Reframing Youth Apathy in Jordan: An Anarchist Approach to Politics in the Hashemite Kingdom

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Abstract

The Arab Spring’s intense, mass popular protests demonstrate young people’s capacity to catalyze significant social and political change throughout the Middle East. Interestingly, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan appears to be among the few countries where these widespread political shifts barely seemed to register in terms of comparable movements. This is particularly unexpected given Jordan’s central regional location and large youth majority (almost 70% of the population is under the age of thirty). Many older Jordanians describe Jordan’s youth as apathetic and disinterested in politics. However, this is a convenient, hegemonic story that may only partially explain the absence of a Hashemite “Spring.”

My thesis challenges the notion of the “apathetic young Jordanian,” through an analysis of the political engagement and opinions of the underrepresented youth in Jordan. During the fall of 2012, I performed original research and data collection in Amman, Jordan (8 interviews and 126 surveys), after which it became apparent that young Jordanians are deeply interested in politics, and not simply indifferent to elections and the “Springs” occurring around them. Using a combination of fieldwork interviews and surveys in conjunction with theoretical analysis, this thesis attempts to situate apathy as an active mode of response in a period of regional and domestic political shifts.

Throughout this thesis, I analyze Jordanians’ political system and the historical context for their current situation, as well as the phenomenon of the “political street,” utilizing an Anarchist approach to better analyze the dynamic nature of power relations and youth political involvement in Jordan. Ultimately, this analysis offers an intriguing and innovative application of Anarchist concepts, reframing traditional understandings of political “apathy” and the prevalent generalizations of young Jordanians. In conclusion, I present my findings from the interviews and surveys, providing more contextual evidence for the thesis, thereby demonstrating that apparent indifference or political nonparticipation can actually be a form or means of engagement. Young Jordanians are not politically indifferent or disengaged, but rather victimized and ignored by the prevailing power relations within the Hashemite Kingdom.
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To Professor Mbaye Lo, a special thank you for helping me start this journey four years ago in beginning Arabic, and helping me see it through over the next few years. Our time abroad together in Egypt and Qatar not only encouraged me to explore the Middle East, but also taught me much about life, both inside and outside the classroom. Thank you for great advice and your willingness to always help a student in need of advice or a kind word.

Lastly, thanks to my family, my amazing parents, brothers, and sister. Without your love and support, I surely would not have finished much of anything, much less this thesis.
Introduction

Although I would like to say that my interest in the Middle East began as a grand, meaningful ambition to solve world problems or better understand another culture; in reality, I needed to satiate my curiosity. During the entirety of my studies before college, the Arab world was effectively ignored and altogether deemed “less important” than European history or American literature. Upon arriving at Duke University, I attempted to fill this gap in my education by studying Arabic and the Middle East. Understanding the complexities of the region’s history and modern day events proved all the more inviting within the context of the incredible events of the Arab Spring. I knew that I needed to witness the culture and setting surrounding this phenomenon, and when given the opportunity to understand the “Spring” firsthand, I travelled to Cairo, Egypt as a member of the Duke Engage program in June 2011.

During that summer in Egypt, I worked at an orphanage and community center, exploring the diversity and peculiarities of this space that I found so intriguing. I became friends with many young Egyptians and discussed politics, religion, or anything else that piqued our interests. However, it was not until a dangerous, intense experience that I truly became invested in understanding the youth of Egypt, and their peers across the Arab world. On the last day of my civic engagement program, I decided to eat a final, traditional Egyptian meal at a street café near Tahrir Square. This same square had hosted the “million person protest” a few weeks earlier, and was the main location of political demonstrations for the Egyptian Spring. A Duke classmate and I sat down for lunch, and as we prepared to pay, we were harassed by an older woman in traditional Egyptian dress, perhaps from rural Egypt. Assuming she only wanted money or was simply curious about our backgrounds, we began to leave, but were immediately surrounded by a group of middle-aged men garbed in Bedouin type robes. Unbeknownst to us, an announcement
had been issued to the media that a few young Americans were responsible for violence earlier that day in Tahrir Square, and we fit the description perfectly.

My friend and I were attacked. As the group heckled, pushed, grabbed, yelled, and demanded answers, we found ourselves in a surreal situation, surrounded by a violent circle. Needless to say, the fear and anger were palpable, and after a few tense seconds a small crowd had gathered in the street. We weighed our options in the din of screams, and were about to break out violently in order to escape. However, before the situation escalated, a few young Egyptians came to our defense. The young men spoke up in broken English, instructing us to run across the street while they held the crowd back. As my friend and I sprinted away, some of the other protestors gave chase, but our unexpected allies stopped these aggressors as well. In a standoff, these young Egyptians had saved us while placing themselves in harm’s way to do so, simply to help two American college students in the wrong place at the wrong time. After this final intense experience in Cairo, I did not feel dissuaded from going back to Egypt (or the Middle East for that matter). In fact, I found myself all the more curious and motivated, sympathizing with the youth in this region and wanting to understand their struggles. As I met and worked alongside these young people, I felt immediately convicted and inspired by their engagement, the struggle for fair political participation many youth in America take for granted.

The next year, propelled by my newfound interest in Middle Eastern youth, I decided to explore the political thought and motivations of young people in neighboring Jordan. In the fall of 2013 I travelled to this desert Kingdom, hoping to better understand the culture, identity, and political behavior of these youth surrounded by countries in turmoil and political instability. During my three-month study abroad program in Amman, the capitol of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, I met and worked alongside many young people. Throughout these interactions,
Jordanian youth seemed deeply engaged and interested in politics, which was unsurprising after the events of the Arab Spring. Although Jordan did not necessarily experience the same repercussions as other Arab countries, it seemed logical that the Kingdom had been affected by its own type of “Spring.” However, many older Jordanians and some younger ones viewed the youth as uncaring and apathetic towards politics. At first glance, this opinion appeared to be perpetuated by the more traditional and conservative members of Jordanian society, but the generalization was much too widespread. Although this generalization could result from the sentiments of older generation regime supporters, as well as tribal leaders, this answer appeared too simplistic. Even the family I stayed with in Amman, who would be considered by many Jordanians as “more progressive” and liberal, suggested youth were indifferent to elections or the entire political process for that matter. As I learned about the various modes and intensities of political engagement in Jordan, I began to discover the cultural/socio-political issues surrounding youth involvement. This subject eventually became the focus of my research, fostering a project that seeks to explore and analyze the opinions and political motivations of young Jordanians.

**Key Terms and Literature Review**

Before discussing the limited literature devoted to one of Jordan’s important populations, young Jordanians, it is necessary to define three terms I will be utilizing in my thesis: youth, apathy, and political participation. Defining “young” or “youth” becomes a difficult task when considering its fluid nature, demarcated by social ideas of biological maturation and adult transition. A multitude of academics have attempted to fully analyze the conception and usage of “youth.” Throughout my thesis and research discussion, youth will be considered those between the ages of 18-30 due to the country’s voting age requirement (minimum of 18 years old), as well as probable timing for political involvement (younger individuals will most likely
not have fully developed political opinions). Other demographic definitions based on political, economic, and cultural factors also support this delineation in understanding “youth.” For example, the framing of youth deployed by the EuroMed Youth Program uses a case-by-case examination of specific youth populations to determine what constitutes the young population (in terms of age) in different countries throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. Although the program deals primarily with non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) and educational reform, the programs’ summaries provide detailed demographic information on these youth populations. The EuroMed Country Summary of Jordan states “Jordan adopted a wide definition of youth (12-30), similar to many other Middle Eastern countries as the Arabic word for “youth” – *shabab* – might refer even to people aged 30 or above. For statistical purposes the UN definition of youth (referring to “youth” as people between the ages of 15 and 24) is also frequently used” (Gorak-Sosnowska 2005, 13). My definition of youth, based primarily on the age limitations for political agency, aligns with these cultural and sociological distinctions.

Another term I regularly refer to in my thesis is apathy, which is commonly understood as a lack of interest or concern, although the “apathy” I discuss here is further refined as “political apathy.” I will differentiate its usage between common conceptions of the term as applied to youth and a more nuanced understanding from an Anarchist theory framework. Political scientist Tom DeLuca accurately describes one “face” of political apathy as “nonparticipation in the political process” (DeLuca 1995, 11). This definition is probably the most relevant and succinct, but the term will be problematized and analyzed more fully in the third chapter. Closely related to my analysis of apathy, “participation,” as positive counterpoint to youthful disengagement, is often commonly thought of simply as “voting.” In my thesis, however, the definition of political participation is broader than just casting a ballot and
encompasses behaviors some might perceive as outside of participation and within categories of “apathy” or “disinterest.” As political analysts and academics, Samuel Huntington and Joan Nelson develop the term “participation” to include the general actions of “voting in a referendum or election and, or, taking part in political activities” (Huntington and Nelson 1976, 3). My thesis emphasizes the second portion of this definition, attempting to understand exactly what constitutes “political activities.”

Surprisingly enough, relatively few recent studies or research projects have been conducted on youth political opinion in Jordan. Although such enquiries have likely been reduced due to perceived dangers of the Arab Spring or the autocratic control of the Jordanian regime, this gap in critical academic research remains rather startling. Some significant information and data on youth prior to 2011 does exist, but since then little seems to be known about the views of youth, despite the population being so essential to Jordan’s future. And, even less academic work has been written on the subject, though a multitude of short articles, blog posts, and even a few polls do relate to youth apathy. In 2010, the Al-Hayat Center for Civil Society Development conducted a survey of 2,100 young Jordanians to track young people’s political feelings/tendencies. The center seeks to empower Jordan’s communities through positive reinforcement of certain values (equality, gender awareness, etc.) and public participation. Their research often extends to hard-to-reach target populations that are ignored or underrepresented in studies due to the difficulties of data collection with large population size and cultural stigmas. The study found that “for this year’s elections [2010], respondents expressed a continued lack of confidence in parliament” (ndi.org 2010). In general, the research described young Jordanians as skeptical of their government and indifferent (or possibly apathetic) towards politics as a whole in their country. Following this study, the center conducted
a similar poll in 2011. An opinion poll analyzing youth aspirations for constitutional reform surveyed just over 900 young Jordanians in the hopes of observing increased political interest and involvement, or discovering reasons for the dissatisfaction. The study investigated youth sentiments toward political rallies, elections, movements, and other forms of demonstrations. Analysis of the data indicated that “only 35.5% of those surveyed had taken part in at least one form or another of the activities calling for reform that were held over the past nine months,” while a vast majority (over 75%) were aware of the constitutional issues at hand (Al-Hayat 2011, 2). Almost half (48%) of the young Jordanians surveyed were not satisfied with the committee’s changes. These numbers indicate a lack of youth involvement in regards to political development, for even though young Jordanians appear to not only understand the current Jordanian political landscape, they vocalize a dislike for current political conditions and chose not to participate in “reform activities.”

In the June 2012 edition of Jordan Business magazine, an article entitled “Arab Youth in Revolt” mentions that “according to the 2012 ASDA’A Burson-Marsteller poll (a public relations consultancy), only 51% of Jordanian youth trusted the government that came in after the start of the Arab Spring, in contrast to an average of 72% regionally” (Al-Khoury 2012, 55). However, despite this sense of mistrust there seems to be little reaction in terms of actual on-the-ground change or movements, at least for/from the youth of Jordan. A 2011 article on the website MidEastPosts.com entitled “Jordanian Youth are ‘Disengaged’ from Politics” argues that “there is a new generation emerging with a different set of expectations and like the 20-somethings on the streets of Cairo, this generation will not be settling for anything less” (Tarawnah 2011). However, rather than reacting in ways similar to other young people in the Middle East, such as mass street occupations in Egypt, burning tires in Tunisia, or prolonged
armed rebellion in Syria, this article suggests that Jordan’s youth would rather wait indifferently (possibly indefinitely) for the counted-upon political change to occur.

The Jordanian Government has responded to this perceived disengagement, attempting to address the issues with a series of policies and initiatives. In the 2005-2009 National Youth Strategy, a policy document created by governmental organizations and bureaucrats, the first objective is “youth and participation.” As described in the text, “this theme focuses on the creation of a safe and conducive environment for young women and men to participate fully in all the fields of national activities” (Youth Strategy 2005, 10). It goes on to list the operational steps, such as supporting greater youth participation in political parties, parliamentary elections, councils of civil institutions (student councils at universities and schools), etc. Though no explicit solutions are offered, the strategy itself is a document supposedly attempting to solve this “apathy” issue. However, the strategy’s resulting benefit (and another likely goal) is to satiate any dissention or negative views among Jordan’s youth regarding the royal family and the government. Whether young Jordanians are politically apathetic or engaged may be less of the ruling elite’s concern than simply consolidating their own power – i.e. placating the Kingdom’s youth into indifferent submission.

My thesis strives to articulate a more nuanced understanding and description of this phenomenon, utilizing Anarchist theories to analyze the apparent political apathy plaguing youth in the Hashemite Kingdom. The lack of scholarship and in-depth academic research regarding Jordanian youth engagement remains problematic for scholars of the Middle East or researchers of comparative civic youth engagement who hope to understand this population so vital to future stability in the region. However, my thesis begins to address this gap, suggesting a different approach for conceptualizing apathy and political participation among young Jordanians.
Research Methodology

Using a multi-pronged research methodology, I conducted interviews and surveys while also relying on participant observations. Over the course of about five weeks, I conducted 126 surveys and eight interviews, the details of which I will present shortly. I followed appropriate questioning guidelines and protocol as set out by the School for International Training. Although I focused primarily on college students, I attempted to collect data from a variety of sources (e.g. politicians, young activists, academics) to improve the overall quality, depth, and scope of the project. My questions covered topics related to politics and youth opinions regarding the government, elections, political engagement/apathy, and individual thoughts on youth identity.¹

The breakdown of the eight interview participants illustrates this diversity of opinion: five college students from the University of Jordan; two older officials, one from the government and one from the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), an independent political party; and, one youth activist blogger.² I asked the six young Jordanians (including the blogger) the same set of nine questions, but I allowed participants’ own interests and analysis to lead the interviews. Focusing on their unique backgrounds and their particularly insightful strands of thought, I made specific inquiries as well. The other two interviews, though still following the format I mentioned earlier to a degree, were more tailored to their individual position and experience. In order to fully utilize the government and MB representatives as expert sources and policy makers, I allowed for extra time and kept dialogue open to encourage their engagement. I received written consent from all eight individuals that I interviewed, questioning was conducted in Arabic except in one

¹ More details can be found in the Interview Questionnaire and Survey (both English and Arabic Translations) in the Thesis Appendix.
² The citations for all interviews and survey data are included in the Works Cited section under the subheading “Primary Research Sources.”
interview where English was predominantly used, and each session ran about fifty minutes to an hour. For the use of this thesis, most participants’ names will be aliases in order to protect their identity and personal information. However, the Jordanian Minister’s full title and name have been included in order to substantiate his claims and position, which he approved before the interview.

