towards converts from Islam and atheists. Across the region, religious identity and political affiliation tend to be linked, so religious discrimination often has political underpinnings.

#### 4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called “fictive kin”).

Family life and relationships are fundamental elements of Levantine society. Regional inhabitants maintain strong connections with both immediate and extended family members, supporting them emotionally and financially, while providing physical care for elderly or ailing kin if needed. While residence

patterns differ somewhat across the region, multiple generations often reside together in one household or live in close proximity.

The urbanization of Levantine society has changed family life in recent years. As of 2023, over three-fourths of inhabitants of Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories live in urban areas compared to around 57% in Syria. As both men and women take advantage of the enhanced educational and employment opportunities available in urban areas, family structures have become more diverse. Moreover, traditional



family dynamics have been disrupted in recent years by regional conflicts, especially in Syria.

Historically, marriage was an arranged union intended to bring both families social and economic

advantages. Although arranged marriages are still common across the region, many regional residents now choose their own spouses, particularly in urban areas. None of the Levantine governments performs civil marriages, relying instead on religious authorities to officiate ceremonies. While divorce was traditionally uncommon, rates have generally increased in recent years. Polygyny, the practice of a man having multiple wives, is legal for some Muslim inhabitants of the Levant.

## 5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The Levant's cultures and religions traditionally privilege the male's role as leader and provider. For example, Islamic law favors men over women in inheritance and other family matters. While most of the region's inhabitants continue to adhere to traditional gender roles – men as breadwinners and guardians and women as mothers and wives – recent decades have seen

some changes. In Syria, for example, gender roles have somewhat shifted since the start of the civil war.

While literacy rates for women have increased in recent decades, female participation in education varies. In 2021, 49% of Israeli women had completed tertiary compared to 43% in the Palestinian Territories. Generally, Levantine women face challenges to attaining education and are often encouraged to pursue traditional “female” disciplines such as education and healthcare.

While women are involved in politics across the region, they are generally less likely to participate than men, and overall, the number of women serving in elected offices remains relatively low. While Israel elected Golda Meir as its first female Prime Minister in 1969, and a few women serve as ministers across the Levant’s Arab states, Hamas authorities in the Gaza Strip typically exclude women from formal leadership positions.

Historically, Levantine women rarely worked outside the home, and female workforce participation varies across the region today. While some 60% of Israeli women worked outside the home in 2022, just 17% of Syrian and 15% of Jordanian women did – some of the world’s lowest rates. Working women in the region often face a pay gap and discrimination. Some Levantine women experience other



barriers to their full participation in society. For example, Jordan’s traditional male guardianship system significantly limits women’s freedoms, and Syrian law permits certain male relatives to place travel bans on female family members.

Same-sex relations in Lebanon, Syria, and the Gaza Strip are criminalized. Discrimination against LGBTQ individuals is widespread throughout the region, even where same-sex activities are technically legal, namely Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank.

## 6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

Arabic is the official language of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian Territories and the Levant's most widely spoken language. Most residents regularly use two Arabic varieties – Modern Standard Arabic in school, the media, and in official



government proceedings and Levantine Arabic for everyday communication. Some Levantine residents speak other languages and dialects. For example, inhabitants of northeastern Syria tend to speak Kurdish, and Syrians in other regions speak other

Arabic dialects, such as Mesopotamian, Najdi, and Bewadi Arabic. Hebrew is the predominant and official language of Israel, with Arabic holding “special” status after losing its official status in 2018. Across the region, English and French also are spoken widely.

Generally, the region's residents demonstrate respect, generosity, and candor in their communication practices. In most of the Levant, communications reflect high levels of emotion and engagement, though some residents refrain from displaying emotions around strangers or in public. Residents tend to share information about themselves and often expect foreign nationals to do the same. Gestures are common when speaking, particularly if the speaker is interested in the topic.

## 7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized

systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Prior to the early 20th century, religious affiliation largely dictated educational opportunities, with Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities operating their own schools during the Ottoman period. Following World War I, the British and French imposed European-style education throughout the region, emphasizing French and English language instruction but largely neglecting the development of the educational system as a whole.

After their independence, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Israel developed their own educational structures and curricula at different rates. In 1946, Lebanese reforms replaced French with Arabic as the primary language of instruction in public schools.

Meanwhile, the Jewish community in British Palestine created its own Hebrew educational system, and after its 1948 independence, Israel expanded upon this framework. In 1957, Syria and Jordan replaced European



curricula with their own educational programs. The Palestinian Territories relied on foreign curricula until the 1990s, when the authorities began developing their own learning materials.

While the adult literacy rate in Syria was just 86% in 2015, the rate is over 95% throughout the rest of the Levant. As of 2021, enrollment rates at the primary and secondary levels were nearly 95% universal in Israel. By contrast, just 76% and 46% of children enrolled at those levels in Jordan and Syria respectively. Public investment in education varies across the region, ranging from 7% of GDP in 2021 in Israel to 5% in the Palestinian Territories and 2% in Lebanon. Due to years of conflict, education in Syria has been severely disrupted with some two million children out of school and one-third of schools destroyed or occupied. International organizations operate schools for displaced and refugee children across the Levant.



## 8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. By contrast, in the Levant, establishing and maintaining relationships often takes



precedence over meeting deadlines, punctuality, or accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner. While regional residents typically agree in advance on scheduled start times, meetings frequently begin late. An exception is Israel, where inhabitants typically

prefer to work quickly and efficiently.

Some Levantines interact with each other in different ways than Americans are used to. For example, in many Muslim and Orthodox Jewish communities, unrelated women and men seldom interact, and when they do, it is typically in group settings. Concepts of personal space also differ from those in the US. For example, many Levantine residents of the same sex commonly sit and stand closer to each other and tend to touch more often during conversations than Westerners.

The region's communities use a variety of calendars, notably Islamic, Western (Gregorian), Julian, and Hebrew ones. Because Friday is considered a holy day in Islam, most of the region observes a Saturday- or Sunday-Thursday workweek. Israelis also observe a Sunday-Thursday workweek, as Saturday is considered a holy day in Judaism. By contrast, in Lebanon, the workweek generally runs Monday-Friday.

## 9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Levantine art, architecture, dance, music, poetry, and theater reflect the region's rich history and modern global trends.

Across the Levant, and particularly in urban areas, Western-style clothing is common, though some Levantines prefer long,

loose-fitting garments and other traditional attire. Some religious groups have their own traditional clothing and headgear.

Levantine music and dance styles express topics like nature, rural life, love, history, and current events. Both traditional and modern forms of music are popular, ranging from Arab folk songs accompanied by the **oud** (a stringed, pear-shaped instrument) to contemporary, upbeat Lebanese and Israeli pop.

A popular traditional dance found throughout the Levant is the **dabke** (a folk dance performed in circles or lines, with different versions defined by the speed and rhythm of the steps).



Many Levantine artists historically favored

geometric designs and patterns to depict plants, flowers, and animals on buildings, jewelry, and household items. Regional inhabitants today create various traditional handicrafts and pieces of folk art that reflect the region's rich heritage and often incorporate religious motifs. Common handicrafts include pottery, embroidery, ceramics, and calligraphy. Soccer is the most widely followed sport in the region. Other popular sports include basketball, weightlifting, handball, and swimming.

## 10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

While cuisine varies across the region, residents tend to rely on many of the same staple ingredients such as chickpeas and other beans, lemons, onions, and garlic. Common dishes include mutton and chicken prepared with a variety of spice mixtures such as **za'atar** (made of sumac, oregano, thyme, and sesame seeds) and **bokharat** (a seven-spice powder). Fruits, yogurt, various salads, bread, and rice are common accompaniments to meals. Popular drinks include tea, often

sweetened and flavored with mint or sage, and a variety of fruit juices. Neither observant Muslims nor Jews in the Levant consume pork. Observant Muslims also refrain from consuming alcohol and prepare food using halal guidelines – allowed by Islamic law.

Health in most of the region has improved in recent decades as evidenced by decreased infant mortality rates and longer life expectancies. Most residents of the Levant have access to quality healthcare that is generally subsidized by governments. Nevertheless, years of conflict have created significant challenges to the delivery of healthcare in some areas. For example, around half of Syrian hospitals have closed, and two-



thirds of Syrian medical personnel have fled since the civil war began in 2011. Consequently, specialized physical and psychological care is unavailable. Meanwhile, Jordan and Lebanon struggle with rising healthcare costs

generated by the influx of Syrian refugees.

Healthcare systems face several other challenges such as long wait times at health facilities and increasing out-of-pocket expenses. Further, the quality of care tends to vary between urban and rural areas, where clinics are often understaffed and equipped with outdated equipment. Noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory disease now cause more than 70% of all deaths in Israel and Syria, whereas communicable diseases injuries are more prevalent throughout the remainder of the Levant.

## 11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

Prior to the 20th century, the Levantine territories maintained largely agrarian and trade-based economies. Even after most of the region declared independence, conflict and political instability largely hampered significant economic development. The territories subsequently followed different strategies to stimulate economic growth. For example, in the 1960s, Syria implemented socialist economic policies with extensive government involvement, while Lebanon prioritized the growth of its private sector. In the 1980s-90s, Israel implemented market-oriented reforms and its economy began expanding significantly, while the other Levantine economies experienced less impressive growth.



Today, the region's economies are predominantly services oriented. As of 2022, Israel's GDP per capita, the Levant's highest, is more than 15 times that of the Palestinian Territories. Israel, a technologically advanced economy, controls much of the Palestinian Territories' economy, limiting the movement of people and goods. Unemployment rates vary widely, ranging from 26% in the Palestinian Territories to 18% in Jordan, 10% in Syria, 13% in Lebanon, and 4% in Israel as of 2022. As many residents work informal jobs, the formal unemployment rate is often much higher. In both Jordan and Lebanon, public dissatisfaction with worsening economic conditions has repeatedly led to anti-government protests. Meanwhile, Syria's economy virtually collapsed after the 2011 start of the civil war, shrinking by about 80% between 2011-16. As of 2023, experts predict a 2.8% growth in the region's GDP, less than that of 2021-22 and due in part to the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian territories.

The region maintains trade relationships with other Middle Eastern countries, several Asian nations, and the US. For example, Syria depends largely on imports from Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and China, while Jordan primarily relies on imports from China, Saudi Arabia, and the US.

## 12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology.

Israel has a modern and robust transportation network, while Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, and Lebanon lack transport infrastructure and public transportation systems. In 2017, the Lebanese government estimated that only 15% of the country's main roads were in good condition. While Syria once had an advanced transportation network, the civil war has caused extensive damage, destroying or damaging some 44% of roads in Aleppo. By contrast, the Jordanian government invested some \$1.7 billion between 2014-19 in transportation projects.



Information technology is spreading rapidly throughout the Levant. Between 2000-21, Internet usage grew from 0.1-21% of population to 75-90%. An exception is Syria, where just 36% of

population were Internet users in 2021. Cell phones are popular – the Levant reports 68-152 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people as of 2022. While Israel places few restrictions on press freedoms, journalists and social media users in Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinian Territories tend to face significant restrictions.

Most of the region faces significant challenges in meeting growing energy needs. With limited resources of their own, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinian Territories import most of their required energy. Syria, once a net oil exporter, has imported much of its required oil since 2011. By contrast, Israel has recently become a natural gas exporter.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Levantine society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Jordan.

## PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

### 1. HISTORY AND MYTH

#### Overview

Located along the eastern Mediterranean in an area that has been at the crossroads of cultures, peoples, languages, and religions for millennia, Jordan first achieved independence in 1946. Since then, the country has played a significant role in Middle Eastern politics. Its powerful royal family has become famous for building strong ties with Western powers, while providing a home for waves of refugees from across the region.

#### Early History

Archeological evidence indicates that early humans inhabited present-day Jordan as early as 250,000 years ago. Around 8000 BC, semi-nomadic peoples founded some of the world's earliest settlements in Jordanian territory. Around 6000, communities



near Ain Ghazal and Teleilat el Ghassul in present-day northwestern Jordan began developing distinctive artistic traditions, crafting some of the world's earliest sculptures and adopting various religious practices (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

#### The Bronze Age

Changes in the Middle East's climate around 4000 BC made the region largely infertile, leading to a decline in agriculture. Copper mining became a major commercial activity in the region (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*), and by 3200, local inhabitants began to

mix copper and tin to create bronze, a stronger metal suited for creating tools and weapons. Scholars classify the following 2,000 years as the Bronze Age, during which the inhabitants of present-day Jordan, including the semi-nomadic Amorite people, engaged in trade with their more powerful neighbors, like

the Ancient Egyptians to the southwest. Records indicate that increased trade coincided with warfare and political fragmentation, as new groups moved into the Levant (the region comprised of present-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian Territories) between 1500-1200 BC, destabilizing existing power structures.

### **Ammon, Moab, and Edom**

Amidst regional upheaval, three distinct kingdoms emerged in present-day Jordan around 1200: Ammon to the north (based around present-day Amman, Jordan's capital), Moab in central Jordan, and Edom to the south. Around 1000, the unification of Israelite tribes into the powerful Kingdom of Israel to the west of the Jordan River threatened these entities. Israeli Kings David and Solomon frequently attacked Jordanian settlements to expand their influence, massacring most of Edom's male population, pressing the residents of Ammon into forced labor, and subduing Moab as a vassal (secondary to a dominant) state.

In response, the three kingdoms unified around 852. Soon after, the Jordanian kingdoms took advantage of political fragmentation in the Kingdom of Israel to assert their military supremacy and establish a short-lived period of independent rule.



### **Eastern Invasions and Nabateans**

Around 780 BC, the powerful Assyrian Empire (based in present-day Iraq and Turkey) began to expand into the Levant, capturing much of present-day Jordan. The Assyrian Empire collapsed around 612, and control of the region passed to their rivals in Babylon (based in present-day Iraq). Nevertheless, the Persian Achaemenids (based in present-day Iran) soon overran Babylon and took control of the Levant.

Under Persian control, notable demographic shifts affected the eastern Levant. In addition to Persian educational and linguistic influence, the Nabateans, a tribe of semi-nomadic traders from the Arabian Desert, moved north and displaced the Edomites. The Nabateans grew wealthy and powerful, controlling lucrative

trade routes between the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula. Around 300 BC, they undertook largescale construction projects in their capital city of Petra, which expanded and flourished in

the following centuries. The remains of these monuments endure as important cultural sites.



### **Greek Invasions**

As Persian rulers lost control of their vast territory, Alexander the Great of Macedonia

expanded eastward, taking the Levant in 333 BC. Following his 323 death, Alexander's generals divided his empire, with the Levant eventually going to the Seleucids, a Greek dynasty based in present-day Syria and Turkey.

Over time, Greek language and culture began to spread across the region, particularly among the educated elite. The Seleucids renamed several cities in Jordan – for example, Ammon became Philadelphia – highlighting the cultural hold that Greek rulers had in regional urban centers. However, Seleucid military defeats and a Jewish uprising in 167 in nearby Jerusalem (present-day Israel's capital) began to diminish Greek regional dominance. The Nabateans filled the power vacuum, expanding northward into Syria and further consolidating control over trade routes.

### **Roman Rule**

The Romans, who had begun to build their empire in central Italy around 500, quickly expanded past the Italian Peninsula starting in 264. In 63 BC, the Romans conquered present-day Jordan, with much of the region falling under the control of the Decapolis, a league of 10 Greek cities that remained independent yet paid taxes to the Roman Empire. The Romans also subdued the Nabateans, enlisting them as a subordinate buffer state between their Levantine holdings and Arab tribes to the southeast.

Jordan flourished under Roman control and became increasingly integrated into the Empire with the construction of new Roman settlements and roads. In 106 AD, the Roman Empire annexed Nabatean territories before later reorganizing much of Jordan into the province of Arabia Petraea.



In 285 AD, the Roman Emperor reorganized his holdings into western and eastern divisions, and in 380, adopted Christianity as the Empire's official religion. Some 15 years later, the split between the western Roman and Eastern (Byzantine) Empires became permanent, with the Byzantines ruling the Levant from their capital at Constantinople (present-day Istanbul, Turkey). The following 300 years were marked by conflict between the Byzantines and Persians, which weakened the Byzantines' hold over the region. Over time, the Byzantine emperors depended on allied Arab tribes to fight on their behalf.

### Arab Rule

Meanwhile, a new religion, Islam, was gaining converts in the Arabian Peninsula (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Soon, Muslim Arab warriors sought expansion into the eastern Mediterranean, defeating the Byzantines in the decisive Battle of Yarmouk in 636 and capturing most of the Levant. They also renamed Philadelphia as Amman around this time. In subsequent centuries, rival Islamic dynasties competed for control of the **Ummah** (community of Muslim believers – see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*).



Ruling from Damascus (present-day Syria's capital), the Sunni Umayyad dynasty took control in 661. Umayyad rulers built a series of palaces, hunting lodges, and meeting houses in the Jordanian desert, while rebuilding former Roman forts to control trade routes. Close proximity to Damascus resulted in a cultural blossoming that accelerated the spread of Arabic culture and the Arabic language supplanting Greek and Aramaic (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*).

However, internal conflict, economic decline, and a devastating earthquake in 749 soon weakened the Umayyads' hold over Jordan. In 750, the Sunni Abbasid dynasty, which ruled from Baghdad (present-day capital of Iraq), overthrew the Umayyads. Abbasid control was fragile, and Jordan's distance from the new capital caused reduced trade and an economic downturn that

resulted in many residents adopting nomadic Bedouin customs (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*). Around the late 10th century, the Shi'a Fatimid dynasty based in Egypt took control of the region.



### **The Crusader States**

Muslim control of Jerusalem concerned the Byzantines and their brethren in Rome. In 1095, the Pope, leader of the Roman Catholic Church, declared a series of religious crusades to capture

territories in the Levant. European Crusaders succeeded in capturing large swaths of coastal territories and founded a series of kingdoms in the region, the most powerful of which was the Kingdom of Jerusalem, established in 1100. Shortly after, the Crusaders established a vassal kingdom, the Lordship of Oultrejordain, to the east of the Jordan River. The Lordship had largely unfixed borders and was governed from a series of castles, notably Montreal and Kerak, which controlled trade and served as a buffer from military campaigns waged by a rising power to the north, the Seljuk Turks.

The strength of Crusader powers in the region was weakened by political infighting and began to decline quickly. The Seljuk Turks exploited this growing weakness and began repeated attempts to expel European forces from the Levant. They founded the Ayyubid dynasty in Cairo (present-day Egypt's capital) in 1171 to consolidate power across the region. In 1188, Ayyubid forces overran Montreal and Kerak, dealing a heavy blow to Crusader influence in Jordan.

### **Egyptian Mamluk Rule**

The Ayyubids' hold on the region was short-lived. In 1250, they fell to a rebellion which led to the establishment of the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt. In 1260, the Mamluks repelled Mongol invaders from Central Asia, who were seeking to expand westward. These victories gave the Mamluks the capacity to conquer the last European strongholds in the region and credibility as defenders of Islam. The Mamluks subsequently consolidated their control of the Levant.

While Mamluk control brought increased wealth to much of the region, present-day Jordan was largely unaffected. Like during the previous Abbasid period, much of the economic activity in the region centered around trade controlled by Bedouin tribes. However, this period was largely free of foreign intervention, despite periodic military incursions from Mongol warriors.

### Ottoman Rule

Meanwhile, to the north, the Byzantine Empire had been steadily weakening. By the mid-14th century, the Ottoman Turks were the region's rising power, and in 1453, they besieged and captured the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, ending the Byzantine Empire. In 1516, Ottoman Sultan Selim I defeated the Mamluks and incorporated the Levant into his growing empire, a victory that placed the region under Ottoman control for the next 400 years. However, the territory of Jordan remained a rural hinterland connecting more important provinces.

The Levant initially benefitted from its incorporation into the Ottoman Empire, as economic development and trade increased during the 16th century. Ottoman control weakened in the 17th and 18th centuries, when local vassals did little more than collect taxes for the Sultan. In 1831, the Egyptian Governor Muhammad Ali and his son Ismail Pasha began a



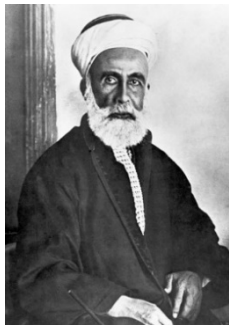
decade-long effort to expand their influence in the region. While Egyptian forces destroyed various Jordanian villages, Great Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia intervened and forced Ali to retreat in 1840, once again transferring control of the region to the Ottomans.

**The *Tanzimât*:** To reassert their power, Ottoman authorities launched the *Tanzimât* ("reorganization") in 1839, which sought to modernize the Sultan's vast holdings. These reforms lasted several decades and affected Jordan's population and physical infrastructure. In the late 19th century, the Ottomans resettled large communities of Muslim Circassians and Chechens from

the Russian Empire in present-day Syria and Jordan, increasing ethnic diversity in the region (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*). The Ottomans also completed the construction of the Hejaz Railway in 1909, which linked Damascus and Medina (in present-day Saudi Arabia), facilitating trade and travel in the Levant and Arabian Desert. Towards the end of the *Tanzimât*, the region experienced a blossoming of Arab nationalism, with newspapers, intellectuals, and artists highlighting local Arab culture and distancing themselves from the Turkish Ottomans.

### World War I (WWI)

In 1914, WWI broke out between the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire) and the Allies (the US, Britain, France, and Russia, among others). During the war, the British made conflicting diplomatic offers to potential allies with interests in the rapidly disintegrating



Ottoman Empire. To some Arab leaders, the British favored the establishment of sovereign Arab states in the Levant, if the local population opposed their Ottoman rulers during the war.

In 1915, Hussein bin Ali, the **Sharif** (custodian) of the holy city of Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia, see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*), was one of the Arab leaders who joined the war effort. Ali rebelled against the Ottomans during the 1916 Arab

Revolt, an uprising of Arabs against the Ottomans in present-day Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria. He relied on his sons Faisal and Abdullah to gain control of much of the Levant and captured Amman in 1918 before the war's end that year.

### Attempts at Independence

Concluded before the war's end, the British-French Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 anticipated the Ottomans' defeat and divided certain Ottoman territories between the two powers, with the southern Levant assigned to Britain. Arab leaders denounced the move, instead proclaiming Faisal as the region's Hashemite (the royal dynasty to which Hussein bin Ali's family belonged)

King of the Arab Kingdom of Syria, which included present-day Jordan. In 1920, French forces expelled Faisal, angering the Hashemites, who threatened to attack the European protectorates in the Levant. To diffuse the situation, the British agreed to place Faisal as King of Iraq and Abdullah as *Emir* (monarch) of Transjordan (the region in the British Mandate for Palestine to the east of the Jordan River in present-day Jordan).

### Emirate of Transjordan

While the British granted Abdullah sovereignty as Transjordan's *Emir* in 1921, they had the final say on foreign, financial, and military matters. Under the Anglo-Transjordanian Treaty of 1923, Abdullah weakened British oversight of Transjordan and accepted that the country would prepare for full independence under the supervision



of the British High Commissioner based in Jerusalem. As part of the agreement, the British closed Transjordan to Jewish immigration to maintain good relations with Abdullah, despite encouraging Jewish settlement in their other Levantine holdings. The British-imposed borders would become the boundary between Jordan and Israel some 2 decades later.

Over the subsequent decades, the British transferred power to Abdullah. In 1928, the *Emir* issued a constitution that allowed for the creation of a legislative assembly to consolidate different Bedouin tribes into a cohesive political entity. Likewise, with British assistance, Abdullah founded the Arab Legion, armed forces that cemented royal rule over the newly defined country.

**World War II (WWII):** Transjordan remained under British supervision during WWII, fought between the Axis powers (Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan) and the Allies (Britain, France, the US, and the Soviet Union, among others). After France fell to Germany in 1940, Syria briefly came under the control of France's pro-Nazi Vichy government. Arab Legion forces, in coordination with Free French and British troops, played a key role in overthrowing the pro-Vichy administration in 1941. Upon

the war's end in 1945, Transjordan became a founding member of the Arab League (see p. 8 of *Political and Social Relations*).

## Independence

With little political will to stay in the Levant after WWII, the British granted Transjordan full independence on March 22, 1946, under a new Anglo-Transjordanian Treaty. Shortly thereafter, Transjordan's legislative assembly proclaimed Abdullah as King and changed the country's name to the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan.



## The 1948 Arab-Israeli War

In 1947, the United Nations (UN) voted to partition the British Mandate for Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. Clashes between Jews and Arabs in Palestine erupted immediately. When the British

withdrew, and the Jewish State of Israel declared independence in mid-1948, war broke out. As an Arab League member, Transjordan joined Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria in declaring war on Israel.

Despite publicly siding with the Arab League, King Abdullah I had political ambitions for the territory that the UN had allocated for a Palestinian state. A long-running personal rivalry with Palestinian leaders, political connections with Jewish settlers, and a desire for territorial expansion made the monarch wary of an independent Palestinian entity on the border of his kingdom.

While Israel repelled its neighbors, Transjordan took the territory to the west of the Jordan River, including East Jerusalem, known as the West Bank. With these territorial gains came over half a million Arab Palestinian refugees, who fled their homes, often by force, in territory that had fallen to Israeli control in what Palestinians term the **nakba** (catastrophe). Control of large swathes of Palestinian land, including important religious sites in Jerusalem, and the absorption of thousands of Palestinians made Jordan a key player in the Arab-Israeli conflict for the following decades (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*).

## Political Transitions

In a 1949 legislative act, the country simplified its name to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which it carries today (see p. 1 of *Political and Social Relations*). In 1950, King Abdullah annexed the land it had captured in 1948 as part of Jordan. The decision was highly controversial, and few countries recognized it. Many in the Arab world, particularly Palestinian refugees, saw the illegal annexation as an affront to the future of a Palestinian state. In 1951, amidst these increased tensions, a Palestinian nationalist assassinated King Abdullah I at the al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem.

After a brief reign, Jordan's Parliament declared King Abdullah's eldest son Talal unfit to rule. A regency council governed Jordan until 1953, when Talal's eldest son Hussein came of age and succeeded his father as King Hussein. The young King led Jordan through turbulent foreign crises early in his reign, seeking to maintain his family's control of the country. Maintaining power proved difficult, as



members of the Jordanian Armed Forces attempted a coup in 1957. To assert control, Hussein purged the legislature of Jordanian and Palestinian Arab nationalists and abolished political parties, establishing autocratic rule.

Meanwhile, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, a political foe of the Hashemites, gained popularity across the Middle East. King Hussein viewed Nasser as a political threat. After a failed attempt to unify with the Iraqi Hashemites in 1958, Jordan turned to Britain and the US for financial and military support. Western countries, eager to strengthen a regional ally, came to Hussein's aid. The large influx of foreign assistance secured Jordan's position in the region and cemented Hussein's rule as King.

## The Six-Day War

In 1965-66, repeated raids on Israel by Palestinian groups like the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO, a political group led

by Yasser Arafat claiming to represent the Palestinian people) led to increased regional tensions. Hussein feared that Syria and Egypt would support renewed coup attempts in Jordan should it not sign a defense pact with them, forcing him to join both countries in declaring war on Israel in 1967. The war proved catastrophic for Jordan, as Israeli forces took control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, depriving the country of fertile land, key religious sites, and sparking another wave of Palestinian refugees in Jordan.



### **Internal Strife**

Following Jordan's defeat in the Six-Day War, many in Jordan's large Palestinian community became increasingly militant in their attempts to secure a Palestinian state. King Hussein,

who maintained secret relations with Israel and depended on foreign aid from Israel's allies, was at odds with Palestinian nationalists such as Arafat, who had begun to openly challenge Hussein's rule. In 1970, tensions came to a head after a Palestinian group hijacked and bombed multiple foreign airliners outside Amman, prompting Hussein to declare martial law. Fighting erupted nationwide, and Jordan turned to US and British military assistance to suppress the uprising. While most of the violence ended within weeks, the threat to the monarchy remained, and in 1971, Hussein formally expelled the PLO.

### **The Palestinian Question**

The loss of the West Bank was a blow to Jordan's regional ambitions. In 1974, the Arab League recognized the PLO instead of Jordan as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, weakening Hashemite claims over territory west of the Jordan River. In response, Hussein declared that the West Bank and Jordan would remain separate entities, fearing a Jordanian-Palestinian union would threaten the monarchy.

Nevertheless, fears of a Palestinian takeover increased in 1977, when Israel elected a right-wing nationalist party that



encouraged the illegal settlement of Israelis in the West Bank. As a result, Hussein cut off secret diplomatic talks with Israel, fearing it would designate Jordan as a homeland for Palestinians and transfer Israel's Arab minority to his domain, once again threatening his rule by creating a Palestinian majority in Jordan.

To improve the Hashemites' standing among Palestinians, in 1985, Hussein and the PLO opened an unprecedented dialogue, with the King hoping Arafat would consent to an



autonomous Palestinian entity under Jordanian sovereignty. Although talks rapidly collapsed, in 1986, Hussein included the West Bank in Jordan's economic development plan and increased its representation in Parliament. He also resumed limited diplomatic talks with Israel, hoping to establish a comprehensive peace plan for the West Bank that would be advantageous to Jordan.

Nevertheless, in 1987, Palestinians revolted against Israel in an *intifada* ("shaking off"), with confrontations rapidly growing in violence and intensity. Hussein attempted to voice support for the revolt and provided financial assistance to the families of those who died in the conflict. Regardless, many Palestinians denounced Hussein's efforts to represent them, leading the King to cancel his economic development plan for the West Bank.

Given the unstable situation and renewed Arab League support for the PLO, Jordan renounced all its claims to the West Bank in 1988. Hussein also fired West Bank civil servants, dissolved the legislature that had Palestinian representation, and converted West Bank passports into temporary travel documents, effectively rendering many Palestinians stateless (see p. 12-13 of *Political and Social Relations*).

### End of Hussein's Reign

From 1990-91, Jordan supported Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in the Gulf War (also known as the Persian Gulf War). Although the conflict resulted in an economic blockade of Jordan and tensions

with the US and Arab Gulf States (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*), Hussein recovered Jordan's diplomatic position quickly. In 1994, Jordan and Israel normalized their relations after signing a peace treaty (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*). The agreement recognized the King of Jordan as the custodian of significant Muslim sites in East Jerusalem, drawing criticism from observers, who perceived the agreement as a political move for Jordan to gain power in the West Bank.