Although the interviews proved insightful and useful for my thesis, I was inhibited by one cultural tradition in particular: as an American man I was unable to interview women. Throughout Jordan and the Arab World, women often do not engage in lengthy conversations with men who are not relatives, and sometimes prefer not to be alone in the same room with an unfamiliar man. Such behavior is a pervasive custom in certain social classes of the Middle East, and it is often framed as Islamic. This widespread cultural practice has changed in some communities/areas, and is downplayed in everyday social interactions to some extent. However, despite the settings of a liberal college campus, I was unable to interview female students due to the individualistic (one-on-one) nature of questioning. In order to make up for this data disparity, I decided to utilize surveys as a means of including young Jordanian women in the research. Thus, my thesis would not remain greatly affected by this cultural difficulty, and the data could include varied forms of collection.

The surveys represent a set of college students from the University of Jordan (UJ), the largest and oldest institution in the Hashemite Kingdom. Located in Amman with more than 35,000 students, it is considered by many to be an elite college, and remains the primary university for the academic pursuits of Jordanian youth (chiefly because less than 50 universities exist in Jordan). Due to UJ’s importance and high standing in Jordan’s society, my research surveys allow for comparison and analysis of many young people, for a large proportion of
young Jordanians pursue higher education (around 90,000 Jordanian students enter college each year). However, the surveys also bring more questions to light, even though certain data clearly implies trends within youth political engagement.

Of the 126 survey participants, about 60% were female and 40% were male, and I issued all surveys during three classes on the same day. In total, 60-70% of participants filled out Arabic copies of the survey, while the rest submitted their answers in English. I conducted the research surveys in three classes for fifteen-minute segments: Introduction to Political Sociology (39 participants), Introduction to Political Science (24 participants), and National Education (63 participants). To attain the most in-depth data, each survey class focused on political topics with students from various backgrounds, majors, and ages. The surveys were two pages long, with three short answer questions, and the remaining questions were multiple choice (please see surveys in appendix for full layout). In order to protect the identities of the participants, no names were included on any of the surveys, and all answers were kept anonymous. This aspect of the surveys proved incredibly useful; after the interviews, some students told me they felt quite comfortable writing their unadulterated thoughts on paper, when in daily interactions they watch their words/opinions more carefully.

Thesis Background

Today, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan remains a relatively small country of about 6.5 million inhabitants. More than half of Jordan’s population is under the age of 25, leading to job shortages and economic insecurity. The country is located in an unstable region, positioned between Israel and Iraq with scarce natural resources left. Its capital city of Amman, so populous that it essentially represents Jordan itself, remains situated in an arid desert with more extreme desert to the north (Syria) and south (Saudi Arabia). Half of its exports and a quarter of its
imports come from trade with its neighbors, making Jordan susceptible to the smallest geopolitical shifts and regional changes (Gorak-Sosnowska 2005, 12). In fact, the territory of Washington State in the U.S. is almost twice as large and it maintains a Gross Domestic Profit (GDP) roughly eight times larger (Jordan’s GDP as of 2013 is 40 billion USD according to CIA World Factbook). The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan does not appear necessarily large or important, but the country remains a relatively stable space in an otherwise rather chaotic region. Although an ally to Western powers and Israel, the stability of this small desert Kingdom relies heavily on its relations with neighbors. Lacking oil and other profitable natural resources, Jordan has received substantial foreign aid (almost 14 billion total USD from America since 1957) to foster Arab-Israeli relations.³ In fact, Jordan is typically mentioned or discussed in relation to Palestinians and Israel, due primarily to the Kingdom’s shaky history with Palestine. This security issue becomes emphasized within Western media, political figures, and academic works.

As King Abdullah II himself stated during a 2013 interview on Middle Eastern relations, “The security and the future of Jordan is hand-in-hand with the future of the Palestinians and the Israelis” (“King Abdullah II Official Website” 2013). The specific relationships and details associated with Jordan and Palestine will be discussed later in chapter one, but the main point is that the international conversation regarding Jordan is often reduced to “the Palestinian issue,” with Western powers and even the King himself perpetuating similar dialogue. Undoubtedly Jordan has deep-rooted ties with Palestinians, considering the large Palestinian population within its borders, its close location to the West Bank, and Jordanian widespread sympathy for the Palestinian cause. However, despite the obvious political/cultural points of contact, a single struggle cannot define an entire nation. With the advent of the Arab Spring in 2010, such one-

³ A superb illustration of this close relationship can be found in the CRS Report by Jeremy Sharp (listed in Works Cited) the Congressional background research offers a summary of recent political relations between the U.S. and Jordan, illustrating the pervasive nature of Western influence in the Hashemite Kingdom.
dimensional analysis is shifting. The shock of this completely unprecedented and unexpected movement across the Arab world brought with it a host of new questions and factors to include in academic analysis. The focus on Palestine is dissipating and conversations are beginning about the multitude of political, economic, social, and cultural complexities within Jordan’s domestic social landscape.

Although I had formed a deep interest in the youth of the Middle East since that first trip to Egypt in 2011, I found myself resorting to familiar discursive binaries while studying in Amman, and thus looked at Jordanian issues through an Israeli-Palestinian lens. One morning while I was discussing young Jordanian political engagement with my host mother, she mentioned her own dissatisfaction and practical dislike of the Israel-Palestinian issue. In fact, although she was originally from Palestine and was forced to leave, this kind woman did not seem eager to identify herself as Palestinian. She told me that the entire situation of Palestinian-Israeli relations had become the sole focus of discourse, and she did not want anything to do with its complications and difficulties. At the time, I did not think much of her comments, but only remember my surprise at encountering a viewpoint so radically different than the conventional narratives. However, as I focused on youth political engagement in Jordan, I sought to differentiate the analysis from a one-dimensional approach. Simplifying the political interests of such a vital population to Jordan’s future (political, economic, social, cultural) would only diminish my thesis work.

My argument avoids this fallacy of oversimplification through utilizing Anarchist theory as a tool to analyze my original field research, suggesting that youth political apathy is actually a dynamic form of resistance. Anarchist theory provides an interconnected approach to politics and Jordan’s youth, for its analysis relies on power relations and modes of resistance, issues
paramount for the young people of the Hashemite Kingdom. As the previous literature review suggests, there remains a gap in critical academic research and analysis regarding this key demographic in Jordan, particularly regarding political interests and engagement. My thesis attempts to fill this gap through utilizing Anarchist theory in analysis and unique original research among Jordanian youth in Amman. In chapter one, I discuss Jordan’s relevant history and describe its political environment. In the following chapter, I present the theoretical framework of this thesis, applying Foucauldian thought and selected concepts borrowed from Anarchist theory to challenge the pervasive generalization that young Jordanians are politically apathetic. Additionally, I include the relevant data from my interviews and surveys that builds upon this framework. Finally, chapter three describes and summarizes my research in Amman, analyzing the detail-rich findings. This thesis concludes with an examination of the collected figures and opinions, building upon Anarchist thought and approach, as well as the earlier summary of current political issues facing Jordan’s youth. Ultimately, my findings are relevant in altering or questioning current conceptions of Jordan’s political composition and future, since understanding the political motivations of young Jordanians remains a critical issue for the country’s stability. My thesis also challenges hegemonic narratives and depictions of youth apathy in Jordan, offering an alternative understanding of their political participation. As such, analyzing their viewpoint will prove vital to Jordan’s development, for the political participation and interest of Jordanian youth affects the Hashemite Kingdom’s present situation, its power among volatile neighbors, and ultimately, its future stability in the region.
Chapter One: Transjordanian Politics and a Young Hashemite Kingdom

Between Iraq and the Hard Place

Until the territory of Jordan (known as Transjordan under the British Protectorate in 1921) was absorbed by the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth century, the region had been ruled by various tribes and remained a rather stable part of Syria. The Ottomans largely neglected the area of Transjordan, leaving its desert peoples in a state of sluggish indifference to the world occurrences outside their tribal squabbles and survival in the harsh desert environment. However, with the world-altering events of the First World War, the Middle East became a de facto political playground for Western powers (i.e. Britain, France, and later the United States). Following the war, the Arab part of the Ottoman Empire was subdivided among the Allies, and with the 1917 Balfour Declaration, Britain committed to recreating a Jewish homeland (Israel). Although Transjordan was officially included in the Palestinian mandate and thus earmarked for the new Jewish home, Emir Abdullah of the Hashemite Kingdom of Hejaz (located in western Saudi Arabia) struck a deal with British policy makers. Britain had originally promised the Arabs of Transjordan their own independent state after World War One, and under certain conditions (such as relinquishing his claim over the rest of Palestine), the emir was given control of Transjordan. After a series of Anglo-Transjordanian agreements, and the emir’s support of the British during the Second World War, Abdullah was finally granted the territory’s independence. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was born in March of 1946, two years before a period of extreme turmoil at their doorstep known as “The Catastrophe” in Arabic or “War of Independence” in Hebrew.
As the new King of Jordan, Abdullah I hoped to strengthen his country by claiming other “available” surrounding areas through peaceful means, particularly the West Bank. In fact, before this war in 1948, Abdullah said that he did not intend “to resist or impede the partition of Palestine and creation of a Jewish State” (Sela 2002, 14). Since the Arab state partitioned for Palestine would already be annexed to Jordan, the King was prepared to compromise and thus avoid conflict. But, the King was eventually pressured by neighboring Arab nations into joining a military intervention against the Jewish forces. Jordan’s Arab Legion was widely considered the most effective Arab armed forces due to its inclusion of British training officers and funding, and thus was appointed to lead and organize the joint military force. However, even their impressive training could not compete with a larger army and superior strategy. Israel claimed an overwhelming victory, expanding the country’s hold and power within the Middle East. Despite devastating losses to the Arab forces and territories, the Jordanian military did manage to occupy the West Bank. After an armistice agreement with Israel in 1949, the Hashemite Kingdom finally

appropriated this territory, along with 400,000 Palestinians and 50,000 refugees from various neighboring countries (Ismael 2001, 289).

This influx of citizens (in effect, doubling the population) marked the beginning of a significant change in Jordanian politics and culture, a shift that incorporated the anger of Palestine and a gradual movement towards democracy. While the King attempted to include Palestinians in the government and other prominent positions in society, he was considered too “friendly” with Israel and too ready to give up the fight for Palestine. Unsurprisingly, Abdullah I was Assassinated by a young Palestinian in 1951, and after a two-year interim period, King Hussein began his reign at the age of seventeen. Hussein commenced his reign with unprecedented freedom of speech and press, attempting to push his Kingdom towards a more liberal system, which was met with open extreme agitation and unbridled criticism from Jordanians (often pointed towards the Hashemite family and Israel). As Middle East economist Taher Kannan and political historian Joseph Massad point out in their joint analysis of that time period:

Although the Jordanian Parliament elected in 1956 was the result of the most free and perhaps most democratic elections in the country’s history… the government that enjoyed its confidence was forced to resign. The period between 1957 and 1967 was eventful, with regional political turmoil that prompted the Jordanian regime to trade off democracy for stability. (Kannan and Massad 2011, 94)

Ironically, the King’s own choice in offering more substantive freedoms to the people of the Hashemite Kingdom only served to rile citizens further, culminating in open riots that had to be dispersed by the Arab Legion (ten Jordanians died in the confusion). A series of coups and assassination attempts haunted King Hussein during the 1950’s, but his charm and charisma managed to win over the Bedouin desert tribes, and with their backing, the military. However, his political prowess could not stem the tide of the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization)
and guerrillas, as Palestinian skirmishes with Israel escalated into the 1967 Six-Day War and ultimately resulted in devastating losses for Jordan.

As a result of the war, the Hashemite Kingdom lost the profitable tourist site of the West Bank, as well as the Islamic holy site of Jerusalem. Over half of Jordan’s population was Palestinian, in effect a threat to Israel that weakened the monarchy’s hold in the region. By 1970, Palestinian calls to overthrow the King led to open warfare with armed guerrilla movements and even the Syrian military. As Jordan’s forces bombed previous refugee camps, engaging in warfare against many of its own citizens (instead of against Israel), Hussein’s regime lost valuable economic support from various Arab countries. However, once the rebellious parties were successfully exiled or quelled, an era of relative prosperity and peace took hold. With a growing middle class, the halt of martial law (which had been instigated at various periods since the late 1940’s), and the allowance of opposition political parties, Jordan appeared to turn a dark corner in its history. Tareq Ismael, a scholar of Middle Eastern government and civil society, describes the reign of King Hussein in these words:

He had to fend off many forces that were targeted against his regime, bringing moderation and a stabilizing influence to the region. He transformed Jordan into a “real” country, a country that will survive his passing because he balanced the nation’s reliance on the West with an accommodation with both Arab public opinion and the twin domestic constituencies of Palestinian and Jordanian public opinion… (Ismael 2001, 302)

By the end of the 20th century, elections were functional and the Kingdom became the second Arab nation to formally recognize the formation of Israel. Unfortunately, despite the recent diplomatic and democratic success, another event was poised to shake the foundations of Jordan: King Hussein succumbed to his battle with cancer in 1999.
Abdullah II, a thirty-seven year old political novice in his father’s shadow, took the throne at the beginning of the 21st century. He immediately focused on economic reform and established a peace treaty with Israel, making Jordan one of only two Arab countries to have a formal truce with that country. But, with the Iraq War in 2003, an influx of 750,000 Iraqi refugees destabilized the country’s already struggling economy and infrastructure (Women’s Refugee Commission 2007). King Abdullah II was forced to request foreign aid, and found his country yet again a victim of its location in a volatile region. Jordan’s situational burden of constantly teetering stability only continued to prove problematic, especially with the advent of the Arab Spring in December 2010. Ironically, the King himself seemed to understand his country’s predicament even before these revolutions rocked the Arab world. A month prior to the Arab Spring, he said jokingly in a Daily Show interview with American political satirist Jon Stewart, “Jordan is located between Iraq and the hard place” (Abdullah II 2010). Little did he know, this “hard place” was going to become even more difficult and dangerous.

A Hashemite “Spring”

The Arab Spring surprised the world (or at least the West) with its devastatingly quick uprisings and intensively active protests. The self-immolation of a Tunisian vegetable seller on December 7th, 2010 triggered a mass of grassroots political movements and uprisings around the Arab world. Hundreds of protests, government responses, political fluctuations, and international reactions occurred across the Middle East (“Path of Protest” 2012). The series of demonstrations appeared with little warning and stubbornly demanded change, protesters often resorting to massive rallies and even violence. Such actions by the protestors were deemed necessary in convincing their country leaders that the Arab Spring was not another momentary revolt easily glossed over, much to the chagrin of autocrats. Numerous articles, studies, blogs, videos, books,
and poems address its causes and nature: the “Islamist Spring,” “Arab Awakening,” or “Arab Spring and Winter” has many faces. To date, rulers have been ousted in Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, and Egypt (twice). With civil uprisings in Syria and Bahrain threatening to throw the region into more chaos, the “Spring” continues to cause protests in Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Algeria, Iran, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and even Jordan. Whether this phenomenon remains an ongoing process, has slowed considerably, or has altogether halted, has become a tense point of debate. The Arab Spring took the Middle East by storm, and has undoubtedly affected practically everything in the region since December 2010.

Jordan, a country the Arab Spring seemingly ignored for the most part, remains a forgotten (or downplayed) political hotspot in the middle of chaos. With revolts, chemical weapons, and the intermittent civil war shaking the Middle East, the Hashemite Kingdom’s population maintains a relatively tame reaction to their own system’s injustices and the other uprisings occurring in neighboring countries. This keeps Jordan on the Arab Spring “backburner” in global media and politics, especially from the West’s perspective. A major potential reason for this relative stability is the country’s political system; since 1952, the Jordanian Constitution established that executive powers fall mainly to the king, and his appointed prime minister and staff. Essentially, the royal family maintains control through assigning loyalists leadership positions in the fifty-five-member upper house (Senate) and 110-member lower house (House of Representatives). Although some activists and media writers accuse elections of being rigged or “transparent but not Democratic,” the Jordanian government could accurately be dubbed “the best of the worst” (Lührmann 2013). Certain seats remain reserved in the House for minorities (Christians, female candidates, etc.) and many members are “fairly” elected, but the rather slow liberalization process still fails to substantially shift tribal
political norms in Jordan. Tribe heads and members vote for their fellow tribesmen, and in some cases effectively absorb the votes of certain family members (women and youth in particular, also mentioned during my research interviews). Still, as political scientist Curtis Ryan points out, Jordan’s governing system was improving for some time until the turn of the 20th century:

For its part, the Jordanian regime heralded the political liberalization process as the most extensive in the entire Arab world, and in many respects that assessment was accurate. The process began to change, however, … as the Kingdom secured its 1994 peace treaty with Israel. Thereafter, regime tolerance for dissent declined precipitously… In a sense, the regime was both mobilizing and containing political opposition. (Ryan 2010, 315)

In a move to curtail fundamental Islamist support (Muslim Brotherhood) and secular leftist parties (Communism), King Abdullah II enforced a new electoral law that favored rural loyalist constituencies. This move cemented the royal family’s hold in the Hashemite Kingdom, again trading substantive democracy for relative stability. After all, as a regime with loyal support (i.e. a traditional tribal system that loves the King) and a strong United States alliance, Jordan does tout itself to be a stable, established country in a region of uncertainty.

Jordan appears to have almost avoided any “Spring” of its own. The reasons for a downplayed or lesser effect from the Arab Spring within Jordan could include a multitude of factors, such as the country’s culture, socio-economic situation, location, or political system. However, there does appear to be a correlation between the policy of Abdullah II and the lack of a Jordanian “Spring.” The King tolerates and allows the mobilization of his critics (e.g. the Muslim Brotherhood, opposition parties, and political rallies), while also maintaining controlled censorship of the media. This gives Jordanians opportunity to express their thoughts in certain venues while limiting that discussion’s public criticism of the Monarchy. His Kingdom has experienced very few large demonstrations (three or less), and these spaces of expressed
dissatisfaction did not escalate into full-blown political upheaval. Although defamatory remarks from journalists criticizing the royal family or the state can have consequences of up to three years in prison, Internet access is widely available and foreign publications remain uncensored. In fact, computer access/Internet usage has more than doubled for Jordanians older than eighteen in the past ten years – it is now readily available to over a quarter of the population (Braizat and Berger 2011, 129). Oddly, despite its state-run newspapers and careful management of television channels, the government has sought to liberalize social media. In March of 2013, Jordanian Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour claimed, “Jordan has been able to skip over the Arab Spring altogether, as it was not dragged into the reform process, instead willingly working toward its ends” (Al-Samadi 2013). He suggests a rather optimistic situation, one of gradual progress. But, I question this portrayal. With widespread dissent in neighboring countries, has this desert Kingdom truly avoided the Arab Awakening?

Some activists, journalists, and bloggers believe Jordan is ripe for the next uprising in the Middle East. Gerarddirect.com, a conservative U.S. private news website, in its October 2012 article entitled “Is Jordan the Next Victim of the ‘Arab Spring?’” asserts that the country could indeed “fall” to Muslim Brotherhood dissent and demonstrations (Freedman 2012). Despite its sensationalist tone and obvious Americanism propaganda, Gerarddirect.com does point out Jordan’s recent increase in street protests and its citizens’ open dissent over the Internet. In December of 2012, CNN asked similar questions of Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh, who said “the Arab Spring has affected Jordan – a gentle breeze, as I keep saying, as opposed to the turbulent winds we saw in other countries” (Burke 2012). The article’s title, “Arab Spring Knocking at Jordan’s Door,” as well as the Minister’s comments, demonstrate a gradual change in government attitude from outright denial to skeptical qualification. Although difficult to
define exactly how, the Arab Spring has affected the Hashemite Kingdom in some manner, and presently motivates some Jordanians to call for significant changes within their country’s government and policy. However, Jordan’s uniquely difficult situation and location prove problematic for sustainable democratic politics, as well as its future socio-economic prospects.

As a recent, rather grim article from NPR succinctly puts it, “Jordan shares the region’s troubles: a faltering economy; rampant unemployment, especially among the young; and a popular demand for a say in how the country is governed” (Amos and Bulos 2013). Due to the almost constant conflicts in the region, hundreds of thousands of refugees have fled to Jordan from Palestine and Iraq, and now upwards of 650,000 refugees pour in from Syria (Gorak-Sosnowska 2005, 12). This in turn has caused massive population growth: since 1960 the number of Jordan’s inhabitants has increased fivefold (Ibid). Almost 55% of the country’s populace is under the age of 25 (around 70% under 29), leading to a community of drastically overqualified and underworked youth (CIA World Factbook, Middle East: Jordan). And, these numbers fail to even accurately include the waves of incoming refugees (estimated in the hundreds of thousands), although some government studies have attempted to do so. With 30% of young Jordanians (citizens ages 15-24) unemployed, the youth demand more work, for even those lucky few jobholders often fail to utilize their college degrees or expertise (Ibid).

King Abdullah II appears to understand the value of youth political involvement, but winning the loyalty of many young voters will be arduous, especially with his regime’s corruption widely criticized under the social media spotlight. The King enthusiastically asserted at the 2011 Jordan Youth Forum that:

The future is yours young men and women, so shape it, not just through participation, but also through pioneering and steering the process of reform and change and build the envisioned future for you and the generations to come… I assure you… your voice is heard, your say is important and your role in the
present and the future is pivotal and the country needs it. (“King Abdullah II Official Website” 2011)

These promising words, though assuming a slightly naïve (or ignorant) young audience, do imply a recent shift in political thought, likely influenced by the Arab Spring. Recent events illustrate that young people in the Arab world play a pivotal role in affecting societal change, particularly through movements. Although by no means revolutionary or even incredibly new insight, the application and implications of youth political theory in terms of the Arab Spring are indeed intriguing, particularly in the case of the Hashemite Kingdom. In an eerie CNN interview almost a year before the Arab Spring began, the King said, “the incentive that you give your youth is going to be the make-or-break future of the country” (Zakaria 2010). Jordan’s leadership seemed to pay special attention to young people in its speeches and grand promises, even before the Spring, and now realizes the youth potential for revolt. Whether this realization will lead to substantive policy change, or simply more elaborate wordplay, has yet to be seen.

Identity and the Political Street

The young people of Jordan find themselves in a safely precarious position: caught in the middle of a muddled chaotic region, but residing in one of the few remaining “comparably stable” countries. Although Jordanian youth hope to promote democratic change in the Kingdom, they also understand large-scale protests and hasty demonstrations will not instantly improve a struggling economy or a corrupt political system. Thus, a delicate balance exists between well-timed discourse/protests and allowance for gradual liberalization (i.e. avoiding another “Spring,” which is in the interests of regime and citizens alike). As members of such a large, politically ostracized population (self-imposed or systemic) in Jordan, young people play a vital role in the further development of the Hashemite Kingdom. Understanding the mindsets and conditions
affecting Jordanian youth, and their resulting outlook on politics, will prove invaluable to King Abdullah II. Three features found in Jordanian society, and in part within the Middle East more generally, shed light on this complex population: youth hybridity, the political street, and the political power of social media non-movement.

When discussing something as ambiguous and undefined as youth identity, no clear-cut terminology exists to fully describe its complex social construction. With the advent of technology and constantly changing cultural shifts worldwide (religious, age, ethnicity, etc.), the young population has become a mixed or hybrid identity. Much of post-colonial research done in the academic fields of social sciences and cultural studies examines the word “hybridity.” For instance, post-colonial thinker Homi Bhabha analyzed the conceptualization of identity, coining the term “hybridity” in reaction to what he dubbed “multicultural awareness”:

> Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. (Bhabha 1994, 2)

Whether studying shifts in language, and art, or mapping trends in globalization, hybridity serves as a descriptive expression encompassing the simultaneous mixing and re-creation of culture. Thus, hybridization is a process of cultural transactions assimilating the transnational and traditional, one of combination and settlement rather than confrontation. For Jordan’s youth, this means playing video games in a Bedouin tent after herding camels on the desert sands. Young people of the Hashemite Kingdom watch *Friends* on T.V. and eat McDonalds’ Big Macs while wearing headscarves and “participating” in a society where the older/wiser are heard and respected. They attend college lectures “original” Jordanians, but Syrian, Palestinian, Iraqi,
Libyan, and Egyptian. To some, these periphery youth may appear walking contradictions or overt cultural complexities, but to young Jordanians, this is simply life. Rather than religious vs. secular, technology vs. tradition, Palestinian vs. Jordanian, Christian vs. Muslim, Western vs. Arab world, national vs. global, democratic vs. autocratic, or other strict “opposite” confliction, the relationship is hybrid. As youth politics scholar Stuart Hall states, this relationship necessitates the “recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of “identity” which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity” (Hall 1994, 401-2). This hybridity of Jordanian youth also greatly affects their political engagement and participation, leading them to communicate amongst themselves and with society in a specific physical space: the street.

The streets of Amman, the capital of Jordan and essentially the nation itself, become a venue for expression of grievances and political thought. A microcosm of active and participative politics, members of the “political street” engage in extensive discussion of their own views, needs, and wants. From screaming vendors in alleyways to squatters on park benches, from poor housewives purchasing daily necessities to homeless gangs of children fighting for more territory, the street remains the thoroughfare for proactive citizen control. However, as sociologist Asef Bayat notices in his in-depth study of youth political participation in the Arab world, “street politics” has another dimension:

Streets, as spaces of flow and movement, are not only where people express grievances, but also where they forge identities, enlarge solidarities, and extend their protest beyond their immediate circle to include the unknown, the strangers… it is this epidemic potential of street politics that provokes authorities’ severe surveillance and widespread repression. (Bayat 2010, 12)

Thus, the street acts as a public space or sphere where ideas can be shared and debated, one where young Jordanians are not ignored or shunned immediately due to age. In some respects,
young people control or propagate the streets of Jordan through their own interconnected identities with the roads themselves. After all, the winding paths and alleys serve as schools, playgrounds, clubs, and hangouts for young people in a society essentially governed by the older generation. The political street in Jordan appears passive towards the regime, and yet offers an untraditional means of critique and societal engagement. However, individuals may openly express their own contrary viewpoints and criticisms, but then often proceed to keep such opinions enclosed within the “private sphere” of the roadway. Even though the Muslim Brotherhood and other minority political groups exist, they wait as empty husks with little substantive power to enact real change in the governing system. And, these parties almost entirely ignore the youth population (the minimum age for to become a member or official representative typically falls between 30-35 years old). Thus, Jordan’s young people slowly turn towards other means of participation, such as non-movements and social media.

A social non-movement, in its most basic general definition, is the collective action of non-collective actors (Bayat 2010, 14-15). It is protracted mobilization and non-institutional encroachment through ordinary means of everyday activities. Two examples of these means include participating within the political street mentioned previously, as well as a relatively new phenomenon in Jordan: social media. The political discussion and blogging on websites has created interpersonal relational protesting online, rather than an organized “movement” effort by likeminded individuals in a physical space. The Internet allows for virtual communities and discussion, in effect, a “computer-generated political street.” Thus, in a non-movement sense, social media acts as a street in Jordan with less rules/regulation but greater scale. Political scientist Dr. Joseph Roberts claims the Internet is completely changing the practice of politics in the Middle East, for now “intermedia” effects individual actors through “an on-going synthesis
of information gathered from both mass media and interpersonal channels of communication” (Roberts 2009, 55). Jordanian youth not only have another accessible means of participation and engagement, but its possible combinations with the already existing street culture of the Hashemite Kingdom are virtually endless. King Abdullah II must now decide how to incorporate young people into his government policy, for as the Arab Spring indicates, youth will not stay online in their politics forever. Life as politics, or the everyday activities that incorporate opinion and dialogue which act in place of political participation, cannot fully replace meaningful institutional representation or engagement for young people in the streets of Jordan.