## Abdullah II

Abdullah, Hussein's eldest son, came to power in 1999 after the death of his father. The King continued policies that prioritized modernization and careful diplomacy. Jordan strengthened diplomatic and economic ties with Egypt and Syria and allowed the US military to use Jordanian bases during the US-led coalition invasion of Iraq in 2003.



The King consolidated his power by courting powerful rural tribes in Jordan's eastern regions. Tribal support in the legislature and security forces allowed Abdullah II to counter the political threat posed by Jordan's large Palestinian population, many of whom supported anti-monarchy Islamist groups. Even with Bedouin support, opposition groups and some international observers claimed that parliamentary elections in 2003, 2007, and 2010 depended on unfair electoral maps to minimize Palestinian Jordanians' political power.

**Arab Spring:** Inspired by a series of protests which swept the Arab World in early 2011 and came to be known in the West as the "Arab Spring," Jordanians began to protest the country's slow economic growth and lack of democratic representation. In response, King Abdullah II introduced two rounds of pro-democracy reforms and dismissed two governments in rapid succession. Despite these overtures, protests continued. Public unrest worsened after the 2011 outbreak of civil war in Syria, which brought another wave of refugees into Jordan and further strained the economy (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*).

**Reforms:** Opposition groups boycotted the elections that the King called in 2013, leading to a pro-government legislature. While some protests persisted, the government security services suppressed largescale demonstrations. After opposition groups continued their critiques of Jordan's electoral system, the government introduced a new proportional representation system for the 2016 elections, encouraging some opponents of the monarchy to participate. Many Islamist parties joined with Christian and non-Islamist Muslim parties under the banner of the National Coalition for Reform (NCR). While the NCR won just 10% of seats in the legislature, it represented the largest bloc of non-independent legislators in the body and an important political force.

Meanwhile, the Jordanian economy experienced slow growth in the 2010s, fueled by unemployment and high debt (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*). Political instability in and a steady flow of refugees from Syria and Iraq, two major trading partners, also lowered economic output. In part to combat these issues, the Jordanian government began a series of economic reforms in coordination with international financial institutions to increase revenue.



The new financial plan raised taxes and lowered subsidies of basic staples, causing widespread discontent in 2018. As in the Arab Spring, the King dismissed his cabinet to deflect criticism from the monarchy and passed a modified tax bill that was meant to address Jordanians' concerns. Nevertheless, the economic reforms failed to gain traction upon their introduction, and the economy faced mounting problems like rising unemployment due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (see p. 6 of *Sustenance and Health* and p. 4 of *Economics and Resources*).

In early 2021, members of King Abdullah's inner circle suddenly challenged his rule. Former Crown Prince Hamzah, the King's popular half-brother, publicly claimed that court officials imprisoned him after he denounced government corruption and

misrule. While the Prince has since declared his support for the King and renounced his royal titles, the incident has pointed to instability in the traditionally stable Hashemite monarchy. As of early 2022, the monarchy appears firmly in control of political and social affairs.



### Myth

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they

provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Many Jordanian myths originated in Bedouin folktales or from traditional *hakawati* (storytellers), who recount folktales at family gatherings and coffeehouses (see p. 2 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Many stories relate the exploits of heroes and their chivalrous, charitable, and honorable acts, providing a model of proper behavior.

**The Story of Hatim al-Ta'i:** A popular folktale centers around the semi-mythical figure of Hatim al-Ta'i, a Bedouin leader, who lived in the mid-5th century AD. While sources vary as to the precise territory Hatim inhabited, some Bedouin communities in Jordan have heralded his displays of generosity as examples of the importance of selflessness in Jordanian culture and society.

In one early tale, a young Hatim gave away his family's entire herd of camels to the needy in a single day, despite the risk it posed to the livelihood of his community. In a later story, an adult Hatim gladly surrendered the land and resources his family controlled upon the request of a rival ruler, so that other members of his tribe would not be harmed defending his possessions by force. Hatim instead retired to a cave, emerging only when the rival ruler relinquished his newly acquired territory and withdrew in shame after realizing that he could never match Hatim's generosity and concern for his community.

## 2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

### Official Name

Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

*Al Mamlakah al Urduniyah al Hashimiyah*

المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية (Arabic)

### Political Borders

Syria: 236 mi

Iraq: 111 mi

Saudi Arabia: 454 mi

Israel: 191 mi

West Bank: 92 mi

Coastline: 16 mi

### Capital

Amman

### Demographics

Jordan's population of nearly 11 million is growing at an annual rate of 0.79%. About 92% of the population lives in urban areas and is largely concentrated in the West, especially in northwestern areas in and around the capital of Amman. The other population center is in the southwestern region near the Gulf of Aqaba. Jordan's recent population growth is partly due to migration from neighboring countries (see "Social Relations" below).



### Flag

Adopted in 1928, the Jordanian flag consists of three horizontal bands of black, white, and green with a seven-pointed white star inside a red triangle on the hoist side.

The colors represent Arab dynasties that influenced Jordanian society: Abbasid (black), Umayyad (white), and Fatimid (green). The red represents the Arab Revolt of 1916 (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*), and the star symbolizes the seven opening verses of the Qur'an (see p. 3-4 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

## Geography

Located in the Levant, Jordan borders Syria to the north, Iraq to the northeast, Saudi Arabia to the east and south, and Israel and the West Bank to the west. Although Jordan governed the West Bank from 1948-67 (see p. 9-11 of *History and Myth*), it formally renounced its claims to the territory in 1988. Jordan's total land area is 34,495 sq mi, about 75% the size of Pennsylvania.

Jordan is comprised mostly of Semi-arid mountains and desert. The Jordan Valley runs along Jordan's western borders with Israel and the West Bank. To the east of the Valley, a long, hilly steppe spans the length of the country. East of the steppe is the Syrian-Arabian desert plateau. Although most of Jordan is desert, the northwestern region has some suitable fertile land.

The Jordan River, which gives Jordan and the West Bank their names, is the country's longest (223 mi), and with its tributaries, the country's only permanent river system. It flows from Israel's Sea of Galilee (also known as Lake Tiberias) in the North to form Jordan's border with Israel and the West Bank until reaching the Dead Sea southwest of Amman. Jordan shares the Dead Sea, the world's second saltiest body of water and Jordan's lowest point, with Israel and the West Bank. The country's highest peak is Jabal Umm ad Dami (6,082 ft) in the southern Wadi Rum Desert.



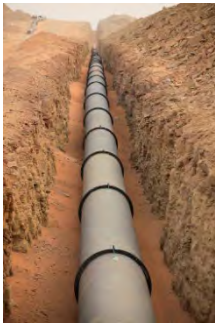
## Climate

Located between the Mediterranean climatic zone that stretches westward toward the Atlantic Ocean and the harsh, dry desert to the east, Jordan experiences a two-season climate of hot, dry summers and cool, rainy winters. Average temperatures range from 78-91°F in the summer and 46-60°F in the winter. Annual winter rainfall varies. While the mountains and valleys to the northwest experience about 14-16 in of rain per year, southern desert regions get just 4 in. Large *khamsin* (dust storms) often occur in the summer.

## Natural Hazards

Located on an active seismic zone, Jordan is vulnerable to earthquakes, droughts, landslides, and flash floods. Heavy

winter rains can cause serious flooding and landslides, which often destroy agricultural land and infrastructure (see p. 5-6 of *Economics and Resources*).



Flashfloods in 2018 caused the deaths of 13 people in Amman and 20 young students near the Dead Sea. Landslides and erosion problems are concentrated on mountain slopes and valleys primarily in the West.

### Environmental Issues

Limited natural freshwater resources, deforestation, overgrazing, soil erosion, and desertification cause significant environmental damage. In addition, Jordan is the world's second most water-scarce country. Climate change, increased water usage, and population growth contribute to Jordan's water crisis. A water pipeline from the southern Disi aquifer transports water to Amman and other cities. As of 2019, the Disi Water Conveyance Project provides about 55% of Amman's water supply. Israel plans to provide desalinated Mediterranean water to Jordan in exchange for electricity from both Jordan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (see "Relations with Israel" below).

### Government

Jordan is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy, dividing into 12 *muhafazat* (governorates), each led by an official appointed by the Minister of Interior, which divide further into districts and subdistricts. After gaining independence in 1946 (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*), Jordan first adopted its constitution in 1947 before revising and ratifying it in 1952. The constitution declares the King as the ultimate authority over the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, resulting in significant centralization.

### Executive Branch

Executive power is vested in the King, who is head-of-state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The King appoints the Prime Minister (PM), members of the *Majlis al-Aayan* (House of Notables, or Senate), and judges. He also approves all laws and can suspend or dissolve Parliament. The King must be a Muslim and part of the hereditary line of King Abdullah ibn al-Hussein

(see p. 7-8 of *History and Myth*). The title passes from the King to his eldest son, unless the King selects a different male family member to succeed him instead. Since 1999, King Abdullah II has been King of Jordan.

Jordan's current PM, Bisher al-Khasawneh, took office in late 2020. The PM serves as head-of-government and is responsible for forming a cabinet of ministers.



### Legislative Branch

Jordan's two-chamber legislature is the **Majlis al-Umma** (National Assembly). It consists of the **Majlis al-Aayan**, comprising 65 members appointed by the King for 4-year renewable terms, and the **Majlis al-Nuwaab** (House of Deputies), with 130 elected members serving 4-year renewable terms. Senate members are typically former PMs, ministers, diplomats, or judges. House members are elected in 23 constituencies by proportional representation. The House reserves 15 seats for women and 12 for Christian, Chechen, and Circassian candidates.

The House is responsible for debating and approving legislation by majority vote. The Senate must then approve the bills by majority vote before final approval by the King, who has the power to veto legislation. A two-thirds-majority vote at a joint session of the **Majlis al-Umma** can overrule the King's veto.

### Judicial Branch

Civil and military courts comprise the judiciary. Religious courts handle personal status matters like marriage and divorce cases (see p. 3 of *Family and Kinship*). **Sharia** (Islamic) law applies to Muslims in *sharia* courts, while various Christian (such as Greek Orthodox and Armenian Catholic) councils handle most similar cases for Christian groups (see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

The highest court is the Court of Cassation, or Supreme Court, which is the final court of appeal for civil and criminal cases. The King appoints the Chief Justice, while a Judicial Council, an 11-member judicial policymaking body consisting of high-ranking



legal officials and judges, nominates the other judges for the King's approval. The Court of Cassation typically hears cases in a panel of five judges. Other courts include Magistrate's Courts, Courts of First Instance, Courts of Appeal, Major Felonies Court, and the Military Court.



### Political Climate

Jordan's King plays a dominant role in politics. Legalized only in 1992, political parties must acknowledge the legitimacy of the monarchy, and political opposition is limited. Participation in political parties remains low, partially due to party restrictions, like one which requires a minimum number of

members to comprise a party. It is often easier for politicians to run as independents.

Jordan has about 49 registered political parties, though as of early 2023, only four – Islamic Action Front, Islamic Centrist Party, United Jordanian Front Party, and National Loyalty Party – have seats in the *Majlis al-Umma*. Independents, primarily tribal leaders (see “Ethnic Groups” below) and businesspeople, hold most other seats. Unfair electoral maps (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*) cause overrepresentation of rural and tribal voters, who tend to favor independent candidates. Electoral corruption and low voter turnout are also problematic. Observers reported vote buying in the 2016 and 2020 elections.

The King centralizes power in many ways and is not obligated to form a government from the elected Parliament. Between 1999-2012, he replaced seven PMs, and from 2001-03, he dissolved Parliament, ruled by decree, and passed laws, some restricting public liberties and others improving the civil status of women, without parliamentary oversight. In 2020, the King dissolved the Parliament, causing then-PM Omar Al-Razzaz to resign, before appointing Bisher al-Khasawneh as his replacement.

Additionally, Jordanian officials limit freedom of expression and forbid criticism of the King. The government asserts control by arresting and attempting to silence dissidents and activists,

whose views it deems as harmful to the monarchy. In 2020, officials arrested activists and protestors and charged them with offenses related to social media posts that were critical of the government (see p. 2-3 of *Technology and Material*). In 2021, officials arrested Prince Hamzah, former ministers, and other leaders for their alleged corruption and criticism of the King and his government (see p. 14-15 of *History and Myth*).

## Defense

The Royal Jordanian Armed Forces is a unified military force with a joint strength of about 100,000 active-duty troops and 65,000 reserve personnel. Military operations primarily focus on maintaining territorial integrity and stability in Jordan and the Middle East. The Armed Forces have recently deployed to conduct operations in Afghanistan, Syria, and Yemen.

**Army:** Consisting of about 85,000 active-duty troops, the Army organizes into a special forces group and brigade, 55 maneuver brigades and battalions (including armored, mechanized, light, and air maneuver), 21 combat support brigades and battalions.

**Navy:** The Navy comprises about 1000 active-duty troops in a Navy Marine maneuver unit.

**Air Force:** Consisting of about 14,000 active-duty personnel, the Air Force includes 7 fighter/ground attack squadrons, 49 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) squadrons, 3 transport squadrons, 17 training operational conversion units and squadrons, 22 attack helicopter squadrons, 56 transport helicopter squadrons, 2 air defense brigades, and 17 surface to air missiles.

**Paramilitary:** The Jordanian Paramilitary consists of some 15,000 active-duty troops in the Gendarmerie, with 2 special forces units, and 10 maneuver battalions.



## Jordanian Air Force Rank Insignia



Field  
Marshal



General



Lieutenant  
General



Major  
General



Brigadier  
General



Colonel



Lieutenant  
Colonel



Major



Captain



First  
Lieutenant



Second  
Lieutenant



Officer  
Cadet



Warrant  
Officer  
First  
Class



Warrant  
Officer



Sergeant  
Major



Sergeant



Corporal



Private

## Security Issues

**Civil Unrest:** In recent years, sporadic demonstrations have rocked Jordanian society. Protestors have demanded a reduction in wealth inequality caused in part by a weak economy (see p. 3-4 of *Economics and Resources*) and objected to the government's relations with Israel.



In 2018, more than 30 labor unions (see p. 1 of *Time and Space*) staged the largest strike in years over a proposed income tax law (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*). To defuse the

protests, King Abdullah II appointed Omar Al-Razzaz as PM, who promised to withdraw the bill. Further unrest ensued in 2019 when about 140,000 teachers protested for wage increases. After negotiations failed and the protests continued, Jordan banned the union and arrested 13 of its members in 2020. A year later, hundreds of Jordanians returned to the streets to protest the water and energy exchange agreement between Jordan and Israel. Although Jordan and Israel already have diplomatic ties, opponents criticized the deal as normalizing relations with Israel despite its continued illegal occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

## Foreign Relations

Jordan historically maintains close economic and political ties with its Middle Eastern neighbors, the US, and Europe. Often considered the most stable Arab country in the Middle East, Jordan holds custodianship of Christian and Muslim holy sites in East Jerusalem and is an arbiter between Israeli and West Bank authorities. Jordan has coordinated military action with allies like the US and United Kingdom, while fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as Daesh, ISIL, and IS) since 2014. Jordan also conducts security operations on its borders with Syria and Iraq, combats terrorist and criminal threats, and hosts international troops (see “Relations with the US” below).

Jordan is a member of the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, Arab League, Organization for Islamic Cooperation, and the Global Initiative to

Combat Nuclear Terrorism. Jordan notably participates in the UN's Group of Friends of Preventing Violent Extremism.