The context of Jordanian youth political engagement remains fraught with historical complications (liberalization, government policy, Palestinian-Israeli relations, etc.) and current economic/civil difficulties (failing economy and lack of jobs, millions of refugees, located between chaotic warring countries). Young people come from an assortment of backgrounds with various affecting cultural traits (traditional tribal, street life, liberal western, etc.) and have been predominately ignored by a societal system that prioritizes the opinions of older generations. However, venues of subtle participation do exist, and continue to expand through social media. To explore this understated and often ignored world of youth political participation, the next chapter delves into interviews and surveys conducted with government officials, political activists, and young people in Jordan. Do youth actually utilize the Internet and participate in the political street? Does the government truly ignore (actively or passively) such an important political population? Why do young Jordanians react peacefully rather than in open “Spring-like” demonstrations? What exactly characterizes political action, and how do youth appear apathetic? Exploring the youth’s own views on these matters, the following section describes and analyzes the opinions of Jordanians living in Amman.
Chapter Two: Youth in the Hashemite Kingdom – An Anarchist Analysis

Nonviolent Action

Although the Middle East has recently been characterized by images of large-scale, turbulent protests in Libya, uprisings in Syria, and chaotic crowds pouring into streets in Egypt, nonviolent resistance has been present in the region since before the Arab Spring in 2010. Western media’s focus on sensationalized images of violence and rebellion has reduced the socio-economic context and historical development of all political resistance in the Middle East into this narrative of a “Spring.” However, no single straw broke the camel’s back, for the sheer weight of protests, boycotts, social movements, and other forms of resistance played a vital role in that moment. In perpetuating the sensationalist narrative of the “otherness” and “chaos” of the Middle East, Western media loves to focus on violence and unrest, the drastic overwhelming shifts that demand attention. Nonviolent action, sometimes a subtler manner of waging political conflict, was often under-recognized as a catalyzing force for political change in the Arab world, at least before the Arab Spring. This is due in part to the dominant focus on a single event in time, out of which emerge tidy narratives and compelling photographs. Certain activities (e.g. rallies or petitions) are more obviously pacifist and political in nature, and have been recognized as nonviolent action, such as the graffiti within Tahrir Square during the “Spring” in Egypt. However, some nonviolent actions can be indirect and understated; even wearing a specific color or symbol can be nonviolent resistance depending on the context. Essentially, any behavior or activity that occurs outside of normal socio-economic/political behavior and intends to throw those behaviors into sharp relief against potential change can be considered nonviolent action.⁴

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⁴ Defining nonviolent action and describing its techniques is not the main focus of this thesis. However, this topic has been thoroughly analyzed by a number of academics, such as Roberts and Garten in their article “Definition of Civil Resistance.” Also, Gene Sharp’s Waging Nonviolent Struggle offers an in-depth exploration of this topic.
Nonviolent political action accepts a specific understanding or viewpoint of power structures: that economic, social, political, and effectively all forms of power ultimately rely on the compliance of people. Thus, power remains fragile, itself shifting based on the very whim and compliance of the populace. Political theorist Michel Foucault describes power not as a “thing” but rather a relation, connections not simply exclusive to the government or state. He argues that “power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not a supplementary structure over and above “society” whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of” (Foucault 2000, 343). Binary understandings of power between the ruler and ruled often simplify its complexities as a single structure or oppositional relationship (e.g. resistance vs. domination). However, power relations are exercised throughout an entire society, implying leaders and even oppressors themselves are produced as subjects within that power, implicating them within its flows while never emanating from them as the governing center. Individual members of a society inhabit various positions in which they alter, absorb, shift, and relay power. Power must then be understood as characterized by a dynamic flow rather than static in location or limited to particular events. Nonviolent resistance thus attempts to assert new meanings across social relations, changing societal patterns of obedience and shifting power through taking/moving popular support away from spaces of formal, conventional power concentration (e.g. king, dictator, and government).

According to Foucault, these spaces are themselves reliant on the cumulative loyalties of citizens, who obtain and manage their power through a variety of interconnected and interdependent relations. Although Foucault proposes a broad yet nuanced approach to power, his definitions can become convoluted and unclear, making it difficult to apply his method in

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5 In order to minimize confusion, I will use “power” for the typical, general understanding of the term and “Power” for Foucauldian theory.
To remain as precise as possible, I now turn to particular passages from Foucault’s own work as well as other understandings of power relations and political non-action that I argue apply to Jordan’s circumstances.

Some theorists, such as political scientist Gene Sharp, attempt to specify their societal analyses, simplifying power structures into six sources: legitimacy; human resources; skills and knowledge; material resources; cultural, religious, and ideological factors; and, sanctions. Each source plays a role in substantiating and maintaining power. Each can also be undermined and eventually turned against a nation’s sovereign. In the case of nonviolent action, all six sources of power can be affected to varying degrees, but legitimacy is often the primary source of contention due to its unstable, fluid nature combined with an organically powerful and widespread influence. Legitimacy, as defined by civil resistance analyst Hardy Merriman, is “the quality that leads people to voluntarily accept and consent to an individuals’ or organizations’ orders” (Stephan 2009, 18). In effect, it is the reason Jordanians respect and obey their King, willingly giving up some of their own constitutive power, similar to Americans submitting power to the president or Europeans to the EU. However, legitimacy does not solely derive from formal titles or institutions; being or appearing installed in power (i.e. elections) or taking responsive action to address citizens’ concerns also solidifies the “rightfulness” of rulers. Thus, this quality is ultimately reliant on performance in concert with public perception, not just formal position. Legitimacy, produced in the tension between performance and perception, can easily be shifted with popular support or eroded quickly when the public withdraws its consensus. Securing legitimacy simply means a governing party must seem to represent the populace and is capable

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6 These six sources of power are taken from Hardy Merriman’s article “Theory and Dynamics of Nonviolent Action,” but were originally described and analyzed in Gene Sharp’s work. Merriman is the senior advisor to the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict and has written extensively on the effects of nonviolent action in reducing terrorism.
(or maintains its right) to rule. Often, legitimacy becomes one of the most cost-effective means for the maintenance of power, as it remains the least expensive way for rulers to influence obedience patterns, unlike expensive security apparatuses or attempts to mediate between the population and the outside (similar to China’s Great Digital Wall or limitations in North Korea). Within Middle Eastern power structures, nonviolent action strikes regimes and governments at their weakest/strongest point – their legitimacy with the very subjects they attempt to rule and manage. And, in fact these spaces of rule are themselves merely shifting, reacting, and even succumbing to the flowing relationships of power in the Arab world. As I mentioned previously, power relations and effects in the region include U.S. interests and Western power consolidation through oil, religious/ethnic turmoil (Islam, Christianity, etc.), Israel, and a host of other imbricated issues. Essentially, rulers such as Abdullah II must traverse and negotiate differing power flows across the same time and space. Such leaders cannot be described as purely active or passive subjects. The King of the Hashemite Kingdom may appear in control and supportive of United States/Israeli policy, as his country manages to remain relatively stable and socio-politically liberal, at least in appearance. However, his effective power remains limited by the regime’s perceived legitimacy and outside influences from the West. Power relations in the Arab world interconnect, divide, inform, conflict, and ultimately complicate the volatile region. The dynamic resistance produced through nonviolent conflict redirects these flows, a phenomenon recently exemplified throughout the Middle East by the Arab Spring.

Civil resistance scholar Maria Stephan describes the subtleties of nonviolent struggle in Civilian Jihad, an edited volume on nonviolent action in the Arab world. In the introduction to

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7 Often described as a “Holy War” in regards to religious Islamic text (and resultantly related to acts of extremist/terrorist groups), Jihad can also be understood as a “struggle against.” In fact, a direct translation of the Arabic term is the noun “struggle.” Stephan utilized Jihad with a direct understanding of its past usage and implications to emphasize the role of nonviolent struggle in the Middle East.
the volume she begins the discussion with a general overview of the topic, stating that “by its very nature, civil resistance is highly participatory. Ordinary people of all kinds…can become frontline fighters, as opposed to passive observers…” (Stephan 2009, 3-4). As she forms a narrative around the various academic pieces, from Islamist political engagement in Iran to popular resistance in Turkey, she denotes numerous countries and cultures as sites where one can trace nonviolent action as a mode of social change. This “Civilian Jihad” or “civilian struggle” has occurred across the Arab world, and has actually become quite prevalent due to its dual subversive and inclusive components. Many in the Middle East are searching for a means to voice dissent and criticize autocratic regimes. Nonviolent political resistance offers a relatively easy way to subvert ruling power while participating in a like-minded community. For example, boycotting elections or voicing dissent on blogs are both relatively easy and yet incredibly effective in destroying ruling legitimacy. This entices many to join in resistance while providing a shared virtual space where a common cause might be vocalized and performed. Stephan concludes that “Civilian Jihad,” as exemplified in the book’s essays and case studies, has been utilized to challenge colonial/dictator powers, as well as to promote socio-political reform. The cultural geography for this “jihad” appears unambiguous in Stephan’s account. She distinguishes where civil resistance has occurred throughout the Middle East in a rather meticulous list:

Egyptians, Iranians, Israelis, Kuwaitis, Lebanese, Moroccans, Palestinians, Sahrawis, Afghans, Sudanese, Syrians, Turks, and other peoples have all embraced this method of struggle to achieve goals both reformist and revolutionary in nature, in both democracies and nondemocracies. (Stephan 2009, 301)

In her examination of civil resistance, nonviolent struggle and its effects appear across a range of Arab countries. However, some countries in the Middle East are missing, notable among them is
the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Although mentioned a few times in passing, Jordan is largely absent in an otherwise diverse collection of analyses on nonviolent action across the Arab world.

The omission of Jordan from this survey is telling and requires us to ask sharp questions regarding Jordan’s relation to the larger Arab contemporary political landscape. Has the Jordanian population been unusually docile and unnaturally immune to popular resistance movements? Have Jordanians not participated in traditional, legible forms of political activism while such movements have flourished around it? Have they participated in less-legible forms of activism? How does power shape the Hashemite monarchy and its popular perception? What are the subject positions adopted by young people in relation to the dominant form of state power? What are the other forces – historical, regional, generational, classed, and gendered – that might offer us ways to understand the particularities of the contemporary Jordanian political condition? In short, where is Jordan’s “Civilian Jihad?”

**Jordan’s Missing “Jihad”**

During a February 2010 interview with Abdullah II of Jordan, CNN reporter Fareed Zakaria asked the King about recent political change and future democratic progress in the Arab world. As they discussed issues surrounding Israeli-Palestinian relations and American foreign policy, Abdullah II mentioned necessary systematic reform, to which Zakaria inquired, “But talk specifically about your country, because, you know, Jordan is often characterized as a benign or an enlightened dictatorship, but it is still a pretty tough set of controls that you have in the country. Are you going to – will your son, when he succeeds you, be a constitutional monarch?” The King answered reflectively, if enigmatically, “I think, when I look back at the past ten years, the reform aspect of our country, in many cases, sometimes you take two steps forward, one step back. There is resistance to change. There’s a resistance to ideas.” The correspondent repeated
his question later in the interview, but Jordan’s leader continued to avoid a direct answer. Despite the King’s relative silence on such a critical issue, the answer he provided remains striking in and of itself, particularly his reference to resistance. This interview took place 10 months before the Arab Spring’s first rumblings, a time building towards open civil unrest and obvious “resistance” against current political systems in the Arab world. And yet, the head of the Hashemite Kingdom only mentioned a resistance to political liberalization and democratization. Effectively, he described opposition to the very change that would soon sweep across the Middle East a matter of months later.

Though Abdullah II may be in power, controlling the dominant political system or structure of his Kingdom, he appears somewhat powerless in his cursory commentary regarding political change within Jordan. However, it is practically impossible to walk the streets of Amman without seeing a picture of His Highness plastered on the walls; his legitimacy still sways the majority’s opinion. Monarchial popularity and public image could be greatly affected by political resistance, and the King’s description of his country hints at the precariousness of his position. While being examined, King Abdullah II deft answers depicted Jordan as an overall sufficient, stable nation increasingly in need of Western support. However, he did highlight one issue with a shocking statistic, commenting “We have the largest youth cohort in history. We have 200 million young men and women that need jobs in the next several years. If we don’t create a positive future where they have a role and a say in their future, definitely, we are going to have a major problem.” In a moment of somewhat surprising candor, the King admitted that his Kingdom has a potential youth problem, a dire issue with the ability to cripple the country’s stability in the near future. But, in doing so, he also indirectly pointed out the instability of his own position, especially if the monarchy fails to garner the obedience and support of that
majority. Herein lies the legitimacy issue for Jordan’s monarchy, one contingent on the continued passive acceptance of the system, even if overt possibilities for active participation in shaping Jordan’s political future are narrowed through the traditional structures of power: gender, family, tribe, and king.