### **Relations with Syria:**

Jordan's relations with Syria were tense for years after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. King Abdullah II was the first Arab leader to call for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's resignation in 2011. He has hosted opposition groups in Jordan and supported them in southwestern Syria until Assad's government mostly defeated them in 2018 with the help of Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah (a radical Shi'i militia group based in Lebanon and backed by Iran).



Due to the war, Jordan hosts hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, straining social relations and the economy. Despite tense relations, Assad called King Abdullah II in late 2021 to discuss cooperation, which resulted in normalized ties between the countries after Jordan reopened its primary border crossing to Syria. Jordan and Syria also plan to participate in the revived Arab Gas Pipeline, which has been out of service due to the war, sending Egyptian gas to Lebanon through Jordan and Syria.

**Relations with Israel:** Jordan and Israel established diplomatic ties in their 1994 Peace Treaty (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*), which reinforced Jordan's custodianship of holy sites in Jerusalem. Many Jordanians hoped that the treaty with Israel meant reinforcing Jordan's detachment from the West Bank and dispelling the concept that Jordan could become a permanent homeland for Palestinians.

In 2021, Israel, Jordan, and the UAE agreed to a deal in which a UAE government-owned company plans to build a solar power facility in Jordan. Israel plans to buy all the electricity produced by the facility, with the proceeds split between Jordan and the UAE. In exchange, Israel plans to provide Jordan desalinated water from the Mediterranean to improve its water supply. While

the deal intends to address Jordan's water crisis, public protests broke out in Amman against cooperation with Israel.

**Relations with the West Bank:** Jordan and Israel are the only countries that border the West Bank, which relies on Jordan for economic cooperation and peace facilitation. The West Bank's Palestinian Authority (PA) has tried to increase imports of Arab products through Jordan rather than depend on Israeli goods. Jordan and the PA agreed to increase trade in 2021. In the same year, King Abdullah II reiterated Jordan's support of a sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital in a meeting with PA President Mahmoud Abbas.



**Relations with the US:** The US and Jordan established diplomatic relations in 1949. The US considers Jordan a key partner in countering terrorism and promoting cooperation in the Middle

East. Jordan receives more bilateral assistance (military, humanitarian, and economic aid) from the US than from any other country (see p. 6 of *Economics and Resources*). In 2021 the US provided Jordan more than \$1.65 billion in aid.

In response to the Syrian Civil War and to combat the expansion of ISIS, the US helped finance Jordan's border security system, an integrated network of surveillance cameras, guard towers, and radar to guard its borders with Syria and Iraq. Jordan hosts nearly 3,000 US troops and military equipment. As of 2023, the US is upgrading the Shahid Muwaffaq al-Salti Air Base near Al-Azraq in eastern Jordan to develop it into a more permanent base. The US also plans to move military equipment from a now-closed military base in Qatar to Jordan, increasing its military presence in and cooperation with the country.

Since 2020, the US has also provided Jordan with aid to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (see p. 6 of *Sustenance and Health*), primarily among Syrian refugees in Jordan. It also maintains the US-Jordan Free Trade Agreement established in 2000.

## Ethnic Groups

Around 98% of Jordan's population is Arab. Non-Arab minorities are primarily Circassians, Chechens, Armenians, and Kurds. Although no consensus on Arab nationalities exists in Jordan today, some 69.3% of residents consider themselves Jordanian. Other self-identified Arab nationalities include Syrian (13.3%), Palestinian (6.7%), Egyptian (6.7%), Iraqi (1.4%), and other (2.6%). While Arab Bedouin people and tribes have integrated into Jordanian society or moved to cities, some maintain traditional ways of life and in scattered rural communities (see p. 1-2 of *Family and Kinship*).

Following the Arab-Israeli Wars in 1948 and 1967 (see p. 9-11 of *History and Myth*), Palestinians fled to Jordan and primarily live in the northwestern part of the country in the cities of Amman, Zarqa, and Irbid. As of 2009, people of Palestinian refugee descent represent an estimated 55% of the Jordanian population, and most are well integrated into Jordanian society. Today, most Palestinians living in Jordan identify as Jordanian. Additionally, about 2 million registered Palestinian refugees reside in Jordan, around 18% of whom live in refugee camps. Queen Rania is a Jordanian born to Palestinian parents.



Similarly, over 660,000 Syrian refugees have fled to Jordan since the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. While many live in refugee camps like Zaatari and Al-Azraq (see "Social Relations" below), others live in cities like Amman, Irbid, and Al-Mafraq.

Iraqis fled to Jordan following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. In 2011, Jordan hosted about 195,000 Iraqi refugees, and by 2022, the number of Iraqi refugees in Jordan had declined to 33,951, as many returned to Iraq. The government does not currently report official data on the number of Iraqis living in Jordan, the figure is a US estimate.

Other minorities, such as Chechens and Circassians, live mainly in Amman and northern Jordan. A small population of Druze (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*) mostly lives in the northern area of Al-Azraq on the border with Syria.

## Social Relations

Jordanian society divides along rural-urban, male-female, and rich-poor lines. Generally, urban dwellers, males, and the wealthy have greater access to education and economic opportunities and hold the most social prestige (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender* and p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*).

Perhaps the most significant social division in Jordan is between Jordanian nationals and those of Palestinian descent. Although the government granted most Palestinians, who entered Jordan between 1948-67, full citizenship and rights, discrimination against them is still widespread and affects their access to essential government services such as obtaining passports and national IDs.

Many Palestinians who have full citizenship do not receive all the benefits that citizenship confers upon Jordanians. Human rights organizations have criticized Jordan for revoking Jordanian citizenship from Jordanians of Palestinian origin, who obtain passports issued by the PA. A 2010 report stated that between 2004-07, the Jordanian government revoked citizenship from about 2,700 citizens of Palestinian origin.



Since 1988, Jordan has not provided Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, or the Gaza Strip with Jordanian citizenship or residency. Instead, Jordan authorizes Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza 5-year and 2-year renewable passports, respectively, for only the purpose of travel. As a result of this citizenship policy change and the fact that as of 2023 Palestine lacks international recognition and official statehood, many Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are technically stateless. While Palestinians in the West Bank and



Gaza can have passports from Palestinian authorities that serve as identification documents and symbols of nationality, these passports do not confer citizenship.

Many Jordanians of Palestinian origin also often face bias when seeking employment. Likewise, some universities limit their admission of Palestinians, who are also under-represented in government. Although the law reserves seats for Circassian and Chechen ethnic minorities, it does not protect Arab minorities living in Jordan, like Palestinians and Syrians, by providing them with political representation. In addition, many Palestinians who lived in Syria before the civil war have sought refuge in Jordan since 2011. The government did not allow many to enter Jordan, though it permitted entry of their Syrian national counterparts. In 2013, then-PM Abdullah Ensour announced Palestinians should stay in Syria until the war ends.

Syrians, especially refugees, also face discrimination in Jordan. As of early 2022, Syrian refugees comprised a large minority of Jordan's population. With the world's second largest per-capita refugee population after Lebanon, Jordan struggles with limited resources to provide humanitarian and economic opportunities for refugees (see p. 2-4 of *Economics and Resources*). Clean water, proper nutrition, and sanitary conditions are a few among many ongoing concerns.

The Zaatari refugee camp in northern Jordan is one of the world's largest, as some 80,000 Syrians live there today. Provision of education



and quality medical services is a challenge, as the camp has only 32 small schools and eight medical clinics. Since 2016, the Jordanian government has granted around 230,000 work permits to Syrian refugees. However, more than 86% of the Syrian refugees who live outside the camps live below the poverty line and face significant difficulties pursuing employment and financial self-sufficiency.

## 3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

### Overview

Over 97% of Jordan's population are Muslims, most of whom are Sunni, almost 2% Christians, and the rest Buddhists, Baha'is, Hindus, and Druze. Sunni Islam is the official state religion, and although adherents of other religions generally practice freely, some Shi'a and non-Muslims face discrimination and harassment.



### Early Religion

The first evidence of religious worship dates to the Neolithic period (8500-4500 BC), when people first began to settle the land comprising present-day Jordan (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*). These early civilizations likely practiced ancestor veneration using bones and decorated the walls of their dwellings with religious imagery. Religious practices became more advanced during the Early Bronze Age (3200-1950 BC), when residents held burials that included large tombs with multiple chambers.

The semi-nomadic Amorites, who worshipped the god Amurru, were the first major civilization in Jordan (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*). Later, inhabitants of the kingdoms of Ammon, Moab, and Edom (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*) worshipped deities and gods, who oversaw natural phenomena and various aspects of life. They believed a supreme deity, El, created the universe and ruled the lesser gods. Initially, worship took place at simple stone or brick altars located outdoors on high ground, though residents eventually built complex temples with large rooms and inner sanctums. Priests and priestesses presided over ceremonies, with worship often including animal sacrifices to various gods.

### Judaism

The Levant (the region comprising present-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian Territories) was the

birthplace of Judaism, and Jewish communities lived in Jordan for millennia. The **Torah**, Judaism's primary text, mentions ancient cities and kingdoms in Jordan. During the Biblical period (1300-1000 BC), Jewish kings conquered vast territory in what is now Jordan (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). However, around 800 BC, Assyrian forces conquered Jordan and expelled most Jewish inhabitants from the region. During the 3rd-century BC rule of the Seleucids (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), many Jews returned to Jordan and remained there when Rome conquered the region in 63 BC. Under Roman rule, Jews faced severe persecution that led them to revolt many times. Over subsequent centuries, Jewish communities in Jordan emigrated from the region.



### Christianity

This belief system first arrived in Jordan immediately after its founding in the Levant around 30 AD. The Bible's New Testament mentions Jordan several times. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, which he later crossed to preach his message about Christianity east of the river. After the Romans crucified Jesus and began to persecute Christians, many Christians settled in areas of present-day Jordan that were not under tight Roman control.

By 380 AD, the Roman Empire had adopted Christianity as its official religion and built many churches in Jordan (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*). Soon after, Philadelphia (present-day Amman) became the seat of a bishop. Christianity remained the predominant religion in the region until the 7th-century arrival of Muslim invaders (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*). While Christians persisted in large numbers through the 8th century, Islam replaced Christianity as the region's dominant religion. During the Crusades from 1095-1188 (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*), European Christians built many fortifications in western Jordan, and Christianity temporarily regained a foothold there. Muslim forces eventually drove out most of the Crusaders in the late 12th century. Since then, Christianity has declined considerably in Jordan, as Christians converted to Islam or fled the region.

## Islam

### Origins of Islam

Muhammad, who Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in Mecca in 570 in what is today Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the Qur'an, or "Holy Book," to guide their everyday lives and shape their values.

### Meaning of Islam

Islam is a way of life to its adherents. The term Islam literally means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is "a person who submits to God."

### Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into two sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Sunnis are distinguished by their belief that the leader (**Caliph**) of the Muslim community (**Ummah**) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'i Muslims believe the religious leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

### Five Pillars of Islam

There are five basic principles of the Islamic faith.

- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger."
- **Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray five times a day while facing the Ka'aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka'aba is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship.
- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Donate a percentage of one's income to the poor or needy.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.



- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (The Hajj):** Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once in a lifetime.

### Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel those of Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews “people of the Book,” referring to biblical scriptures, because they also believe in one God.



**Abraham:** All three faiths trace their lineage to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. However, Christians and Jews trace their descent to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; while

Muslims trace theirs to Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ishmael.

**Scriptures:** Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Jews and Christians altered God's word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God.

**Jesus:** The three religions differ significantly in their understanding of the role of Jesus. While Christians consider him the divine Messiah who fulfills Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet but do not acknowledge his divinity or the Christian Trinity.

**View of Death:** Muslims believe that God determines the time of death and birth. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven.

### Concept of Jihad

The concept of jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be

confused with the publicized violence often associated with jihad. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism and consider it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

## Ramadan

Observed during the 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*) Ramadan is a month-long period for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time,



Muslims who are physically able fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, a Muslim learns to appreciate the good in life. Muslims typically break their daily fast at sunset with a meal known as *iftar*. Ramadan includes several holidays:

- **Lailat al-Qadr:** This “Night of Power” marks Muhammad’s receipt of the first verses of the Qur’an.
- **Eid al-Fitr:** This “Festival of Fast-Breaking” celebrates Ramadan’s end and is a national holiday in Jordan.

Another important holiday is celebrated when the *Hajj* ends, about 70 days following the end of Ramadan.

- **Eid al-Adha:** This “Festival of Sacrifice” commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (or Isaac, according to Christians), as proof of his loyalty to God. It is also a national holiday in Jordan.

## Arrival of Islam in Jordan

Following Muhammad’s death in 632, his followers set out to spread the teachings of Islam beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Arriving in the Levant around 636, Muslim Arab warriors won decisive battles and captured significant territory (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*). The subsequent Umayyad Caliphate (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*) was tolerant of Christian and Jewish groups in the region and allowed them to retain positions of

authority. Over time, the Umayyads led the conversion of most residents to Islam. By the 8th century, the Abbasid dynasty (see p. 4-5 of *History and Myth*) had defeated the Umayyads and made Sunni Islam the predominant sect in Jordan.

In 1949, King Abdullah I established the Hashemite Kingdom of



Jordan with Sunni Islam as the official state religion (see p. 9-10 of *History and Myth*). The Hashemites, who were originally from Mecca, gained legitimacy from their claim of being direct descendants of Muhammad.

### Religion Today

Sunni Islam remains the religion of most Jordanians and is highly influential in society. Jordan's current monarch, King Abdullah II, is a prominent voice in the Muslim world despite lacking any formal religious title. He has been particularly vocal in denouncing Islamist extremism and advocating for Muslims across the world to be tolerant in the wake of widespread anti-Muslim sentiment in the 21st century. He has also expressed the importance for Jordanians to be religiously tolerant. In addition, the Hashemites are traditionally the protectors of holy sites in Jerusalem. King Abdullah II has partnered with Israel to preserve Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and ensure access for pilgrims.

Religion is also highly visible in the Jordanian legal system and government (see p. 3-6 of *Political and Social Relations*). Islamic courts following **sharia** (Islamic) law handle all cases covering family disputes, marriages, and other personal status matters for Jordan's Muslims. Likewise, religious minorities have their own religious courts to address similar issues. In addition, the legislature has a small number of seats reserved for Christian representatives to ensure that their viewpoint is appropriately represented (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Despite the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*), non-Muslim Jordanians, particularly those who converted from Islam, report threats of violence from relatives over the perceived "dishonor" of

converting from Islam, as well as interrogation by security officials regarding their “true” beliefs. Further, Muslims who convert to another religion are still subject to *sharia* courts, which treat them as deserters instead of Muslims. The Jordanian government also does not recognize some minority religious adherents, like Jehovah’s Witnesses and Baha’i practitioners.

**Islam:** Most of Jordan’s Muslims adhere to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, a generally tolerant school of thought that emphasizes community consensus and the primacy of the Qur’an over later Islamic teachings. A small number of residents are Shi’i Muslims, many of whom are refugees from neighboring Iraq. Jordan is also home to a small number of Sufi practitioners, known for Islamic mysticism and ritualistic prayer.

**Christianity:** Today, most Jordanian Christians belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. Others are Armenian Catholics or members of various Protestant groups. Christians live throughout Jordan, particularly in major cities such as Amman, Zarqa, and Irbid. Although Christians represent a small portion of the population, Jordan observes major



Christian holidays such as Easter and Christmas (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*). Christians generally maintain positive relationships with Muslims, and the government has taken steps to limit discrimination against them.