As previously mentioned, Jordanian dissatisfaction with the current system’s corruption, nepotism, and restrictive laws has become practically palpable through social media and small-scale protests. In fact, as the language within the interview suggests, Hashemite subjects likely harbor more negative sentiments towards the “set of controls” within his “enlightened dictatorship” than against any liberalization or improved transparency in government policy. This begs the question: Why then did the King claim his country remains unwilling to accept liberalization? Is the ruling family simply insulated from or out-of-touch with their citizens’ own wants and needs? The underlying reasons for his seemingly inaccurate assessment could be from a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of Jordanian public political sentiments. Or, this “resistance to change” the King mentions could be disagreement from powerful political representatives, a minority of tribal leaders resistant to liberalization. Regardless of the reasons behind the King’s imprecise portrayal, I argue that the King’s depiction of political resistance and engagement are flawed. I substantiate my argument by highlighting that population dissention and dissatisfaction can take non-traditional forms of “action.” Obviously, lack of open rebellion and protests does not necessarily imply that citizens are at all satisfied with their current means of political engagement and representation. Additionally, the absence of public, passionate resistance to policies or political claims does not mean Jordan’s general public remains indifferent to democratic change in their government.
Although the position of the “king” ultimately relies on power relations with his subjects, regimes do not necessarily or completely win citizens’ submission through a grandiose popularity contest. Legitimacy may be a key source of power for rulers and movements alike, but rarely do leaders and governments rely solely on any single source of power to maintain order and obedience within social structures.\(^8\) In the case of Jordan, civil society itself may be a form of the King’s political control, a phenomenon analyzed by political scientist Quintan Wiktorowicz in his work *Civil Society and Social Control: State Power in Jordan*. In his analysis of Jordan’s power structure, he critically notices:

> The administrative control and regulation of civil society in Jordan reflect a growing trend away from overt repression toward less visible forms of social control in the region. This system of social control is not hegemonic or complete. There is a continuous ebb and flow in the level of control actually achieved by the state. (Wiktorowicz 2002, 44)

Civil society is typically viewed as a mechanism of collective empowerment, a support for citizens to defend their own rights against state power. However, Wiktorowicz argues that since the advent of more widespread liberalization in the Hashemite Kingdom, civil society has become the variable, alternative measure to raw coercion. By subdividing society into organized spaces of non-government organizations (NGO’s) and the private sphere (outside of business/government), the state can more easily observe and control its citizens. Jordan’s monarchy has astutely avoided exercising physical (and more visible) force, instead strengthening its power over Jordanian society through influencing and maintaining civil institutions. In effect, King Abdullah II reinforces all six sources of power, solidifying monarchal ideology while appearing to emphasize the freedom and independence of his subjects.

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\(^8\) States often differentiate their emphases on the six sources of power mentioned previously, and thus their means of control or consolidation differ from each other. This disseminates political risk (such as an overreliance on religious authority) and plays to the strengths of that particular leader/government/country. This also implies that the relating movements or politics of resistance that can reclaim/channel that power most effectively differ as well depending on the situation and location.
Foucault carefully observes throughout his excavation of French history that disciplinary power does not always or necessarily originate from visible coercion and commands, but from partitioning space and society into units readily available for surveillance and that can be regulated and administered (Foucault 1979). Similarly, Jordan’s government consolidates its power through creating such “partition institutions,” as exemplified by the General Union of Voluntary Societies (GUV). A corporatist creation of the state, the GUV enforces self-regulation and monitors all of the Hashemite Kingdom’s NGO’s, severely limiting the creation of new organizations while inhibiting overall management and efficiency of existing NGO’s. Instead corruption and favoritism flourish, maintaining a network of support circulating through those loyal to the King and confirming the basic power of monarchical ideology. Ultimately, its hierarchical structure and state influence allows the ruling family to manage and influence the civil society of Jordan, cementing ruler power. Although civil society has effectively become a support for rulers’ power, it is not the sole means of strengthening regime authority and legitimacy in the Hashemite Kingdom. The King and government utilize other spaces as sources of their power, as seen in chapter one with the examples of Jordan’s nepotistic electoral system and media censorship.

Considering these rather glaring disparities in effective authority and diverse spaces of power (however subtle some may appear), as well as a massive youth population, Jordan seems the perfect country for some manner of resistance. But, as Civilian Jihad seems to imply through Jordan’s absence in its broad survey of Arab social movements, Jordanian nonviolent action and struggle remains either extremely proscribed or altogether nonexistent. This “understated” form of resistance could be the result of the regime’s utilization of civil society institutions to enhance

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9 More details on Jordanian Civil Society and NGO’s can be found in Wiktorowicz’s other article, “The Political Limits to Nongovernmental Organizations in Jordan.”
state control, simply because it does provide a more subtle manner of exercising power, at least when compared to the openly brutal police retaliation and army regulation found in other Middle Eastern countries. However, Foucauldian political theory offers another possible explanation for the seemingly nonexistent resistance in Jordan, providing a unique understanding of power relations. As mentioned previously, Foucault does argue for a broad definition and description of power, but he also avoids attempting to track resistance along conventional fault lines of dominant hegemonies of power. He refuses to put limits on any resistance, believing that such limitations would themselves be derived from standards reinforced by modern power (the very system resistance would attempt to overcome). In fact, according to Foucault, power’s relationship manifests within resistance through exceedingly diffused and intersected modalities:

If there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would just be a matter of obedience. You have to use power relations to refer to the situation where you’re not doing what you want. So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with resistance. So I think that resistance is the main word, the key word, in this dynamic. (Foucault 1997, 167)

Foucault’s point is not simply that resistance is always present or necessary in power dynamics, but that in effect, it is also inevitable. Resistance is the force giving substance and being to Power relations. As political philosopher Mark Kelly phrases it in his description of Foucauldian theory, “while resistance is in a sense presupposed by power, resistance is actualized by power; its character as resistance derives from its opposition to some power relation” (Kelly 2009, 108). Resistance is not a reactionary act, and cannot be fully or accurately described as a discrete combination of societal structures or clear-cut relationships. Rather, resistance is a feature of power itself, by which power can be understood or become manifest in society. Foucault’s key point is that without resistance of any kind, power cannot be present. Thus, some form of resistance must exist in Jordan, however nebulous in nature. Considering Jordanian civil society
and its position in strengthening state power, we can imagine that tracking political resistance in the Hashemite Kingdom requires an alertness to inherently subtle and even understated modes of thought and action. Oddly enough, the Arab Spring’s example appears to motivate Jordanian citizens and rulers alike to avoid similar unrest in their own country, ultimately lessening open resistance and legitimizing harsher government tactics. During my interviews and daily conversations with Jordanians, the avoidance of another “Spring” was a hot topic, many citizens mentioning their willingness to submit and prevent a resistance escalation to the likes of Egypt or Syria. This attitude only reinforces the current power structure and fosters an even more pronounced ambiguity or ambivalence surrounding resistance in a monarchal system.

**Youth Political Engagement and Resistance**

Foucault describes two modes of resistance: pursuing freedom from limitation and practicing self-formation (Kelly 2009, 105). Each resists against power, through attempted deconstruction of current institutions or by the creation of alternate societal structures. Within Jordan, the existing power structures and social dynamics discourage (and ultimately prevent) open pursuit of either form. Whether through specific legal ordinances that inhibit political rallies, or by the widespread cultural adoration of the King and tribal system, those in power reinforce their own control by “less visible” means than armed oppression of dissent and deviation. However, resistance still takes place, as many Jordanians themselves suggest in my research. My research interviews and surveys indicate youth engagement takes a variety of forms for different reasons. Some citizens seek freedom from their controlling regime, while others attempt to improve the system or create a different Jordan. And, some young Jordanians attempt to do both.
During the fall of 2012, while conducting my research in the Hashemite Kingdom, I met Rani Dababneh, a recent college graduate with a critical vision for youth political engagement in his country. Rani understood the power struggle and corruption in Jordan’s political system, as well as the regime’s own inevitable need to constantly consolidate its power and manage the populations from which it derives its legitimacy, notably young people. He also recognized young people rarely had a voice in the tribal process of politics and hoped to create a space for open political opposition. Noticing the stringent Jordanian laws regarding media and general public dismissal of rallies, he decided to build a digital space of resistance: Jordanoholic.com. Through the relatively anonymous medium of the blogosphere, anyone can post thoughts and opinions. With no limitations or rules on his website, he built a separate site of resistance against the regime, one of anonymous but collective dissent aimed at discrediting Jordanian ruling power through hundreds of posts. Websites similar to Rani’s are becoming more commonplace as young people realize their online commentary can become a venue to vent frustration and be heard. These sites offer youth a much-needed alternative to simply succumbing to their situation in silence as a politically ignored constituency in Jordanian society.

Although many of Jordan’s subjects feel underrepresented to some degree in their government, the country’s youth remain particularly marginalized from substantive roles in politics or society. Until young people reach an age of socially understood maturity, the older generation views them as “lesser” or even “incomplete” actors. During my interviews in Amman, young people had intense personal opinions on contemporary issues, with rather complex analyses of their government, culture, and the Arab world in general. However, when in a setting of older individuals, these same young people appeared to quietly accept an outwardly passive role. Ferris, a rather cynical college student I questioned for my research, openly
criticized Jordanian society, government, and even his fellow students. And yet, Ferris also casually mentioned that his father routinely casts his entire family’s votes, meaning Ferris and his other family members have no say in elections. This practice is quite common among tribes, and effectively cuts out young people from a substantive role in the entire process. Rather, they are simply placeholders and “extra votes” for the patriarchs – docile bodies constituted in a mass only given differentiation by male authority figures from the family unit on up.

Another cultural aspect or embedded feature that substantiates state power while degrading youth empowerment is the stigmatization of young Jordanians as apathetic. Many older citizens within the Hashemite Kingdom describe youth as lazy, uninformed, or even rash in their decisions. In fact, young people themselves perpetuate this generalizing sentiment, labeling their own generation as apathetic towards political engagement. During our discussion at the University of Jordan, Ferris assessed his fellow students involvement and said that most do not care about politics, much less engage actively. He insisted that few young people vote, attend rallies, or even know much regarding political activities on college campuses. Oddly enough, Ferris seemed deeply engaged and interested in government policy, revealing his rather expansive knowledge on the subject through in-depth analytical opinions. Yet, this same student claimed he was another “apathetic” young Jordanian. How can the youth of Jordan appear so invested and well informed while many (including young people themselves) think them uncaring and self-absorbed?

According the survey research that I conducted at the University of Jordan (UJ), Ferris seems quite accurate in his assessment. Young people’s political disengagement, in the traditional sense of the term, is supported by the data collected from Jordanian college students:
Figure 2. Plans to Vote and Participate in Demonstrations

As evidenced by the graph, a rather large proportion of students chose not to participate in political demonstrations. Only 30% protested or planned to do so, and 70% of the students chose not to participate in political demonstrations altogether. Although not attending political rallies could be a mere avoidance of events or “active” participation, the fact that young people (who have been the heart of protests across the Arab world) have such a strong dislike for such activities remains rather surprising. Of the 126 students surveyed, almost exactly half (49.6%) planned to vote and half (50.4%) stated they would not participate in the upcoming election. A slight majority of survey participants were females, which could possibly skew the data towards nonparticipation in demonstrations due to socio-cultural norms. Additionally, circumstances and cultural phenomena may have affected this data, such as the tribal favoritism and family head voting practice expressed by Ferris. These numbers do not necessarily suggest rampant, utter apathy or indifference to the election process. However, this survey question does not imply intensive, widespread participation or interest for traditional modes of political participation. Furthermore, the above “plan to vote” data appears to correlate with youth opinions regarding Jordanian youth involvement in politics and perceived reasons for youth “apathy.”

Oddly enough, the young students surveyed at UJ remained rather neutral or impartial when questioned about their sentiments towards Jordanian youth general involvement, evidently disagreeing on the substantive participation of young people in the Hashemite Kingdom:
This even displacement of percentages illustrates young people’s uncertainty regarding their own participation as “Jordan’s youth.” Possibly explaining Ferris’s own cynical thoughts of his peers, some (if not many) UJ students view other young Jordanians as “apathetic” and uninvolved. There remains persistent divergence in opinion on this issue. However, the survey participants shared clear reasons to explain variable political interest/disinterest among Jordan's youth.

The reasons participants listed for youth interest/disinterest in politics shed light on their concerns and general disposition towards themselves and their joint identity. According to the surveys, corruption remains the main cause for this youth disengagement, although a large
proportion listed “apathy” as a major factor as well, displaying the generalization disseminated by older generations in Jordanian society. Ironically, this oversimplification of apathy as the current Jordanian youth attitude towards politics is also perpetuated by young Jordanians themselves in their opinions of peers. Although this final survey data remains rather spread out (around 50% for the highest voted option), the surveys indicate a slightly more unified opinion on reasons why youth care about Jordanian politics, economic issues taking the top position with 71% of the survey votes. Oddly enough, after comparing the data for these two categories side by side, it seems that youth may all care about similar issues, but are more divided on why they do not care.

This peculiarity was also present in my research interviews, for most people I interviewed agreed on “youth apathy” and “corruption” as reasons young Jordanians do not care or engage in elections. But, the reasons young people “cared” varied greatly during interviews. The reasons for the wide cultural attitude towards Jordan’s young population remain varied, and youth political apathy itself is not unique to Jordan, as it can be considered a global phenomenon to some degree. Extensive research worldwide has analyzed young populations and their involvement in politics, but relatively few studies investigate this topic in the Middle East. During my research in Jordan, many young people seemed uncertain or even dismissive when discussing youth political interest, echoing sentiments of the older generation. In fact, this view of the youth as politically apathetic appears quite commonplace. But, upon closer inspection and reflection, this prevalent description of young Jordanians as unconcerned seems unlikely to stem from mere youth political disregard. Considering the “Springs” taking place around the Middle

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10 Although youth political participation varies depending on the country, youth apathy has become a worldwide topic, particularly among Western polities. Many academics have written on the subject specific to certain regions, but the article “What is youth participation?” by Barry Checkoway provides a general description of young people and politics across the globe.
East, movements often sustained and substantiated by youth, other complexities must affect the Jordan situation. I argue that the issue is obscured by Western understandings and traditional definitions of political involvement and resisting power as purely active exercises as well as understandings of all inaction as indicative of “apathy.”