**Other Religions:** Jordan is home to small numbers of believers of other religions, such as Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and Baha’is (adherents of a religion that combines aspects of Islam with a belief in the unity of all religions and humanity). Along with **Muwahhidun** (Druze to outsiders – an Abrahamic religion that broke away from Islam in the 11th century), followers of these religions account for less than 1% of Jordan’s population.



## 4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

### Overview

Despite economic hardship and rapid population growth, family remains the foundation of Jordanian society, with members relying on each other for emotional, financial, and social support.

### Residence

Jordan is one of the world's most urbanized countries, and as of 2023, some 92% of the population lives in cities.



In recent decades, Jordan has experienced significant migration and urbanization, especially in Amman, Al-Zarqa, and Irbid (see p. 1 of *Political and Social Relations*). While access to electricity and running water is widely available, water shortages are frequent (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*).

**Urban:** Housing conditions vary by income. Many upper-class Jordanians reside in large apartments or individual homes, many of which have private courtyards with concrete walls to provide privacy. By contrast, lower-class families often live in crowded one- or two-room apartments. Buildings and homes are typically constructed from concrete and brick, though some are made of mud and stone. Some families design their homes to allow for the addition of more floors for their married sons.

Some urban areas, notably Amman, lack affordable housing for low-income families. Although the government has created urban renewal projects in Amman and Al-Zarqa to provide more affordable housing units, existing zoning laws promote the construction of larger units. Consequently, little has been done to satisfy the demand for smaller, less expensive homes, which has contributed to the affordable housing shortage.

**Rural:** Residents in rural areas traditionally live in single-family homes. Similar to urban residences, many houses in villages are

made of concrete and brick, often in a manner to allow for the addition of floors and private courtyards. Alternatively, a small population of semi-nomadic Bedouin (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*) live in traditional black tents, primarily in the sparsely populated desert in eastern and southern Jordan.

## Family Structure

Family relations are important for Jordanian daily life and social organization. Generally, extended relatives are expected to help each other, avoid actions that may bring shame to the family, and value the needs of the family over individual desires. Households often include extended family members, with other relatives living nearby. Many children remain in the family home as young adults and move into their own quarters after marriage or obtaining a secure job. Jordanians highly respect their elders, with children typically caring for their parents as they age. The father is traditionally the breadwinner and head-of-household.

**Polygyny:** This term refers to the practice of a man having multiple wives simultaneously. In accordance with Islamic law, a Muslim man can have up to four wives, if he can treat them all equally. In a 2017-18 survey, some 4% of women reported their husbands had another wife. Between 2015-20, over 7% of

registered marriage contracts were for men to take more than one wife.



## Children

Historically, Jordanian families had many children but tend to have fewer today (see p. 3 of *Sex and Gender*).

Extended family members typically assist with childcare, and cousins often maintain sibling-like relationships. Although the legal working age is 16, young children in low-income families, particularly refugees (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*), often work in agriculture, construction, or manufacturing to help support their families (see p. 3-4 of *Economics and Resources*). Likewise, poor, refugee, and displaced children sometimes are subject to abuse, sexual exploitation, and restricted access to education (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

**Birth:** In the Islamic tradition, a Muslim father whispers the **adhan** (call to prayer) into his newborn baby's right ear and the **shahada** (profession of faith) in the left (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) following birth. While traditions vary, many Muslim Jordanians hold a party called **aqiqah**, typically on the 7th day after birth, to welcome the baby. Traditionally, the *aqiqah* involved the sacrifice of an animal, commonly sheep, signifying the child's birth. Today, many Jordanians celebrate *aqiqah* with a meal, giving gifts to the newborn and announcing the baby's name (see p. 3 of *Language and Communication*).

**Circumcision:** Most newborn males are circumcised at a medical facility following birth. Although uncommon, female circumcision is still prevalent among some inhabitants in Rahmah, a village in southern Jordan (see p. 3 of *Sex and Gender*).

### Marriage

Traditionally, a marriage was an arranged union, a practice which remains common among some families of similar social standing. Nevertheless, Jordanians



more commonly choose their own spouses based on mutual attraction, though their choice typically must receive family approval. Families usually consider education, social status, religiosity, character, and wealth when accepting a suitable spouse. Generally, families do not force arranged matches, and either marriage prospect can reject a proposed partner.

The government performs no civil marriages, and therefore religious authorities preside over marriage. Typically, while Muslim men can marry non-Muslim women, Muslim women are not allowed to marry non-Muslim men.

**Bridewealth:** Upon marriage, a Muslim groom traditionally pays the **mahr** or a so-called bridewealth to the bride, which becomes her sole property. A legal requirement for Islamic marriages, the *mahr* symbolizes the bride's financial independence. In Jordan, the *mahr* usually consists of money.

**Weddings:** Many Muslim wedding events are segregated by sex. The Muslim couple signs a **nikah** or **katb al kitab** (wedding contract) to demonstrate their intent to wed. Before the wedding celebrations, Muslim couples traditionally participate in several ceremonies with family and friends. The bride's wedding party typically attends the **Laylat al Henna** (henna party), where the women receive intricate temporary henna tattoos. Similarly, the groom has a shower night with close relatives and friends during which the friends prepare the groom for his wedding night.



Traditionally, the groom's family holds a procession through the town to bring the bride from her father's home to the wedding venue, usually a banquet hall, often accompanied by her father and brothers. The wedding celebration and festivities officially signal to society that the couple is married, which in Jordan, is often more important than the **nikah** or **katb al kitab**. Events typically consist of music, dancing, and feasting **mansaf**, a traditional meat and rice dish (see p. 2 of *Sustenance and Health*).

## Divorce

This break-up carries significant social stigma in Jordan. According to the Jordanian government, the divorce rate was just 5.5% as of 2018. However, in 2022, nearly 37% of marriages ended in divorce. If a woman files for divorce, she typically must return the **mahr** to her husband or his family.

## Death

In accordance with Islamic tradition, Jordanian Muslims typically wash and wrap the deceased in a **kafan** (shroud or clear white cloth) and bury the body within 24 hours of death facing the **qibla** (direction of Mecca). Members of the deceased's community usually perform **salat al-Janazah** (funeral prayers) to honor the dead. Following a burial, most Jordanian families have an **azza**, (3-day mourning period) and public wake for extended family and friends to offer condolences. The mourning period typically lasts for 40 days.

## 5. SEX AND GENDER

### Overview

The Jordanian social system is patriarchal, meaning that men hold most power and authority. While women increasingly take advantage of educational and professional opportunities, legal and institutional discrimination and some cultural norms limit their full participation in society.



### Gender Roles and Work

**Domestic Work:** Women in Jordan traditionally hold responsibility for childcare, cooking, and cleaning, and typically retain those responsibilities even if they work outside the home. While girls and young women often have domestic chores and responsibilities, families generally do not expect boys and young men to perform household chores.

**Labor Force:** As of 2022, Jordan had the lowest women's labor-force participation rate of any country without an active conflict. In 2022, about 15% of Jordanian women worked outside the home, lower than in neighboring Lebanon (29%), Saudi Arabia (28%), and Israel (60%). While women have similar literacy and post-secondary education completion rates as men (see p. 1 of *Learning and Knowledge*), they are underrepresented in the workforce. Women typically serve as managers in education and healthcare, while men tend to hold managerial roles in most other sectors. Although the law guarantees equal pay, women still earn on average a third less than men for similar work.

### Gender and the Law

Although the constitution (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*) guarantees equal rights for all Jordanian men and women regardless of race, language, or religion; women routinely face unequal treatment before the law. Jordanian citizenship derives from the father. While a Jordanian woman married to a non-citizen maintains her own citizenship, she cannot pass it on to her children.

Women are entitled to maternity leave with full pay for 10 weeks. For the year after delivery, women may receive paid leave to nurse a newborn for up to an hour each day. Although the law provides those who are sexually assaulted the right to leave their job and receive severance pay, it does not stipulate a penalty for perpetrators of sexual assault. Further, labor laws do not protect women from sexual harassment in the workplace.

Personal status laws regulate marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. In matters of inheritance, all Jordanians, including non-Muslims and Christians, are subject to **sharia** (Islamic) law (see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*), and female heirs typically inherit half the amount that their male counterparts receive. However, male heirs must provide financial assistance to their female relatives. Further, a woman may lose her right to inheritance from her husband if she lives or works outside the home without his consent.

In the case of divorce (see p. 4 of *Family and Kinship*), women typically maintain custody of their children until they turn 15, after which the child may choose with which parent they want to live. A woman loses custody if she remarries.



### Gender and Politics

Although women gained the right to vote in 1974, their political participation remains low. Between 2010-20, women's representation in the House of Deputies grew from 9-12% due to a

2012 electoral law guaranteeing that women hold 15 parliamentary seats (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*). This rate is significantly lower than Israel (24%) and the US (29%) but higher than Lebanon (6%).

### Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

While about 26% of Jordanian wives report experiencing GBV from their husbands, experts believe many women do not report incidents due to the social stigma surrounding domestic violence and their lack of trust in the authorities to protect them.

Between 2010-13, some 159 rapists used Article 308 of the penal code to evade punishment by marrying their victims. In a sign of progress for advancing women's rights, Jordan abolished Article 308 in 2017.

Child and forced marriage are common. Although an amendment to the personal status law in 2001 raised the minimum marriage age to 18-years-old, reports indicate that underage girls still marry.

About 10% of children are married before 18-years-old and 1% before age 15.



**Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):** Also known as female genital cutting or female circumcision, FGM is any procedure whereby a woman's external genitalia or genital organs are cut or removed for non-medical reasons. Although not banned nor widely practiced in Jordan, FGM is common among a historically nomadic Bedouin group inhabiting Rahmah village in southern Jordan. The continued practice is partly due to the community's patriarchal structure and lack of health education.

### Sex and Procreation

Between 1960-2023, Jordan's birthrate dropped from 7.7 births per woman to 2.9, similar to the Middle East and North Africa average (2.6) and Israel (2.5), and higher than the US (1.8). This decrease is primarily due to the evolving role of women in society. Women in urban areas have greater access to methods of contraception, and educated women tend to marry at slightly older ages. Abortion is legal only if the pregnancy endangers the mother's life, though it is uncommon and socially stigmatized.

### LGBTQ Issues

Jordan decriminalized same-gender sexual conduct in 1951, though it does not recognize same-sex marriage or civil unions, and laws do not protect LGBTQ individuals. Homosexuality is widely unacceptable in society, leading many LGBTQ individuals to conceal their sexuality from family and friends. Despite this discrimination and social stigma, Amman is home to some LGBTQ-friendly spaces such as cafes and clubs.

## 6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

### Language Overview

Arabic is the official and primary language of government, business, education, and the media.



### Arabic

Most Jordanians' first language is Arabic, which is spoken by over 95% of the population. In daily life, most Jordanians use Levantine Arabic, a dialect also spoken across Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. The Jordanian variant of Levantine Arabic is South Levantine Arabic, or alternatively, Jordanian-Palestinian Arabic. In school, Jordanians learn to read

and write Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a variety used across Arabic-speaking countries for writing, formal discussions, speeches, and in the media. With a 28-character alphabet, Arabic is written horizontally from right to left.

Levantine Arabic and MSA differ in both vocabulary and grammar, particularly distinct use of noun endings and subject-verb order. While Levantine Arabic varies among speakers, it is mutually intelligible with most other regional Arabic dialects and relatively well-known across the Arabic-speaking world.

Bedouin (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*) Arabic dialects influence rural Jordanian speech, resulting in the distinct pronunciation of some words. Urban residents tend to speak more like other Levantine people. Some residents of Jordan speak other Arabic dialects, like Egyptian (1.1 million speakers) and Mesopotamian (1 million), primarily spoken by Iraqis.

### Other languages

Kabardian (151,000) and Adyghe (93,000), spoken by the Circassian ethnic minority, are common (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*) in northwest Jordan and major cities, as well as Armenian (10,000) and Chechen (5,200).



**English and French:** Over 4.5 million Jordanians, especially younger residents, speak English as a second language. English became prevalent in the early 20th century, when Jordan was under British control (see p. 7-8 of *History and Myth*). Almost all Jordanian schools teach English as a second language (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*). English appears on street signs, government documents, and passports. French is also a popular second language offered in some, often private, schools. Some French-language media outlets operate in Jordan.

### Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Jordan requires not only knowledge of Arabic, but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralinguistic (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.



### Communication Style

Jordanians' communication style reflects their regard for flattery, generosity, and tradition. They devote significant time to greetings and other formalities, such as inquiring about one's family and health. After initial pleasantries, Jordanians tend to be direct in their communication style. They often ask inquisitive questions about one's job, opinions on current events, and other personal subjects. Good posture is also important during conversations, as it conveys respect towards the speaker.

Strangers often exhibit friendliness and familiarity towards one another and engage in small talk, which applies to minor, casual interactions with ordinary people such as shopkeepers and taxi drivers. Foreign nationals should engage in these casual conversations and respond with questions in kind to not appear

cold, aloof, and disinterested. However, foreign nationals should avoid inquiring about family members of the opposite sex, which many Jordanians consider improper and disrespectful.

## Greetings

Jordanian men greet with a handshake, which is also customary when leaving a small gathering. Women usually exchange light cheek kisses when greeting each other. Some Jordanians of the opposite sex shake hands or lightly exchange kisses, while others do not touch when greeting. If not shaking hands, men typically greet women verbally or with a nod, though some



women may extend their hands for a handshake with foreign men. Foreign nationals should wait for members of the opposite sex to initiate the greeting.

Jordanians typically consider it polite to stand during greetings, which they extend with great care and respect. Many Jordanians verbally greet by saying **salaam**

**alaykum** (“peace be upon you”), to which those present respond **wa alaykum as-salam** (“and upon you be peace”).

## Names

Jordanians typically have a first (given) name, a second and third name based on their father’s and grandfather’s names, and a last (family) name. Jordanian family names are passed down from the father. Many Jordanian names have religious (typically Islamic) origins, like Ali and Muhammad (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Some other Jordanian names are Arabic words for positive qualities or virtues.

## Forms of Address

Generally, Jordanians first address one another with their first and last names, though people of the same age or gender often use only first names after becoming better acquainted. Formally, it is polite to address others using their title. Jordanians often address adults as **abu** (father of...) or **um** (mother of...), followed by the name of the person’s eldest son. Jordanians

sometimes use the English titles “Mr.” or “Mrs.” followed by a person’s family name. Young Jordanians often call elders **aamu** (uncle) or **ammati** (aunt), even if they are not related. Many Jordanians informally address each other as **akhi** (“my brother”) or **uhkti** (“my sister”) and use terms of endearment like **habibi** (“my dear”) with friends or acquaintances.

### Conversational Topics

Polite conversation typically involves inquiries about one’s well-being and extended family. Many Jordanians inquire about one’s children and their names. If one has no children, a polite response is **masha’allah** (according to God’s will). While many Jordanians are comfortable discussing current events and some political topics, foreign nationals should avoid controversial subjects such as questions about Israel and Palestine, sensitive religious topics, and criticism of Islam or the King. Safe conversational topics include the weather, current events, entertainment, and sports.