**An Anarchist Understanding of Young Jordanians**

Though the term “resistance” seems to denote defiant substantive actions, such as debating or protesting, it cannot be fully reduced to this single dimension. Similarly, traditional concepts of power attempt to create an artificial binary, rather than analyze the entirety of power relations within a living, moving society where each individual has different, sometimes conflicting, lines of affiliation, affinity, desire, and obligation. As I have described previously, Foucauldian theory analyzes power relations in this interconnected manner, but it may not be specific enough to accurately describe young Jordanian political opinion. Foucault’s theory offers a unique perspective of power in society as a whole, not necessarily a description or prescription for certain countries. During my time in Jordan, I discussed politics relatively frequently with a host of different youth and realized that a typical theoretical assessment of the “apathy” phenomenon would only support the current power relations in Jordan. Young people would again be relegated to a space of uninvolved diffidence, and youth would be widely considered disengaged politically among older generations and even themselves. Such an ineffective and disassociated young population would help consolidate regime power, placating most dissidence and avoiding substantive youth resistance. A traditional Western understanding of youth politics and withheld votes assumes certain typical behaviors associated with “active” participation. Such an approach would only lead to the simple one-dimensional verdict: “young Jordanians don’t care.” Thus, I attempt to engage and analyze my findings outside or
disassociated from these power relations through a “non-traditional” worldview: Anarchist theory.\(^{11}\) Utilizing concepts from Anarchist scholarship is useful for reframing the particular issues facing Jordanians, providing a new set of tools to analyze the stubborn but crucial problem confronting Jordanian society and scholars interested in the role of youth in the Kingdom. Additionally, this approach allows for an incisive critique of the hegemonic narratives perpetuating Jordanian youth “apathy,” and provides insight into the dynamic nature of political resistance in a closed, coercive system.

The sensationalized definition of anarchism, that its followers pursue only chaos or oppose all forms of order and tranquility, is a simplistic viewpoint perpetuated by modern state and corporate propaganda and outdated, sensationalized (though politically expedient) understandings of its meaning. Rather than the basic absence of rule, in the words of political philosopher Nathan Jun, “Anarchism is better understood as universal condemnation of and opposition to all forms of closed, coercive authority (political, economical, social, etc.)” (Jun 2012, 116). Israeli activist, journalist, and self-professed anarchist Uri Gordon describes it as a contemporary social movement, an intricate political culture, and a collection of ideas (Gordon 2008, 3-4). In fact, the terminology is so entirely ambiguous that he claims “the breadth and diversity of what could “count” as anarchist expression is indeed hard to place in bounds” (Ibid. 27). Thus, anarchism embraces a broad network of analytical approaches when dissecting varied polities and social relations, and adopts a brutally singular critique of state hegemony. Because Anarchist theory is difficult to “place in bounds,” I will utilize the work of several anarchists

\(^{11}\) Typical understandings of “anarchism” and “anarchy” denote utter chaos, but the term “Anarchist” thought indicates the various frameworks and perspectives of anarchist theorists. Although such philosophers and political scientists maintain similar analyses of politics and power relations, I will specify particular concepts and authors, for the peculiarities and arguments of separate anarchists can vary (sometimes quite drastically).
(and in some cases Foucault supporters), namely Harold Barclay, James Martel and Jimmy Clausen, and James C. Scott.

An Anarchist approach relying on these academics provides the necessary tools and language to reframe the apparent “apathy” of young Jordanians. In particular, three aspects or issues within Anarchist theory prove substantively useful in understanding Jordan’s youth political engagement: defining politics in terms of power, the forms of resistance, and state/cultural domination. Interestingly, the dynamic approach of Anarchist theory to power relations parallels youth political opinion in Jordan, and closely mirrors their reactionary engagement with the Jordanian political system (e.g. elections, parties, etc.). Young people in Jordan are often described (particularly by the older generation) as apathetic or indifferent towards politics, which I witnessed time and time again during my time in Amman. Jordan’s younger generation often avoid almost all forms of voting, demonstrating, and abstain entirely from joining movements/groups, as demonstrated later in my interviews and surveys. Some political theorists and academics would describe this non-action as apathy, assuming the behavior to be a natural deficiency in the population itself, rather than the result of structural/cultural issues or purposeful involved choice. I argue this “apathy” may actually be another subtle form of political engagement, a variety analyzed in anarchism as characteristic of ignored margin populations under systematic regime rule.

Anthropologist Harold Barclay, who has studied Arab villages extensively, wrote, “Since societies have order and structure and must deal with the problem of power, they are therefore involved in politics. When we use the word politics, we are concerned with power and its uses in a human group” (Barclay 1990, 23). Although Anarchist theory encompasses a broad network of philosophies, Barclay asserts that anarchism “is, after all, the condition in which there is the
maximum diffusion of power, so that ideally it is equally distributed” (Ibid. 21). Rather than viewing politics solely as activities concerned with the governance of a country, Anarchist theory or method analyzes power dynamics and relations stratified throughout society, defining these relational subtleties as politics. “Government” occurs within communities, tribes, friend groups, and families, not simply at a state level. Anarchists Martel and Klausen describe this multifaceted approach this way:

Against the liberal preference or need for central nodes from which to explain and organize the political system, we argue that anarchism accepts and even constitutes a radical dispersion of the these elements. Dispersion does not mean elimination; anarchists do not subscribe to a supposedly nihilistic denial of the political but rather to an appreciation for how the political can in fact incite (rather than overwrite) the myriad forms and capacities of human existence. (Martel and Klausen 2011, XV)

In Jordan, these forms include tribal customs, male/female cultural representation and corresponding gender hegemonies of power, effective age restrictions, and formats/venues of appropriate political dialogue. State involvement and policy, though an obvious issue of central importance and contention for Jordanian youth, remains a single piece of a very complex puzzle.

Traditional forms of political resistance are commonly understood (in the academic community) as demonstrations, media critique, protests, formation of unions, violent uprisings, boycotts, and other activities deemed expressly or intentionally political in nature. However, although each of these formats of political resistance exists to some extent within the Hashemite Kingdom, many young Jordanians seem indifferent to these conventional forms of political dissent, familiar to anyone with a passing interest in modes of political activism. Rather than vote or support any party in a system they hold too corrupt and ineffective to make any substantive difference, most youth instead choose a path of deliberate non-action – withdrawal from the tightly controlled sphere of normative political identification. As a majority population
with little to no power (i.e. political clout, economic means, a voice at home or in communities), some young people deliberately withhold their involvement. Existing concepts of resistance focus on intentionality or setting, but Anarchist theory describes political resistance through various levels and forms. It does so while keeping in mind the level of systemic repression. As Anarchist historian James C. Scott mentions in his writing *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, “The parameters of resistance are also set, in part, by the institutions of repression. To the extent that such institutions do their work effectively, they may all but preclude any forms of resistance other than the individual, the informal, and the clandestine” (Scott 1985, 299). Effectively, young Jordanians are left with no options, as the King, his government, and even political parties either ignore or intensively minimize their ability to engage politically (at least in the narrow traditional definition of politics).

Domination includes “the various systematic features of society whereby groups and persons are controlled, coerced, exploited, humiliated, discriminated against, etc.” (Gordon 2008, 32). In Jordan, countless socio-political aspects constantly subdue and control the youth: limited jobs, Islamic tradition, expensive living conditions, generalizations of political apathy and violent rebellion, corrupt voting system/high taxes/governmental representation, sexism and strict gender control, ageism against youth, tribalism, etc. As Gordon discusses power and resistance, he adds that domination is characterized by “impersonal sets of rules regulating relationships between people, rules which are not autonomously constituted by those individuals placed within the relationship (including the dominating side)” (Ibid. 33). These spoken policies and unspoken traditions maintain a tight cordon around young Jordanians, recreating dominative practices among youth communities as well, even in the supposedly “safe” realm for youth: the internet. Self-censorship and cultural stigmas are redistributed by youth among their peers, in
effect supporting domination by those in power (i.e. older generations and regime supporters). However, many still choose to silently resist through non-action from within Jordan, a phenomenon that continues to be greatly misunderstood and inadequately explored.

In the following chapter I analyze Jordanian youth political engagement in the format of original research, applying Anarchist theory to the findings. With 8 interviews and 126 surveys as primary source material, I argue that young people are not apathetic, and in fact remain politically engaged despite non-traditional formations of involvement. The issues surrounding youth politics, such as monarchial rule, protests, parties and elections, etc. can only be described as complex and interlinked. However, utilizing the analytic methods offered by critical anarchism (understanding modes of power, resistance, and domination) ultimately clarifies and supports my final argument. Young Jordanians have been grossly overlooked in scholarly literature, possibly due to their perceived passivity or seeming lack of political potential insofar as traditional understandings of participation. However, contrary to the generalizations of older generations in Jordan, my research and analysis suggest that young people of the Hashemite Kingdom are not “apathetic.” In fact, Jordanian youth’s subtle political engagement could eventually initiate gradual political change. Or, quite possibly, this majority population will follow the example of their neighbors, and soon they may not resist political domination so “passively.”
Chapter Three: Young Jordanian Resistance/Engagement through Apathy

Active Youth: Shifting Power Back to Young Subjects

During my research in the Hashemite Kingdom, I investigated the misconceptions and power relations permeating Jordanian youth political participation. Although I was only able to question a relatively small portion of young Jordanians, many of whom came from a similar background as educated university students, I did interview political figures and youth leaders deeply invested in youth’s socio-political development. Through a close analysis of these interviews, framed by anarchist understandings of power and political engagement, the means and motivations of political resistance for Jordan’s youth become clearer. I do not pretend to hold all answers, or even fully understand the complexities of youth politics in the country, but my research does bring some critical questions into focus around this difficult and often hazy issue. Rather than presenting a binary of power in the region, such as a simple relationship of government/King ruling over Kingdom subjects or older generation subjugating young people, this chapter argues for a dynamic interpretation of youth politics within a web of shifting power. Youth politics is multifaceted and unevenly distributed as a force – drawn into the clear spaces of organized power relations but at the same time always shifting and moving at the peripheries and fault lines of these relations. To sublimate the political energies of Jordanian youth into pre-existing categories and rationales erases from view a significant force for coming change.

As previously mentioned in the methodology section of my introduction, I conducted eight interviews, all of which must be analyzed and understood within a specific context. All the young Jordanians I talked to are college educated and volunteered to be interviewed, which may affect research data analyzing youth apathy and political engagement. In all likelihood, those young Jordanians totally disinterested would not willingly express their indifference, much less
take a survey or talk to an American student asking about politics. As an American male researcher, I was limited to a specific range of subjects and my own position needs to be taken into account when considering interview answers; I was never able to ask young female Jordanians their opinions, due primarily to cultural stigmas. However, despite these slight limitations to my research, my interviews provide useful insights into the rationale of Jordan’s youth and the power relations permeating their current situation within the Hashemite Kingdom.

Although I began my project in Amman with interviews at the University of Jordan campus, I knew that simply describing the political thoughts of young college students would not provide the necessary background or depth for insightful commentary. Thus, I began searching online for other sources, combing alternate spaces of political participation. As briefly mentioned before in chapter two, after scouring numerous websites, blogs, and other online sources for Jordanian youth opinion and possibilities of internet resistance, I discovered the pertinent website Jordanoholic.com. This blog, in reality a free-for-all intellectual battleground, had articles and commentary written by young people covering many types of issues in the Hashemite Kingdom. From journalists to political activists, a variety of Jordanians discussed topics such as voting, news, politics, and youth issues on this website. Debates and dialogue were often posted in Arabic or Arabish – a phonetic transliteration of Arabic using Latin script. However, some writing was translated/posted in English by the website’s creator: informational technology entrepreneur Rani Dababneh.

As the first and original “Jordanoholic,” Rani hoped to create a space for genuine, meaningful conversation on Jordan’s politics and culture. He was appalled at his generation’s apparent lack of interest in all things political, and thus decided to foster social engagement through technology. Since computers and the Internet were becoming more widespread in
Amman, and Jordan’s youth were already inseparable from their cellphones, a website was the obvious venue for his brainchild. Already a master of Computer Information Systems (his B.A. degree from the University of Jordan), Rani made his living through online business straight out of college. Eventually, he decided to focus on creating his platform for positive change, breathing Jordanoholic.com into existence. As the unofficial mission statement of this young mathematician and renowned blogger says on his own website (ranidababneh.com), his undertaking is “Technology by day, Society and Reform by Night.” After weeks of trial and error, his double-life led to a platform for what he dubbed “positive change in my [Rani’s] beloved country!” Although grandiose and probably too optimistic in his motivations/goals for the blog, he did ultimately produce a significant result: a space that has been utilized by many young Jordanians for political commentary.

After contacting Rani and describing my research, he suggested we meet at a Starbucks near Abdoun, the most affluent district of Jordan’s capitol. We met in an American coffee shop, surrounded by Jordanian hipsters – young people seeking to act, dress, talk, and think more decidedly Western. Taking advantage of the free Wi-Fi, the younger generation of Amman often flocks towards such places to work and play on their computers, or in Rani’s case, to engage in political discourse. I began the interview in earnest, inquiring how he would describe or characterize the youth of Jordan. Rani answered that besides people in Amman being more educated than those outside the capital, “youth, in general, are tending more towards extremism.” He further explained young Jordanians often either blindly follow the monarchy in mute acceptance, or attack Jordan’s government and politics (according to liberalism or radical Islam). In general, he estimated maybe twenty percent of young people are moderates, and he considers himself a mediator of moderate thought through his website and in daily discussion. Rani then
mentioned that the political indifference or apathy of youth has changed of late, mainly due to the Arab Spring, as well as gas price hikes. But, he claimed that young people have largely chosen to remain unengaged, despite a renewed political interest. He described their general attitude as “an immature but understandable reaction to politics.” I later asked Rani about his thoughts on the current Jordanian government and voting system. He immediately replied that it is “nonproductive,” later quipping that though the current prime minister is trying, he just “inherited other people’s problems.” With the government’s “disgustingly high corruption” and constant emphasis on the short term, Rani painted a bleak picture of Jordanian politics.

According to my survey data from the University of Jordan (UJ), many young people agree with Rani’s assessment of both Jordan’s voting system and the “fairness” of elections. During some of my interviews at UJ, strong opinions were relatively easy to find. However, in the survey data, opinions appear more indifferent or neutral:

![Figure 5. Jordanian Government Maintains a Fair Election System](image)

Though the majority of participants stayed impartial on the matter, 34% of the students believed that the Jordanian government does not maintain fair elections (combining Strongly Disagree/Disagree statistics). This percentage is slightly larger than the 27% of participants who believe in the government’s fair elections. However, almost 40% of young Jordanians chose to remain neutral, betraying a certain level of indifference that appears to fit the traditional
definition of “political apathy” to some degree. Oddly enough, this neutrality towards election maintenance was not present in my research interviews, for the individuals I questioned in person had strong opinions on the matter.