### Gestures

Jordanians punctuate their speech with gestures, and body language is key to conveying respect. One touches their fingers briefly to the forehead and bows the head slightly to show respect. One might emphasize a point by punching a fist in the air or waving the index finger at the person being addressed. Jordanians express “no” by tilting the head quickly upward, while making a “tsk” sound. Foreign nationals should avoid gesturing or eating with the left hand and showing Jordanians the soles of feet or shoes, as these actions are impolite. Many Jordanians place their hand over their heart as a gesture of sincerity, which they also use to soften a refusal or reinforce giving thanks.

### Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at [www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/](http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/) and click on “Resources” for access to language training and other resources.

## Arabic Pronunciation and Transliteration

Transliteration is the process of spelling Arabic words using the Roman (Latin) alphabet. The table below shows sounds or letters having no English equivalent or that vary from MSA pronunciations. When texting or writing informally online in Romanized Arabic, Jordanians frequently replace certain Arabic letters with numbers, also depicted below.

Arabic Letter	Transliteration and Description	Number (if applicable)	Example
أ	a	2	<b>Africa</b>
ع	'a or aa	3	sound from deep in the throat as in the name 'Ali or the instrument 'oud
خ	kh; strong "h"	5	<b>loch</b> (as pronounced in Scotland)
ط	ṭ or t	6	<b>tar</b>
ح	ḥ or h; whispered "h"	7	<b>hoot</b>
ق	g (pronounced as a glottal stop in Levantine Arabic and as "g" in MSA)	8	pause in the middle of "uh-oh" (in MSA pronounced like <b>cough</b> and transliterated q)
ص	ṣ or s	9	<b>saw</b>
غ	gh; like the guttural French "r"		Paris (as pronounced by a French person)
ذ	dH; Soft "th"		<b>this</b>
ء	' (glottal stop)		pause in the middle of "uh-oh"
ج	y (or j)		<b>yes</b>
ك	ch (or k)		<b>chin</b>

## Useful Words and Phrases

English	Arabic (Romanized)
Hello (May peace be upon you)	Salaam alaykum
Response: And upon you be peace	Wa alaykum as-salam
How are you?	Keefak (m) / keefik (f)?
Hi	Marhaba
Good morning	Sabah al-khayr
Good afternoon / evening	Masaa' al-khayr
My name is...	Ismee...
Yes	Aywa
No	La
Please	Min fadlak (m) / fadlik (f)
Thank you	Shukran
You're welcome	Ahlayn
Good night (when leaving)	Tusbih (m) / Tusbihi (f) 'al-khayr
Where are you from?	Min wayn inteh (m) / inti (f)?
Where do you live?	Wayn saakin (m) / saakineh (f)?
I am American	Ana amreeki (m) / amreekiyya (f)
Do you speak (English / Arabic)?	Btahki inkileezi / 'arabi?
Now	Halla' / Hassa
Today	Al-yaum
Tomorrow	Bukra
Yesterday	Mbaarih
The meal was very good	Ikteer tayyib al-aki
Look!	Talla' (m) / Talla'I (f)! Shuuf (m) / shuufi (f)!
Excuse me	Law samaht (m) / samahti (f)
Pardon?	'Afwan?
I don't understand you	Ma fahimit 'alayk (m) / 'alayki (f)
What?	Shu?
Where?	Wayn?
How?	Keef?
Me / you	Ana / Inteh (m) / inti (f)
Him / her	Huweh (m) / hiyeh (f)
What time is it now?	Addaysh as-saa'a?

## 7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

### Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 98.4%
- Male: 98.7%
- Female: 98.4% (2021)

### Early Education

Before the arrival of standardized formal education in Jordan, regional inhabitants informally transmitted values, skills, beliefs, and historical knowledge to younger generations. During the Seleucid era in the 3rd century BC (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), schooling became increasingly important. Greek centers of knowledge, primarily in Damascus (present-day Syria's capital) and Antioch (in present-day Turkey), greatly influenced culture and society across the Levant (the region comprising present-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian Territories), which led to a cultural blossoming in Jordanian cities.

Greek urban centers subsequently became part of the Decapolis (10 important cities in the Levant) under the greater influence of the



Roman Empire, which invaded in 63 BC (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). As the Decapolis became increasingly wealthy from trade, Greek and Roman education became more widespread. Gadara and Pella (present-day Umm Qais and Tabaqat FahI) in northern Jordan were renowned for their schools, which attracted scholars from the surrounding region.

### Islamic Education

With the spread of Islam to the region in the 7th century AD (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), Islamic instruction for children was formalized. Teachers gave lessons in Qur'anic verses, Islamic rituals and duties (see p. 3-5 of *Religion and Spirituality*), and Arabic calligraphy (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*)

to the children of elite Muslim families. Some male children received religious primary school instruction at their local **kuttab** (traditional Islamic school). Advanced students attended **madrasas**, more comprehensive schools for civil servants.

During the Umayyad dynasty (661-750 – see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), non-Arabic-speaking populations became part of the **Ummah** (community of Muslim believers – see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Many of these recent converts, particularly from present-day Iran, traveled to the desert regions of the Levant to study with Bedouin tribes (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*), which were known for their knowledge of traditional

Arab folktales, poetry, and diction. In turn, many of the visitors shared new forms of education with the local inhabitants.

Under Ottoman control of Jordan (1516-1918 – see p. 6-7 of *History and Myth*), the educational structure barely changed,

and progress stalled. Large-scale neglect of the region was detrimental to organized education. Although Jordan hosted a handful of formal educational centers and some foreign missionary schools, education generally stagnated.

### Education Under the Hashemites

Under the reign of King Abdullah I (1921-51 – see p. 8-10 of *History and Myth*), increased wealth and support from British officials led to growth in the availability of primary and secondary schools. The government convened several councils for education to standardize educational materials and promote greater school access for Jordanians. In 1940, the newly created Ministry of Education (MoE) replaced the councils, set a revised national curriculum, and expanded the school network to accommodate the country's growing population.

During King Hussein's rule (1953-99 – see p. 10-13 of *History and Myth*), the MoE further reformed the educational system and included the rapidly growing number of Palestinian refugees that lived in Jordan (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*). The



MoE removed barriers to access, such as mandatory exams, for secondary school admission. It also adopted measures to increase equity in learning outcomes, like mandating the use of government-selected textbooks in all public schools.

### Modern Education System

Today, education in Jordan is free and compulsory for all citizens, with a mandated minimum of 10 years of schooling starting at age 6. Most Jordanian students attend government-run public schools. Historically, enrollment in fee-based private schools has been significantly higher than the average rate in Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries. As of 2021, almost 29% of Jordanian primary school students were enrolled in private schools, compared to the MENA average of about 10%.

Public schools in Jordan operate under MoE-established guidelines. They segregate by gender (see p. 3 of *Time and Space*), the language of instruction is Arabic, and Islamic



studies are compulsory for all pupils except for Christians (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Some private schools in Jordan, mostly in Amman and other urban areas, instead follow foreign curricula of mostly European or North American school systems. In a 2018 assessment of student performance in reading, math, and science, Jordan ranked below the US and had similar scores as Thailand and Colombia.

As of 2021, Jordan spent about 3.2% of its GDP on education, lower than the MENA (3.8%) and US (6.1%) averages. Likewise, the country has a low school completion rate, in 2022, 96% completed primary and 56% completed secondary. A lack of funding in the school system has affected educational outcomes, with a 2022 study showing that by grade 3, only about a third of pupils could read at an appropriate grade level. Nevertheless, with US aid (see p. 6 of *Economics and Resources*), the MoE launched a strategic plan in 2018 to address shortcomings in the



system, seeking to improve teacher training and support, upgrade and repair outdated infrastructure, and reduce overcrowding and understaffing at all grade levels.



**United Nations School System:** The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) manages about 170 schools in Jordan. Mostly primary schools, these institutions were

first founded in 1949 to provide a basic education for the sudden influx of Palestinian refugees after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). While Palestinians in Jordan have the option of enrolling their children in Jordanian schools, UNRWA schools are traditionally near refugee camps and seek to integrate students into the host nation's educational system, while maintaining a focus on Palestinian history and identity. As of 2022, around 120,000 Palestinian students are enrolled in UNRWA schools, where schooling is free. Nevertheless, many of the schools operate two daily shifts and rely on temporary or rented structures to host students due to underfunding. With UN and foreign support, Jordan has also educated many Syrian refugees, who have been victims of civil war. As of 2020, about 145,000 Syrian refugees were enrolled in formal education in Jordan.

**Pre-Primary:** Children ages 4-5 may attend optional pre-primary school. Although Jordan has some publicly funded pre-primary institutions, many childcare centers are fee-based, making them inaccessible to many working-class Jordanians. However, the MoE has set a goal of making pre-primary education available to all 5-year-olds by 2025. In 2022, about 32% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in pre-primary school.

**Basic Education:** Jordan categorizes all 10 compulsory years of schooling as "Basic Education." Students at this level study a curriculum that includes Arabic, natural and computer sciences, math, Islamic studies, civics, and English. Students are typically

graded on a 100-point scale and must score at least a 50% in all their courses to advance to the next year. Students can repeat a school year only once, after which they proceed to the next grade. In 2022, about 80% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in primary school.

### **Secondary Education:**

After completing basic education, students can continue on to a 2-year secondary school, which divides into “technical” and “academic” tracks. Technical schools offer certificates in nursing, hospitality, agricultural



studies, or home economics. Academic secondary schools offer two courses of study – science or literature. Upon completion of either track, students are administered the **Tawjihi**, a national exam required to obtain a secondary school certificate. As of 2021, approximately 61% of students who took the **Tawjihi** passed. In 2020, about 68% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in secondary school.

**Post-Secondary Education:** If they pass the **Tawjihi**, students in the academic track may enroll in universities, while community colleges and technical institutes offer technical track students vocational training. Though public universities receive significant government funding, many also rely on tuition fees. As a result, many middle- and lower-income Jordanians must take academic leave to raise tuition funds or cannot access higher education. Otherwise, many students rely on private loans to finish their studies within the mandated 7-year limit on completing most degrees. Some universities admit students with low grades in exchange for higher tuition payments, a program that observers criticize for lowering academic standards and aiding the wealthy.

One of Jordan’s most prestigious universities is the University of Jordan, which was founded in 1962 by a royal decree and considered one of the MENA region’s best. Other notable post-secondary institutions are the Jordan University of Science and Technology, Hashemite University, and Yarmouk University.

## 8. TIME AND SPACE

### Overview

Jordanians view interpersonal connections as key to conducting business. While public displays of affection tend to be inappropriate, especially between members of the opposite sex, social touching among friends and family is common.

### Time and Work

Jordan's workweek runs Sunday-Thursday, with business hours varying by establishment type. Most offices are open from 8:30am-6:30pm, with a mid-day lunch break between 1pm-



3pm (see p. 1 of *Sustenance and Health*). Government offices and banks generally open from 8am-3pm, though some only open to the public for limited hours within this timeframe. Shops generally follow a 9am-8pm schedule, with a 2-hour lunch break in the early afternoon. Many shops, businesses, government offices, and restaurants either close or have significantly reduced hours during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

**Working Conditions:** Jordanian labor laws establish an 8-hour workday and a maximum 48-hour workweek, with government-set overtime pay. Benefits include 2 weeks of paid leave, 10 weeks of maternity leave, and a variable minimum wage based on job type. Despite these and other benefits and protections, the combination of lax enforcement and labor unions' ineffectiveness in advocating for protections often results in unsafe working conditions. Around 46% of Jordanians are engaged in informal employment (see p. 3-4 of *Economics and Resources*), whereby labor codes such as the minimum wage and other workplace standards are inapplicable.

**Time Zone:** Jordan adheres to Eastern European Time (EET), which is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Jordan observes

Eastern European Summer Time (EEST) from the end of March-October when the country is 3 hours ahead of GMT.

**Lunar Calendar:** Jordanian Muslims (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*) use the **Hijri** (Islamic) calendar to track Muslim holidays. Since it is based on lunar phases, dates fall 11 days earlier each year in relation to the Western calendar. The Islamic calendar's 12 months each have 30 days or fewer. Days begin at sunset on what the Western calendar would show as the previous day. For example, each new week begins at sunset on Saturday, and the Muslim holy day of Friday begins on Thursday evening.

### National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- March/April: Good Friday
- March/April: Easter
- May 1: Labor Day
- May 25: **Eid al-Istiklaal** (Independence Day)
- June 10: Army Day (Anniversary of the Arab Revolt, see p. 7 of *History and Myth*)
- December 25: Christmas Day

Variable dates according to the lunar calendar:

- **Eid al-Fitr:** End of Ramadan
- **Eid al-Adha:** Festival of Sacrifice
- **Awal Muharram:** Hijri New Year
- **Mawlid al-Nabi:** Birth of the Prophet Muhammad

**Time and Business:** Jordanians tend to have a relaxed approach to time, considering schedules and deadlines less important than relationships and social obligations. As a result, lengthy introductions, small talk, and interruptions may delay the start or progress of meetings. While senior employees typically expect punctuality from subordinate staff, higher-ranking staff often have more flexibility in managing time. Workplaces are usually hierarchical, and subordinate staff's inability to confirm an agreement without management's approval may prolong negotiations and decision-making.

## Public and Personal Space

Jordan maintains gender segregation in some public spaces, primarily schools (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*) and mosques, though the practice is not always strictly enforced. Religious conservatism (see p. 6-7 of *Religion and Spirituality*) often shapes personal preferences for space. Most Jordanians maintain an arm's length when conversing with strangers but stand closer to family and friends. Friends of the same gender may maintain minimal personal space when interacting.

**Touch:** Conversational touching depends largely on the level of familiarity. Unrelated Jordanians of the opposite gender tend to refrain from touching (see p. 3 of *Language and Communication*). Close friends and relatives often touch while interacting, and friends of the same gender often hold hands in public, demonstrating the closeness of their relationship.

**Eye Contact:** Jordanians typically engage in direct eye contact during greetings to convey interest and respect. During conversation, moderate eye contact signals attentive engagement. Nevertheless, many Jordanians avoid sustained eye contact with elders and members of the opposite gender.

## Photographs

Foreign nationals should acquire a Jordanian's permission before taking his photo. Government and military installations prohibit photography.



## Driving

Some Jordanians drive aggressively, ignoring traffic laws and pedestrians' right-of-way. Road conditions in urban areas tend to be suitable. Conditions are typically poor in rural areas, where the combination of unpaved or badly maintained roads and lack of lighting makes driving after dark dangerous. In 2019, Jordan recorded 17 traffic fatalities per 100,000 people, higher than the US rate (13) but lower than the average of countries in the Middle East and North Africa (19). Like Americans, Jordanians drive on the right side of the road.

## 9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

### Overview

Jordan's clothing, music, and arts reflect its unique history and the country's place in the modern global economy.

### Dress and Appearance

Everyday attire typically is either Western or traditional in style. As standards of dress tend to be conservative, Jordanians usually clothe most of their bodies. Likewise, male and female foreign nationals should also dress conservatively, avoiding shorts, mini-skirts, and sleeveless tops, except while visiting private beaches or pools.

**Traditional:** Women's traditional dress varies by region. For example, the **shirsh** (a black dress with tight sleeves and decorative embroidered geometric patterns along the neckline and down the sides) is typical in northern Jordan. In central and southern Jordan, the **thawb** (a long, floor-length dress) often has long, pointed sleeves. The **thawb** and **'abaya** (full-length, long-sleeve garment) often feature **tatriz** (intricate embroidery, see



"Folk Arts and Handicrafts" below).