The relatively even split in both youth plans to vote and confidence in the election system describes a population caught between few options and an unfair system. That a vast majority of participants stayed neutral on the election system also shows their unwillingness to answer strongly, possibly due to fear of repercussions, social pressures, or a genuine love of the King. However, the most likely reason for these divided numbers and reliance on neutrality stems from legitimacy itself. In Jordan, there are cultural and even legal repercussions for questioning the legitimacy of the royal family. King Abdullah II, and even his policy, is often publicly supported while privately criticized. This phenomenon is especially true for young people, simply because Jordan’s youth are influenced into perpetuating and supporting the legitimacy of the monarchy. In a self-fulfilling cycle, young people give the King legitimacy simply by belief in, or acting as if they believe in, his authority, which then renews and rebuilds this trust in the office, the space of the King’s power.

Interestingly, in conjunction with his critical views of the government and King, Rani seems to appreciate young Jordanians’ apparent lack of interest, suggesting that many of his compatriots are not actively involved but still develop their own opinions and arguments regarding politics in the country. His description of their theoretical leanings towards extremism may generalize young people, forcing them into a binary of two camps, either vehemently for King Abdullah II or against him. However, Rani does in fact notice the youth population’s shift from apathy towards understandable reactionary politics. Traditional notions of political involvement cannot fully understand or accurately analyze a space of non-action, where young
Jordanians care enough about political issues to type a blog response, but choose not to vote or attend rallies. Rani still labels his fellow youth as unengaged, but his definition is hedged by a normalized understanding of political activity, not an Anarchist description of the many forms of resistance. In effect, he argues young Jordanians remain an uninformed but politically opinionated collection of participants – essentially, vocal spectators. Though unengaged in the action-oriented, typical sense of grassroots party involvement, they appear active in theoretical discussion.

Other young activists appear to agree with this description of youth political thought, even if they maintain conflicting political views to Rani’s moderate critiques of the King and government policy. As I interviewed university students, I met a young activist and student leader named Amer who enthusiastically answered questions, and practically begged to be included in my research. He was an avid supporter of King Abdullah II and a key member of multiple political student groups on campus. Although a staunch opponent of the Muslim Brotherhood, Amer had grown up in Amman with many Brotherhood supporters as friends and acquaintances, so he attempted to remain as neutral as possible during our discussion. Previously, he had met with the King during youth forums to discuss political involvement and job possibilities for the younger generations. In fact, Amer had even been a member of a delegation that travelled alongside King Abdullah to meet with the U.S. president. He was groomed for politics, and obviously hoped to someday run for office or obtain a governmental position.

Upon asking Amer about his thoughts on youth understanding of politics in Jordan, he first qualified his opinion, stating “he cannot generalize.” He mentioned that though some are educated and well informed, due to future worries about job prospects, many young Jordanians
don’t understand the intricacies and blindly follow political groups with outside agendas, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. However, with the advent of the Arab Spring, Amer believed that young people are trying to engage more in politics, claiming “Youth aren’t apathetic anymore. Now we are starting to care, whereas before we barely cared.” Although he admitted the election system is far from perfect, he maintained that the King and his party are doing very well in spite of difficult circumstances. With surrounding political unrest, an unstable economy, and burgeoning numbers of refugees, he claimed the government is actually providing the best services possible given the situation. Though he seemed to sympathize with the Hashemite regime and understand their tough choices, Amer was highly critical of opposition parties, citing outside control and rampant corruption. He argued that many such parties simply “seek power and authority, ultimately hoping to take away power from the King and hold all advantages.” Amer even disputed party leaders’ motivations, claiming “they don’t have the concerns of Jordan at heart. Many of the leaders don’t have strict ideology, and will change their minds and opinions if offered government positions.” As mentioned in chapter one, the political system of Jordan is choked by dozens of oppositional parties, most of which are ineffective and minuscule. His criticism was not pointed at young people or the government in particular, but rather at the multitude of political parties.

The fact that Amer pointed out that many parties and “outside” movements hope to redirect power from King Abdullah II not only confirms his own leanings, but also describes the current power relations in Jordan. Much of the country’s power flows straight to the King and his government, and Amer believes that youth ought to add their own support to the current political structure in the Hashemite Kingdom. In his eyes, the monarchy is utterly legitimate, and the government is making the best of a tough situation, quite opposite to the criticism of Rani. And
yet, both appear to agree on youth apathy, for Amer also describes young people as a relatively raw party developing political identity after a previous state of apathy. Before the Arab Spring, young Jordanians did not care about governmental policy, but they became politically engaged and informed as they were inspired by active young people across the Middle East. Ironically, despite his more cynical depiction of fellow youth, Amer himself seems to blindly believe the legitimacy of Jordan’s current regime. He remains adamantly involved in the political process/system, and thus likely emphasizes a positive, substantive role of young people in the Hashemite Kingdom. However, though he may be a traditionally engaged young member of society, he appears to be in the minority.

As I continued my interview with Rani, his criticism of politics in Jordan became all the more pointed and pessimistic. He did not support any single party due to the lack of established or developed politics: “thirty-five parties and eighty youth movements, who do I choose with so many options and no real power?” However, he still planned to participate in elections, stating, “I believe in gradual change – elect the best of the worst until you get the best of the best.” Rani’s seemingly pessimistic views are appropriate, if not understandable given his country’s political system and dire circumstances, and yet he intends to vote and created a virtual forum for political dialogue. Out of all six interviews I conducted with young Jordanians, Rani is arguably the most critical thinker and pragmatic in regards to the Hashemite Monarchy and government. Yet, he chooses to engage within the political system in anticipation of eventual changes, changes ultimately accomplished by plodding social movements and almost meaningless participation. Rani does not see Jordan’s youth as a hopeless, apathetic, wandering mass of the disengaged and disinterested. Instead, he believes young Jordanians are undergoing a process of gradual improvement in political thought and action. He hopes his generation can build towards
his goal of political mediation and compromise between the King and young Jordanians. The mission of Jordanoholic.com, he told me in hopeful aspiration, is “to act as one ultimate information portal to guide all through the various gateways of Jordan, to build a Jordanian Community, to network and deliver the right impression of our country to the whole world.”

This optimistic sense of potential participation was also present in the rest of Amer’s interview, but he maintained a decidedly more positive stance on the current situation of Jordan’s youth. Although Rani described a difficult situation of little substantive power for young Jordanians, he hopes to foster change through the Internet, whereas Amer believes the country to be much more amicable and representative of youth interests. Each of these young activists argue for opposing understandings of the current political power and space young Jordanians utilize, and yet they contend the best mode of youth engagement remains within the very power relations and political structures that often ostracize youth involvement. This traditional view or format of affecting systematic socio-political change may be expected from a monarchial supporter such as Amer, for any regime supporter would typically prefer working within previously established channels of power, especially if those power relations favor the King (and themselves presumably). Interestingly, Rani also insists on the necessity of voting and other active forms of political participation, while emphasizing less normalized technological formats of engagement for fellow youth (i.e. Jordanoholic.com). However, such “keyboard activism” does not always equate to substantive change, for it can actually become a safety valve and release political engagement into the digital void while “traditional” politics continues as usual. Both Amer and Rani are almost glaringly engaged, deeply invested in the political engagement of their generation, but they do not suggest open resistance or rebellion to the very power relations that likely led to the lack of youth engagement in traditional political activities in the first place.
Instead, they suggest engaging the very system that so many young Jordanians despise, a sentiment not likely shared by many of their peers who feel ignored and even ostracized in the realm of politics.

**Passive Engagement: Affecting Substantive Change in Power Relations**

Before I canvassed the University of Jordan for young people to interview, I met an acquaintance that offered a flurry of opinions on my research, but at first did not want to participate in the study. Ferris was a computer science student, and although he had previously lived in the U.K. for a few years, he had returned to Jordan to pursue his studies and eventually work. While discussing politics, his witty remarks and general disposition portrayed an absolute apathy towards politics in Jordan. Nevertheless, his opinions may have been the most biting and vehemently declared arguments, indicating his concern for these issues (and engagement with politics) despite his choice to not participate in demonstrations and his self-admitted indifference towards the elections. When asked how he would describe youth in Jordan, Ferris retorted “misinformed – we are not encouraged to study politics, political philosophy, or anything to do with it.” The student then continued reprimanding his generation, claiming that young Jordanians typically consider the particular tribe and family of a representative more important than the political platform or issues themselves. They vote for politicians based on personality, familial ties, and loyalties rather than his or her actual policies. In terms of youth political apathy, Ferris again denounced his fellow students’ own ignorance regarding the issues, lamenting “they think they care about politics, but they don’t know the difference between political ideals and realistic expectations.” Ferris cynically analyzed the current political situation of young Jordanians, particularly aware of their grand notions with little effective power, whereas Rani and Amer still held to a political system dominated by parties and ultimately the King.
Ferris’s cynicism towards the Jordanian government was echoed by the sentiments of two other students, themselves supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). Mohammad and Khalid each studied engineering and went out of their way to discuss the MB’s policy and value during their interviews. However, they wanted to be questioned together, which may have affected some of their answers and thoughts expressed during the interview. I first asked how they would describe or characterize young Jordanians, to which the two excitedly declared that youth are “well educated” and incredibly invested in politics. Mohammad and Khalid claimed politics had become a “hot topic [for young people] due to the Arab Spring, Israeli relations, and social media.” Although both students later admitted young Jordanians have not become heavily involved in politics, they argued the government had essentially suppressed engagement through its ineffective policies and corrupt voting system. They described the youth of the Hashemite Kingdom as “not apathetic, they just don’t need to vote since it will not change much anyways.” Interestingly, Mohammad mentioned that he still plans to vote due to family pressure, whereas Khalid tersely stated, “no, it will not change anything anyways, voting yes or no – same result.”

Although both Ferris and the two young MB supporters criticize Jordan’s government, particularly pointing out the failings of elections, they maintain strikingly different opinions of their fellow youth. Ferris paints young Jordanians as apathetic and uncaring, even if they have an understandable attitude in reaction to a political system that altogether disregards their interests. Ferris may have criticized the ruling party, but he also recognized that the government could not be responsible for everything, especially if young “activists” are willing to remain indifferent due to a broken system. On the other hand, Mohammed and Khalid appear to draw a line between apathy and inaction, purposefully highlighting youth’s own lack of substantive power as reason
enough to not vote. According to the two engineers, Jordan’s youth are not succumbing to indifference or naïveté, but rather resisting current power relations through this nonparticipation.

**Policies of Power and Resistance in Socio-Political Spaces of Jordan**

Although the main focus of my research revolved around youth and their political participation, I also interviewed certain political figures: a government official and a Muslim Brotherhood representative. Young people may have been the focus of my research, but without input from politicians, my arguments would rely too heavily on the particular opinions of college students and young workers. I wanted to include the thoughts and insight from those with vested political positions and social connections to established institutions. These two political figures provided context for a full discussion of youth, power, and politics. The government member offered his take on the King’s views and policies, defending the regime’s approach to youth in the Hashemite Kingdom. And, as the largest, most organized opposition party in Parliament, the Islamic Action Front (virtually synonymous with the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan) demanded inclusion in my analysis. After asking other Brotherhood members and professors, I was contacted by an active member, who invited me to an IAF office in a suburban area of Amman.

Ahmed, a Muslim Brotherhood representative, realized the difficulty of winning young Jordanians over to his party. In his mid-thirties, he still related to the plight and frustrations of young people, but as a traditional conservative father, he also gained respect and acknowledgement of Brotherhood members (often those considered “youth” are underrepresented or practically ignored altogether in the MB). After becoming more involved with the Jordanian Brotherhood, Ahmed hoped to bridge this gap between the different generations, and thus improve the MB’s political strength. However, he claimed that his current effort to solicit youth support was constantly undermined by a sensationalist media as well as
systemic problems within Jordanian politics such as corruption and underrepresentation. Ahmed clarified that the MB is “a people’s party, a civic movement first” and lamented that “we are still living in the Middle Ages here in Jordan.” He believed that many young people have misconceptions about the Brotherhood, first and foremost being that it remains solely a political entity, at least according to Ahmed. Regardless, he continued highlighting the organization’s multifaceted nature, stating it is too simplistic to think the MB resides solely in the realm of politics. In fact, he described the Muslim Brotherhood as a nonviolent movement and a form of resistance against the current Jordanian regime.

From the perspective of Jordan’s government, the MB often exacerbates issues and does not engage in open political dialogue. During my time in Amman, I decided to visit Jordan’s Office of Political Development, a department that seeks to improve everything from voting transparency to democratic/political awareness of citizens. There, I was able to interview the Minister of Political Development himself: Bassam Haddadin. At first, Minister Haddadin’s wording and answers remained neutral and politically parsimonious, but eventually he candidly discussed my questions and addressed youth issues without excuses or disclaimers. The first subject he mentioned was the King, and his respect for the leader’s vision particularly on youth involvement in politics. Haddadin said that King Abdullah “has been paying specific attention to the youth, trying to work with them hand-in-hand.” According to the Minister, because the King is one of the youngest leaders in the world (age 51), he is open-minded and hopes young Jordanians will play a significant role in the country’s progress towards democracy. Youth political involvement has improved since Abdullah’s rise to the throne in 1999, and it is the many conservative parties in parliament that hinder the young and remain “against youth participation in government.” As the head of Political Development, Haddadin felt that he
understood the “real” situation behind politically closed doors. And, he implied the King is not necessarily to blame for the political apathy of young Jordanians. Upon close examination, the Minister’s answers and dialogue seemed to skirt the main issues surrounding youth, particularly apathy and effective political participation. However, his blame of conservative parties and protection of the King’s image is to be expected from a politician and government employee.