Traditionally, men wear a **thawb** or **dishdasha** (a plain cotton or wool long-sleeve garment that falls to the ankles).

**Dishdasha** fabric is

often white in summer and darker colors in winter. Some men combine traditional and Western clothing, like wearing the **dishdasha** with a Western-style vest and overcoat. Many men wear the Jordanian **kuffiyeh**, also called **shemagh**, a red and white checkered headscarf that is often fastened by an **agal** (black rope traditionally made of woven goat hair). The Palestinian version of the **kuffiyeh** is black and white.

**Modern:** Some conservative women wear a **jilbab**, also called a **libis shari** (a floor-length, long-sleeved, front-buttoned coat), with a **hijab** (headscarf). Many women also wear Western-style

clothing that is typically modest, sometimes paired with a *hijab*. While traditional clothing is common in rural areas, most urban Jordanian men dress in Western-style clothing.

## Recreation and Leisure

Jordanians tend to spend their leisure time with friends and family. Popular pastimes include dining, shopping, and socializing at homes, shopping malls, and **aswaq** (singular, **souq** – open-air markets).



Historically, men tend to gather at coffeehouses to socialize, smoke **shisha** (flavored tobacco) through **argileh** (water pipes), and play games like backgammon or dominoes. *Argileh* lounges, dance clubs, and bars are popular venues in urban, touristic areas like Amman and Aqaba, where some Jordanians gather.

**Holidays and Festivals:** Jordanians celebrate many religious holidays (see p. 5, 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Most Muslims observe **Eid al-Fitr** at the end of Ramadan and **Eid al-Adha** following the **Hajj** pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia (see p. 3-4 of *Religion and Spirituality*). To celebrate, many families gather to pray, feast, give gifts, and make charitable donations. Among Christians, Easter and Christmas are central holidays, though customs and dates vary by year and tradition (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*).

Some national holidays commemorate important dates in Jordan's history. Army Day celebrates the Great Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire in 1916, and **Eid al-Istiklaal** (Independence Day) marks Jordan's independence from British control in 1946 (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). Both holidays often feature speeches, parades, and fireworks.

## Sports and Games

Jordanians participate in a wide variety of sports, such as soccer, basketball, volleyball, taekwondo, boxing, swimming,

and rugby. Car races are also popular, and King Abdullah II has competed in national car rallies.

Jordan participates in numerous international competitions, such as the Summer Olympics, Islamic Games, West Asian Games, and Pan Arab Games. At the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, Jordan won its first Olympic medal when Ahmad Abu-Ghaush won gold in taekwondo.

**Soccer:** Known as “football” in the region, soccer is Jordan’s most popular sport and pastime. Many Jordanians begin playing at a young age, and children often create makeshift soccer fields in local streets. The Jordanian men’s premier league comprises 12 teams. As of 2022 Al-Faisaly are the defending champions. The men’s national team, nicknamed “The Chivalrous,” has had minimal success in global competitions.

**Games:** An ancient West Asian boardgame, **tawle** or **shesh-besh** (backgammon), involves two players vying to clear their markers from the board. *Tawle* is especially popular among Jordanian men, who often meet to play in cafes. Other popular pastimes include **shutterunj** (chess) and **dama** (checkers).

## Dance

Jordan’s most important traditional dance is **dabke** (or **dabkah**), a folk dance with regional variations that may have originated when neighbors gathered to stamp mud into cracks in thatched roofs. *Dabke* involves dancers placing their arms over the shoulders of the adjacent dancers or holding hands in a line or circle, stomping and kicking their feet to the music.



The person in the **dabbeek** (leader) position is typically the most skilled dancer and waves a handkerchief to lead the dance. *Dabke* is common at celebrations and especially at weddings.

Jordanian Circassians (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*) have many unique traditional dances and techniques. Jumping male dancers land on their toe knuckles, and female



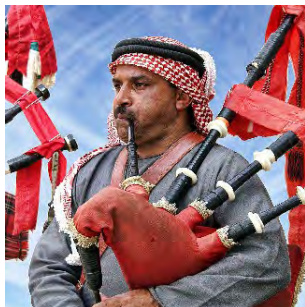
dancers execute coordinated graceful movements. The dancers also have many traditional costumes, such as knee-high boots, ornate daggers adorning a leather belt, furry woolen headpieces for men, and floor-length embroidered dresses with wide dangling sleeves for women.

### Music

Traditional Jordanian music reflects regional customs and history.

Traditional instruments include the **oud** (stringed instrument similar to a guitar), **qanun** (trapezoidal string instrument), **ney** (flute), and **darbuka** (drum).

Traditional Jordanian songs are in the form of **zajal**, a combination of improvised



poetry and music with traditional instruments such as the **rabab** (bowed string instrument) and **mizmar** (reed pipe). Although Bedouin still play **zajal** songs in rural areas like Wadi Rum, they are not popular in cities. The British brought bagpipes to Jordan during the British Mandate (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*), which the military band still play today.

Many Jordanians listen to an array of foreign and Middle Eastern musical styles, such as pop, rock, heavy metal, folk, classical, rap, and electronic. In recent years, Western music has influenced Jordanian music. Some local musicians blend Western pop beats and instruments with traditional Jordanian melodies and instruments. For example, Tareq Al Nasser founded the popular musical group Rum in 1998, that combines traditional Jordanian songs and instruments with electric piano, Western drums, and Latin, jazz, blues, and reggae rhythms.

Other notable musicians also utilize traditional Arab and modern Western musical traditions. Jordanian pop singer Diana Karazon won *Superstar* (Arab Idol), while Bedouin singer Omar Al-Abdullat's patriotic song "Hashemi, Hashemi" became widely popular in the 2010s. Similarly, Palestinian-Jordanian Adham Nabulsi gained regional recognition in his debut on *The X Factor Arabia* TV series.

## Literature

Religious texts comprised most early Jordanian literature. One of Jordan's first popular poets, Mustafa Wahbi al-Tal, also known as Arar, used humor to discuss a range of topics from anti-colonialism to nationalism.



Contemporary literature began to blossom in the 20th century, reflecting the complexities of Jordan's political and social realities. One of the many themes of Mounis al-Razzaz's works was the lifestyle transition of living in traditional rural towns to modern cities (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*). Today, Jordanian literature covers current conflicts,

identity issues, and political and social themes. Elias Farkouh depicts religious, cultural, and political themes in his works. His novel ***Ard al-Yambous*** ("Land of Purgatory") tells the story of an exiled man. Similarly, British-Jordanian author Fadia Faqir's novel *My Name is Salma* is a story of an Arab woman who is forced to flee the Middle East for the West.

Palestinian-Jordanian Jamal Naji often focuses on the status of Palestinians in Jordanian society, a theme in his novel *When the Wolves Grow Old*. Ibrahim Nasrallah's novel *The Time of White Horses* addresses issues of exile and identity. In 2006, the government charged Nasrallah with insulting the state and banned his collection of poetry, ***Nu'man Yastaridu Lawnahu*** ("Anemone Regains Its Color"), in Jordan.

## Folk Arts and Handicrafts

Jordan has a rich tradition of folk arts and crafts, which include calligraphy, tapestry, embroidery, leatherwork, ceramics, mosaics, and colorful carpets made of sheep wool, goat hair, and camel pile. Palestinian *tatriz* influences Jordanian needlework, which features a variety of colors in geometric shapes and patterns. *Tatriz* is often on traditional dress, decorative tablecloths, and picture frames. Soapmaking is another time-honored tradition, in which Jordanian artisans blend olive oil with scented herbs to make aromatic varieties.

## 10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

### Sustenance Overview

Meals in Jordan are often important social events. Traditional Jordanian cuisine reflects the country's close ties to Levantine neighbors and the presence of nomadic Bedouin culture (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*). Dishes typically incorporate fresh and imported ingredients seasoned with aromatic spices.

### Dining Customs

Most Jordanians eat three daily meals and snack throughout the day. Traditionally, the mid-day meal is the largest, with friends and family lingering over the food to take advantage of conversation and companionship. When invited to a Jordanian home, guests usually arrive a few minutes late and present the host with a small gift, such as sweets, fresh fruit, or flowers.

A meal typically consists of a large collection of **mezze**, flatbread, and main courses that all diners share. Some Jordanians avoid using the left hand, which is reserved for sanitary purposes and considered unclean, to eat or pass food. They typically wash their hands prior to meals as a sign of proper etiquette. Hosts usually provide guests additional servings of food and beverage as a gesture of hospitality, and politeness dictates guests oblige and sample all dishes offered. Likewise, leaving an empty plate is thought to invite famine and considered rude. Diners usually leave some uneaten food to commend a host's good hospitality. Further, many Jordanians consider it rude to leave as soon as the meal concludes. Instead, guests remain to share extended conversation with other participants.

### Diet

Bread is one of Jordan's most common staples, served alongside most dishes. While there are dozens of varieties, a common form is **khubz** (pita or flatbread), which diners tear into pieces and use to scoop dips like **labneh** (thick, creamy yogurt



garnished with olive oil or served strained with diced cucumber, fresh mint, and crushed garlic) or heartier dishes like **fuul medames** (mashed fava beans cooked with garlic, cumin, lemon, and olive oil). Other starchy staples are potatoes, which Jordanians often use in traditional lunchtime stews, and rice.

Besides starches, most meals include vegetables and/or an animal protein, particularly lamb, goat, or sometimes chicken. Common herbs and spices include sumac, parsley, cinnamon, cardamom, oregano, garlic, star anise, and **za'tar** (a mixture of thyme, marjoram, and sumac). Across the Levant, Jordan is renowned for its dairy products, and especially *labneh*, **jameed** (hardened cakes of dried ewe's or goat's milk), and **kashkawan** (a soft white cheese made of cow's or sheep's milk). Observant Muslims typically do not consume pork nor alcohol and adhere to particular rules of animal slaughter and meat preparation to ensure that food is **halal**, allowed by Islamic law.

### Meals and Popular Dishes

For breakfast, many Jordanians eat bread, either *khubz* or **ka'ak** (a round loaf topped with sesame seeds), along with eggs, local cheeses, olives, and *fuul medames*. Other popular breakfast options are **fatayer** (pies baked with cheese, meat, or spinach) or *khubz* and **hummus** (blended chickpeas and sesame paste),



sometimes served in a Jordanian variation known as **fattet hummus** (a pudding made from hummus and toasted or fresh *khubz*).

The mid-day meal typically consists of hearty meat dishes and stews. A popular Bedouin meal is

**mansaf**. *Mansaf* is one of Jordan's national dishes and is traditionally baked in a **zarb** (underground oven) for several hours before serving, often at special events like weddings (see p. 4 of *Family and Kinship*). Another similar dish, **maqluba** (or **makloubeh**), is also served on notable occasions and consists of chicken or lamb cooked with rice and vegetables, then served

by overturning the pot the meal was cooked in and topping the stew with herbs, raisins, and fresh vegetables.

Dinner is often a smaller meal and typically includes leftovers from lunch or similar dishes. Other options are **farooj** (grilled chicken served with bread and raw onions) and **shish tawook** (chicken kebab marinated in lemon, garlic, and yogurt). For dessert or a sweet snack, Jordanians eat **baklava**, **kanafeh** (shredded filo dough layered with soft cheese and syrup), nuts roasted with sugar and spices, or dried dates.

## Beverages

Jordanians drink a variety of hot teas. Sweetened black tea, mint, or herbal blends are some of the most popular options.

Coffee is another popular drink, frequently served black, sweetened with sugar, and consumed throughout the day. Bedouin communities serve small saucers of coffee as a sign of hospitality. Etiquette dictates that guests should accept three-five



servings. Another popular drink is **sahlab**, a thick blend of milk, cinnamon, and nuts, traditionally served in the winter. Popular alcoholic beverages include **arak** (an anise-flavored spirit), local wine (often produced by Christians, see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*), or beer.

## Eating Out

Restaurants in urban centers such as Amman range from upscale establishments specializing in international and local cuisine to inexpensive food stalls. Street stalls are especially popular for quick dinners. Popular options are **shish tawook**, **falafel** (a deep-fried mixture of chickpeas with garlic, cumin, and parsley), and **shawarma** (meat grilled on a rotating spit, sliced, and wrapped in flat bread with yogurt and vegetables). Coffeehouses are important spaces for Jordanian men (see p. 3 of *Time and Space*), who often gather to socialize and smoke **shisha** (flavored tobacco) through **argileh** (water pipes, see p. 2 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). While tipping is not common in Jordan, diners often round the bill up at cafes and street stalls, and a 10% tip at restaurants is appreciated.

## Health Overview

While the overall health of Jordanians has improved in recent decades, they continue to face notable non-communicable “lifestyle” diseases and other serious health challenges. Between 1990-2023, life expectancy at birth increased from about 70 to 76 years, a figure slightly higher than the average of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries (73) but lower than the US (81). During the same period, infant mortality

(the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased from about 30 deaths per 1,000 live births to 14, lower than the MENA average (18), but about twice the US rate (5).



## Traditional Medicine

This treatment method consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population’s beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Jordanian medicine relies on herbal treatments to identify and cure the causes of illness, both physical and spiritual. Besides herbal remedies, common treatment methods include acupuncture (a process in which a practitioner inserts very thin needles into a patient’s skin) and **hijama** (also known as wet cupping, the process of applying heated cups to the skin to extract toxins, improve blood flow, and alleviate pain).

## Healthcare System

Jordan’s healthcare system is composed of both a government-funded public scheme and a network of private medical providers, and each sector is roughly the same size. Public health experts note that Jordan’s healthcare system is one of the MENA region’s most well-developed. Accordingly, the country is a popular destination for medical tourism. Both public and private practitioners provide care through primary care clinics, home care programs, and hospitals that treat major illnesses like cancer and cardiovascular diseases. In 2020, Jordan spent about 7.47% of its GDP on healthcare, higher than the MENA average (5.96%), but lower than the US rate (18.82%).

Despite efforts to expand medical coverage to low-income and rural Jordanians, treatment at government healthcare facilities still requires enrollment in the public insurance scheme, which is funded through the government budget, payroll deductions, and employer contributions. As of 2022 around 72% of Jordanian citizens were covered either through public or private health insurance plans. Despite government subsidies, the cost of treatment in public hospitals can be prohibitive for uninsured Jordanians, causing some to delay needed care. Likewise, out-of-pocket spending constituted about 30% of all healthcare expenditures in 2020, a similar level to other MENA countries (30%), but significantly higher than the US (10%).

**Refugee Healthcare:** Jordan's large refugee population (see p. 11, 13 of *Political and Social Relations*) has required the creation of a parallel healthcare system to address the specific needs of these communities. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East provides free healthcare to Palestinian communities through its own primary care facilities or by paying for treatment in the Jordanian healthcare system. Refugees of neighboring Syria's civil war receive medical treatment through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in officially recognized refugee camps in Jordan. Outside of these areas, Syrian refugees can access Jordanian medical facilities but must pay the same rate that uninsured Jordanians pay for healthcare services.



### Health Challenges

The leading causes of death are chronic and non-communicable “lifestyle” diseases, which accounted for some 80% of deaths in 2019. Of these, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, diabetes, cancer, and neonatal complications are the most common. Preventable “external causes,” such as suicides, car

accidents, and other injuries resulted in about 10.4% of deaths, higher than the US rate (7%). Roadside accidents (see p. 3 of *Time and Space*) are the seventh leading cause of death in 2022. The elevated number of tobacco smokers in Jordan, with about 57% of adult men in the country using tobacco in 2020, has been a persistent challenge in the country's efforts to reduce non-communicable diseases. Health experts claim that the high usage of tobacco products among men is a contributing factor to the difference in life expectancy between Jordanian men and women. As of 2023, men were expected to live to about 75- and women to 78-years-old.

Health experts point to Jordan's large refugee population as a notable healthcare challenge in the country. The rapid influx of Syrian refugees since 2012 has strained the healthcare system's



capacity to offer adequate care for all who need it. Many refugees and uninsured Jordanians therefore depend on local pharmacists as their primary medical care providers, who typically do not have the same medical training as physicians.

Likewise, some refugee communities have inadequate access to basic services, and crowded living quarters pose a high risk for the rapid transmission of communicable illnesses (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*).

As of mid-2023, Jordan reported over 1.7 million cases of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus. Of these cases, Jordan has recorded just over 14,000 deaths. As of October 2022, about 45% of the country's population was fully vaccinated against the disease. While the Jordanian government was one of the world's first to offer vaccinations to refugees, hesitancy to receive has led to lagging vaccination rates compared to neighboring Israel and Saudi Arabia.



## 11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

### Overview

Early inhabitants established small farming settlements around 8000 BC. Economic activity increased as residents began to mine copper, and around 3200 BC, they started trading bronze with groups across the region (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*). About 1,000 years later, desert nomads moved to the area, and many residents shifted to nomadic lifestyles, subsisting largely by herding livestock. Significant settlements did not return for



centuries, as small villages and nomadic groups lived mostly as farmers or herders (see p. 1-2 of *History and Myth*).

The region remained largely rural until the 4th century BC, when the Seleucids built cities and promoted caravan trade (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). Beginning in 63 BC, local prosperity grew as the Romans encouraged trade with other regions and built new cities (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). The Levant remained a prosperous trade center until the 7th-century arrival of Muslim invaders from Arabia (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*). Jordan's regional relevance declined under the Abbasid dynasty starting in 750 AD, and people returned to a semi-nomadic lifestyle herding sheep, goats, and camels. In the 16th century, the area became part of the Ottoman Empire and remained a mostly rural, relative backwater until the empire's collapse during World War I (WWI, see p. 6-7 of *History and Myth*).

In the early 20th century, Europeans became more involved in Jordan. In 1908, the Ottomans, with German support, built the Hejaz railway through Jordan, improving its trade prospects (see p. 1 of *Technology and Material*). After WWI, the area then known as Transjordan became a British Mandate (see p. 7-8 of *History and Myth*) dependent on British financial support. British aid supported some modernization and industrialization, albeit at a slower pace than in neighboring British territories.

After Jordan gained independence in 1946 (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*), the 1948 Israeli-Arab War significantly impacted its economy. Despite losing the war, Jordan won control of the West Bank and over half a million Palestinian refugees, which caused political instability and high unemployment (see p. 9-10 of *History and Myth*). To help mitigate these challenges, the US and United Kingdom provided aid to Jordan's pro-Western government that stimulated growth in Jordan's industrial and mining sectors and agricultural sector in the West Bank.

Nevertheless, in the 1967 Six-Day War (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*), Israel captured the West Bank and its significant arable land. It also created a new wave of Palestinian refugees, who fled to Jordan, which became increasingly reliant on aid from its Arab neighbors and the US. Although Israel eventually gave Jordan rights to farm in the West Bank, the Jordanian economy became more dependent on importing agricultural products and other growing sectors like tourism, banking, mining, and chemicals production.

In the early 1990s, Jordan sided with Iraq, its largest trading partner, which invaded Kuwait causing the Gulf War (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). The US and Kuwait's other allies blockaded Jordan, which devastated the economy that was heavily reliant on trade and foreign aid. Up to 300,000 refugees, many of whom were Palestinians of



Jordanian nationality, fled Kuwait and other Gulf countries for Jordan, which intensified the economic crisis there. Eventually, Jordan supported a US-led peace initiative, and its economy began to recover as regional trade resumed, foreign aid returned, and some of the refugees left the country.

After ascending the throne in 1999, King Abdullah II partnered with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank to privatize key sectors like manufacturing and mining in exchange for debt relief and loans to foster private enterprise. Jordan

became a member of the World Trade Organization in 2000, and foreign direct investment helped cultivate emerging information technology and pharmaceuticals sectors. Jordan's economy grew as private enterprise increased.

The 2008-09 global financial crisis led to higher unemployment, which contributed to political instability in Jordan. In 2011, King Abdullah II issued several tax reforms meant to address unemployment and discontent. However, unrest continued after Jordan reduced fuel subsidies to qualify for an IMF loan in 2012. A surge of refugees fleeing Syria's civil war also placed substantial strain on Jordan's infrastructure and services (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). Jordan's slow economic growth,



combined with a rapidly growing population, caused per-capita GDP growth to decline by an average of 1.69% per year between 2009-17.

To reduce public debt and kickstart growth, Jordan and the IMF implemented tax

increases, subsidy cuts, and other austerity measures in 2016, causing widespread protests. By 2019, data showed that the tax hike had lowered consumption and sales tax revenue. Consequently, Jordan and the IMF implemented additional programs in 2019, though the COVID-19 pandemic hampered these measures (see p. 6 of *Sustenance and Health*). Unemployment increasingly impacted more Jordanian youth and women, who already experienced extremely low participation in the labor force (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*).

Today, Jordan's economy faces high unemployment and public debt, lack of capital, and the strain of hosting around 3 million refugees. Government spending accounts for nearly a third of GDP. While IMF and World Bank reforms have focused on stimulating private sector growth with limited success, Jordan remains reliant on foreign aid. It also struggles with a large informal sector that consists primarily of small businesses and unskilled workers, who have no legal protections and pay few

taxes (see p. 1 of *Time and Space*). Nearly half of the workforce are informal workers, including many Palestinians and recently arrived refugees from Syria. As of 2023, the economy was recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic as tourists returned to Jordan. Although experts predict the economy will grow 2.7% in 2023, many observers expect unemployment, low growth, and women's low labor force participation to persist.

## Services

Accounting for about 61% of GDP and 79% of the labor force in 2022, services comprise the economy's largest sector. Major subsectors are tourism, banking, information technology, and retail.

**Tourism:** Jordan's well-developed tourism subsector accounted for nearly 20% of GDP in 2022. In 2022, around 5 million tourists visited Jordan. Most visitors are from nearby Arab countries and typically visit historical sites, including the world-famous Petra (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), medieval mosques and churches, and natural sites such as the Dead Sea and Wadi Rum.



**Banking:** Jordan's banking subsector accounted for just under 40% of GDP in 2021. Of the 16 Jordanian banks in the country, three adhere to Islamic lending and interest laws. In 2020, Jordanian banks held some \$80 billion in assets. Since 1999, Jordan hosts the Amman Stock Exchange, where Jordanian stocks and securities are traded.

**Information Technology (IT):** IT accounted for about 4% of GDP in 2022. Jordan's IT companies employ about 26,000 Jordanians, who develop software, build IT infrastructure, and create health, financial, and educational technologies, among other activities.

## Industry

Industry accounts for around 25% of GDP and employs about 18% of residents. Major subsectors are mining, chemical and fertilizer production, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and oil refining.

**Mining:** In 2021, mining accounted for almost 9% of GDP. Most mining in Jordan is for potash and phosphate, minerals used in fertilizer, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals production. Jordan is the world's 7th-largest potash producer and has the 5th-largest phosphate reserves. The country produces significant quantities of bromine, also used in chemicals production.



### **Chemicals and Fertilizers:**

Jordan refines and manufactures fertilizers and chemicals and was home to about 85 fertilizer factories in 2022. Jordan also produces sulfuric and phosphoric acid used in industrial processes, chemicals production, and as cleaners, as well as specialty cements for industrial use.

**Pharmaceuticals:** Jordan was among the first Arab countries to become a major generic drug producer and is a regional leader in pharmaceuticals production, much of which is centered around Amman. In 2020, the subsector contributed about 7% of Jordan's GDP. Jordan typically sells manufactured pharmaceuticals to neighboring Arab countries.

**Clothing and Textiles:** Jordan's textiles subsector employs nearly 75,000 residents, operating about 75 mills and clothing factories throughout the country. Production focuses on textile yarn, fabrics, pre-made articles, apparel, and related products. Exports of clothing and textiles exceeded \$2 billion in 2021.

**Oil Refining:** While Jordan lacks major oil reserves, the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company refines oil primarily imported from Iraq. In 2022, the firm made \$187 million in total revenue.

### **Agriculture**

Agriculture accounts for over 5% of GDP and about 3% of employment. As Jordan is highly arid, only about 2% of its land is arable. The largest obstacle to agriculture is water scarcity. Jordan has few natural freshwater sources, which have grown increasingly depleted in recent years (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*). Agriculture in Jordan uses new technologies

and water conservation techniques for efficient water utilization. While the government subsidizes most irrigation, droughts from climate change have made irrigation increasingly difficult.

**Farming:** Most Jordanian farms grow wheat and barley in the uplands and fruits and vegetables on irrigated farms in the Jordan Valley. Farmers grow tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers, olives, and other fruits and vegetables. Most livestock are goats and sheep, though farmers also raise poultry and produce milk. Because Jordanian farms cannot meet the country's food needs, Jordan imports most of its prepared and fresh food requirements.

### Currency

Jordan's currency is the Jordanian **dinar** (JOD or JD), which divides into 10 **dirhams**, 100 **qirsh** (also called **piastres**), and 1,000 **fulus**. The Bank of Jordan issues five banknote values (1, 5, 10, 20, and 50 **dinars**), and seven coin values (1, 2, 5, and 10 **qirsh** and 0.25, 0.5, and 1 **dinar**). Since 1995, Jordan has pegged the JOD to the US dollar, with US\$1 worth JOD 0.709.



### Foreign Trade

Jordan's exports, which totaled \$12 billion in 2022, primarily consisted of potassic fertilizers, calcium phosphates, packaged medicines, and clothing sold to the US (20%), India (15%), Saudi Arabia (10%), Iraq (8%), United Arab Emirates (UAE) (3%) and Indonesia (3%). In the same year, Jordan's imports totaled about \$27.2 billion and primarily consisted of cars, petroleum products, knitted fabric, and medical and food products from China (15%), Saudi Arabia (14%), UAE (8%), the US (6%), and India (5%).

### Foreign Aid

Jordan is a major recipient of foreign aid, much of which has focused on assisting with water scarcity, promoting private-sector growth to decrease reliance on government spending, refugee assistance, and COVID-19 support. In 2022, Jordan received \$660 million in US bilateral aid. The European Union and Arab countries also provide significant aid to Jordan.

## 12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

### Overview

Jordan has well-developed and modern infrastructure in major cities but not in many smaller towns and rural areas. Financial problems consistently delay government plans to improve infrastructure. Although Jordan is a technological leader in the Middle East, the government tightly controls the media.

### Transportation

The most common form of public transportation are buses and minibuses. While they lack subway networks, major cities such as Amman and Irbid have robust public bus systems. Taxis and rideshare services are also available in major cities. Small towns and rural areas lack public transportation infrastructure and are primarily reliant on minibuses for travel between cities. Many Jordanians travel short distances by walking or riding bikes or mopeds. Privately owned vehicles (POVs) are becoming more popular, and about 1-6 Jordanians owned a POV in 2021.

**Roadways:** Jordan has just under 5,000 mi of generally well-maintained and paved roadways, including multi-lane highways that connect large cities and smaller local roads. Highways also lead to border crossings with Iraq, Syria, and the West Bank (see p. 2 of *Political and Social Relations*). Several of these land borders have recently reopened after long closures due to security threats in Iraq and Syria.



**Railways:** As of 2020, Jordan has 930 mi of railways mostly connecting Amman to the Syrian border and a few nearby towns. Today, the Hejaz Jordan Railway, the successor of the famed Hejaz Railway (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*), runs only from Amman to Al Jizah Station, south of the capital. The government plans to expand the railway network for freight transport, though financial difficulties have hindered progress.

**Ports and Waterways:** Jordan has no navigable waterways, as its three major rivers (Jordan, Yarmuk, and Zarqa) are too shallow for large boats to transport goods or people. Jordan has just 16 mi of coastline on the Red Sea, where its only major port, Aqaba, is located. Aqaba has cargo and passenger terminals and is one of the Red Sea's busiest container ports.

**Airways:** Jordan has 18 airports, 16 of which have paved runways. The Queen Alia Airport in Amman is by far Jordan's largest, serving over 97% of passengers in 2023. Jordan's airports collectively registered 9.5 million passengers and 86,000 flights. Jordan's largest airline and flag carrier is Royal Jordanian Airlines, which flies to over 50 destinations worldwide.



## Energy

While Jordan generates most of its energy from oil and other fossil fuels, it is also a regional leader in wind and solar energy, which accounts for about 23% of total electricity production. In exchange for desalinated water, Jordan has plans to supply Israel with electricity generated from a solar power facility to be constructed by the United Arab Emirates (see p. 9-10 of *Political and Social Relations*). Although Jordan has limited hydrocarbons reserves, it has about 300 mi of natural gas and 30 mi of oil pipelines.

## Media

While Jordan's constitution protects freedoms of speech and press, the government tightly restricts the media and forces journalists to register with the state-affiliated Jordanian Press Association (JPA). Journalists are subject to surveillance by the intelligence service, and officials often use vague anti-terrorism and security laws to prosecute and sometimes jail journalists. Media outlets also face frequent gag orders and restrictions on discussing certain topics to limit public debate and information access. To avoid punishment, many media outlets self-censor and do not cover subjects that officials consider "off-limits."



**Print Media:** Jordan has major national and smaller regional daily newspapers, as well as weekly and monthly publications. Although print media have struggled with financial difficulties and many outlets risk closure, the JPA recently has taken steps to support them. Major daily newspapers include JPA-owned *Al Rai*, privately-owned *Al Ghad*, and *Ad-Dustour*, in which the government owns a stake. The main English-language daily is *The Jordan Times*, a sister publication of *Al Rai*). The Media Commission reviewed over 400 books on 2022 and banned 53 for religious and moral reasons. In 2021 the commission banned 15 books.



**TV and Radio:** TV is a popular news and entertainment source in Jordan. State-controlled broadcaster Jordan Radio and TV Corporation (JRTV)

operates national news and entertainment networks like *JordanTV*, *Al-Mamlaka TV*, and *SportTV*. Numerous private satellite TV stations offer international programming, such as Israeli and Syrian broadcasts. JRTV also operates national radio stations, most of which broadcast news and entertainment in Arabic. A few regional and international English- and French-language broadcasts are also available. Most of Jordan's 40 privately owned radio stations broadcast music. Today, many young Jordanians stream TV and music via the Internet.

### Telecommunications

Jordan has an advanced telecommunications network and is a regional leader in implementing new telecommunications technologies like 5G networks. Most Jordanians communicate via their mobile devices. In 2022, Jordan had about 4 landline and 68 mobile cellular subscriptions per 100 people.

**Internet:** In 2021, about 83% of Jordanians used the Internet regularly, and 6 per 100 inhabitants gain access via mobile devices. Nevertheless, the government restricts Internet use by blocking access to hundreds of websites. In addition, recent cybersecurity laws enable officials to prosecute or jail people for posting news stories or social media posts that are critical of the government.



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