Both Minister Haddadin and Ahmed present vastly differing narratives of governance and youth involvement. Although each admits a certain underrepresentation or disregard for youth political involvement in Jordan, as well as young Jordanians’ general indifference, the two politicians argue their respective organizations are addressing youth concerns more adequately (at least when compared to other parties and organizations). However, during the interviews, neither seemed to address Jordanian youth political apathy as a unique phenomenon particular to the Hashemite Kingdom. Rather, they dismissed indifference as a general issue of youthful disposition worldwide, not a form of intentional disengagement. The government official excused the King, while the MB representative blamed him for a litany of governmental issues. Haddadin discussed policy towards youth and Ahmed focused on young Jordanians’ negative stereotypes towards the Muslim Brotherhood. Both discussed power dynamics within their own spheres of interests and influences, but appeared to ignore or downplay any existing political resistance already present among youth.

After defending the King and supporting his policy, Minister Haddadin discussed youth representation in Jordan’s political system, blaming a lack of opportunity due to “politics remaining exclusively for the elite.” Although Haddadin described workshops and information sessions hosted through his department’s programs, he still believed few will participate without results – “the youth need to feel that they have an impact.” The Minister even admitted that
Jordan’s youth had become apathetic over the past few years, but insisted they are still “the same as young people anywhere else in the world.” At one point, the Minister presented a constitutional amendment to change the required age of parliamentary members from 30 to 25, but, as he lamented, “it was immediately shot down.” Similar to the Minister, Ahmed either defended his party or offered disclaimers, emphasizing that the MB identifies with all Jordanians and fights against the injustice of what he dubs an “ancient system.” Ironically, Minister Haddadin and even the King himself claim the current system remains modern and democratic, fighting against “ancient system” supporters, like the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite his apparent pessimistic views towards the current political system, Ahmed seemed hopeful and enthusiastic that change would occur if the brotherhood could regain its status and support in Jordan’s communities, particularly among young people. He claimed that the “media’s propaganda is keeping the youth from fully trusting the Muslim Brotherhood.” This “false” information from news sources convinces young people that the MB is dangerously chaotic and always responsible for violent outbreaks during street protests, while print/broadcast language perpetuates an image of his organization as hostile or ambivalent towards youth.

Ahmed later pointed out that although not everyone can become a member of the MB due to age and religious restrictions (effectively required to be Muslim and typically older than mid-twenties upon formal membership), there still remain many opportunities for supporters to participate and attend events. He went on to praise Jordanian youth, noting “the new generation is open minded – very intelligent due to technologies and connections to the rest of the world.” In fact, according to Ahmed’s observations at rallies and protests, young people are not apathetic towards politics. He claimed, “At a recent demonstration, 60-70% of the people present must have been under the age of 25.” He admitted his own surprise, for youth were much less
involved and indifferent just two years ago, but Ahmed recognized this renewed interest is only natural as more daily life becomes affected by inefficient corrupt policy (gas prices, decreased food subsidies, education funding, water shortages). According to his account, the familiar generalizations of young people as lazy and apathetic may have been more accurate a few years previous, but their current involvement could shift as Jordan’s youth witness the effects of the Arab Spring abroad and constrictions and corruption at home.

Both political figures openly discussed an improvement or renewed engagement of young Jordanian politics, which coincides with the previous perspectives shared by Rani (the blogger), Amer (the young activist), and Muhammad and Khalid (the young MB supporters). However, their respective opinions regarding the present state of youth apathy/political involvement differ greatly. These oppositional opinions highlight today’s power relations and disparities within Jordan. Amer and Minister Haddadin – both openly sympathetic to the King – painted a vastly more positive picture than others I interviewed, as was to be expected. The slight progress cited by Rani and the other more skeptical interview subjects, though possibly increasing young Jordanian interest in politics, does not imply significant change. Ferris’s harsh criticism and Rani’s analytical observations do not describe shifting power dynamics, only the slight renewal or rekindling of involvement. Although Ahmed defended his party’s approach to Jordanian youth engagement and political apathy (practically denying its prevalence), he also addressed the MB’s own perceived apathy and nonparticipation in recent elections. He reiterated his own embarrassment at the state of the current political system, and bitterly remarked, “The Muslim Brotherhood is not participating in elections because it is a dead end. Plus, we have no extra money to spend for nothing.” Ironically enough, these resentful sentiments echo the opinions of many young Jordanians towards the political system in general, as indicated by certain
interviewees (particularly Muhammad, Khalid, and Ferris) and my survey findings. In fact, Ahmed’s sentiments and attitude may suggest the MB’s platform has taken an approach to politics similar to young Jordanians through its non-action, or at least withdrawn from an overt and sanctioned political space where it can only lose.

As the King and political parties have noticed, prevalent youth “apathy” (in the traditional, political sense) can resist current power dynamics, including legitimacy as a source of power. This shifts power back towards young Jordanians. Minister Haddadin defended the King and focused on youth in his department, Rani created a space for open political dialogue, and Ahmed pointed out the MB’s renewed focus on young Jordanians: each attempts to address perceived youth “indifference” uniquely and adequately so as to rebuild, redirect, or recapture this legitimacy to a greater extent. However, ironically, in his process of analysis in reclaiming substantive power, young people themselves seem to have been ignored or forgotten to some extent. How will young Jordanians attempt to address these issues to rebuild their image or identity from “apathetic” to “Jordanoholic?”
Conclusion

Today, Jordan’s situation remains quite dire, despite its apparent political stability. Comparing the Hashemite Kingdom to its neighbors glosses over the country’s own difficulties, and the volatility beneath a surface of supposedly democratic elections and transparent governance. The massive population of young Jordanians, who themselves are excluded from substantive political participation, notice the pervasive corruption and nepotistic behavior of their “representatives.” However, rather than escalating their resistance to open rebellion or uprisings, these youth choose to engage in politics and affect change through a subtle manner of resistance. The avenue for creating these necessary changes, such as government transparency and the systematic elimination of corruption, remain hindered by oppressive policy, cultural tradition, and a host of other sources of power that strengthen ruling authority.

King Abdullah II and the Jordanian government are able to consolidate their power through these established power relations, relying on their legitimacy and the seemingly passive state of the youth majority. Even a cultural generalization like “youth apathy” reinforces regime power. The hegemonic depiction of youth as disengaged circulates a narrative of political disempowerment based on personal choice and disinterest. We should be careful to note that this hegemony perhaps operates as a kind of discursive barrier suppressing youthful engagement and minimizing their effects (and threats) on the Kingdom. However, I challenge this conceptualization of Jordan’s youth; the young people of Jordan are not merely submissive or inert, nor are they apathetic towards the shifting powers surrounding and permeating their country. Rather, the younger generations of Jordanian society engage and resist the government through political non-action. Although youth mobilization will be slow and subtle due to the understated manner of this non-action, and such an inactive attitude may appear as shallow
public obedience, the dominant ideology continues to erode.

The King himself appears to realize this gradual corrosion of his authority, as well as the importance of young Jordanians to the future of his Kingdom, and effectively his reign. Thus, he has initiated forums and programs through nonprofit organizations that attempt to engage youth in politics, hoping to garner their support and respect. Following suit, the government has created initiatives to improve youth involvement in Jordan’s elections and policy processes, but these proposals never directly provide actual programs or on-the-ground organizational results. Young people remain ignored and ostracized politically, despite the ruling power’s public image of open dialogue and carefully choreographed “opportunities” for youth engagement. The government is stymied by its dual impulses to harness youthful energies while simultaneously restraining them within a rigid system that seems to produce a strong sense of dismay and resignation among young constituents. The targets of these publicity stunts and promised changes are not convinced. After discussing the general sentiments and goals surrounding political involvement with young Jordanians themselves, I know the youth of the Hashemite Kingdom are not naïve. They simply have no options, and thus choose to not “actively participate” in a political system of dominative power relations, at least in the traditional senses of voting or party support. With little substantive power, Jordan’s youth cannot truly or fully engage, and forcible, active resistance could in fact lead to an even grimmer situation, similar to the cases of Syria or Egypt. Political non-action is not the fastest or the most effective means of resistance, but currently it appears to be the only choice left for young Jordanians to affect future change without a Hashemite “Spring.” Youth figure prominently in this future, however, their orientations are diffuse and tentative, marked more by absence than unified blocs of traditional political power.

After meeting individuals like Rani, the motivated young blogger, I have come to realize
that many young Jordanians are attempting to redistribute power to their peers through more “active” means, rather than waiting for the effects of nonparticipation to take hold. And, as James C. Scott discovered in his analysis of Southeast Asia, political non-action can in fact prove quite effective given enough time and the right circumstances. The issues of Palestinian-Israeli relations and a governing system controlled by the King and tribes only complicate an already chaotic region. Additionally, the nature of the political street exasperates youth attitude towards the ruling party due to their own underrepresentation in the political process. Simply because the realm of political involvement for youth has effectively shifted to informal spaces in the street does not imply such dialogue could fully replace governmental representation. Due to this lack of viable venues or means of political participation, young people resorted to non-action, which itself seems a last resort. “Not participating” can catalyze change, however small the increments may be in a gradual progress of reform. Anarchist theory, namely the concepts of Foucault, Barclay, and Scott, describes this subtle form of political involvement and its use within power relations. Non-action actually claims power from the Monarchy and remains not only an understandable or “last resort” youth reaction to politics, but also possibly the best option available for young Jordanians. Rather than risking another “Spring,” Jordan’s youth are submitting without rolling over, critiquing the election system and regime through avoiding traditional political engagement in a system that ostracizes their opinions.

Political withdrawal seems to define a generational gap in Jordanian politics, suggesting a type of “dead zone” in terms of both scholarly research and substantive youth engagement. My research attempts to address this missing contextualizing information, for few studies or in-depth analysis have been conducted in order to understand these young Jordanians. My work offers a critical intervention into this space of absence where discursive narratives appear to stand in for
concrete research of young people and their lived realities. For such a large population to be marginalized through generalized and unimaginative notions of “youth,” and even expected to give up their individual political agency to other institutions who assume power by proxy, the power disparity is truly significant.

The interviews and surveys I conducted cannot begin to fully understand or investigate the political engagement of Jordan’s youth. The complete focus on college students for both sections of my research, and the lack of female interviews likely affected the outcome of my data. However, my thesis does not claim to fully describe young Jordanians, or even necessarily extrapolate the data to include the entirety of Jordanian “youth.” Rather, I am offering new information and insight into the motives of a relatively underappreciated and understudied population in the Hashemite Kingdom. Utilizing the established concepts and frameworks of Anarchist theorists, I provide a uniquely analytical perspective on Jordan’s youth and the context of their apparent “apathy.” Rather than assuming anyone can somehow simply dismiss youth as a static or unmotivated force in Jordanian politics, we need to continue to engage with them as young Jordanians discover new ways to use their identities and create strategies to negotiate the complex social, political, and cultural terrain they occupy.

Absence from conventional political discourse does not mean people are unaware of the political world they inhabit, or uncaring in their disposition towards governments. Individuals are alert to the conditions that shape their available options and compel their energies, and the young people of the Hashemite Kingdom are no exception. Thus, the research questions that need to be asked may require further honing, and perhaps a more radical revision of this particular approach to data analysis or framing of the issues encountered. My research in Jordan and the resulting analysis in this thesis rely on the opinions of relatively few young people, a necessary limitation.
for the scope and time allotted. However, longer fieldwork would provide a more refined texture of the everyday concerns young people face, as well as more diverse data collection from a variety of young Jordanians (such as those already in the workforce, those on the streets, or any not at school). I restricted my study primarily to the University of Jordan, but in the future, I would adjust my research model to better complement the theories and outlying factors regarding youth political engagement. For instance, including subjects’ own definitions and understandings of key terms like “apathy” or “power relations” could prove quite insightful. Also, working collaboratively in a mixed-gendered team would also provide greater access to various social/gender positions young people occupy. At the very least, I hope my thesis and research will initiate a discussion, and possibly inspire other studies on the population of young Jordanians and their situation in the context of the Arab Spring. Understanding the political opinions and engagement of Jordan’s youth may very well prove vital to the sustainability of the entire country in the near future. The possibility of a Jordanian “Spring” or a renewed peaceful emphasis on political reform lies with this youth population, and the Hashemite Kingdom must change to both satiate youth negative sentiments and harness their power for the country’s future prosperity. Otherwise, Jordan will likely be beset by the same uprisings and turbulence as its neighbors.
Works Cited


Primary Research Sources


Appendix

The interviews were conducted in Arabic, utilizing a combination of guided and standardized questioning. This allowed for professional, accurate interviews while maintaining the need for spontaneity and further elaboration. A set of pre-determined questions were asked, and other follow up inquiries or clarifying questions were added as necessary according to the time allotted and overall setting/comfort of the study population. All participants signed consent forms and were adequately informed of the reasoning and nature of the research. Below are listed the primary questions and basic interview format.

Interview Design:

1. How would you describe or characterize the Youth of Jordan?
   a. How do young people react to Jordanian politics or politics in general?
   b. Do you believe young Jordanians are politically apathetic? – Why/why not?

2. What is your opinion of the current Jordanian Government?
   a. Do you plan to vote in the upcoming election? – Why/why not?
   b. What political party do you support? – Why?

3. What do you think of the Opposition Parties in Jordan?
   a. What do you know about the Muslim Brotherhood? – Opinion?
   b. What are your thoughts on the Islamic Action Front (IAF)?
The following survey will be utilized for research only, and will remain completely anonymous. Please answer the following questions (2 pages, 25 Questions) to the best of your ability, understanding any information given is voluntary, and questions may be skipped if necessary.

Thank you for your participation.

Age: Sex: Male __ or Female __
City of Residence: Political Affiliation (if any):

Please Check All the Applicable Options and Answer Questions…
Occupation: N/A__ Student__ Worker__ (Please Specify: ) Other:
Self-Identified Nationality: Jordanian__ Jordanian-Palestinian__ Palestinian__ Other:

I am planning to participate in the upcoming elections: Yes__ No__

If not, Why? –

I participated/plan to participate in political demonstrations: Yes__ No__

If not, Why? –

I support X parties: Local/National__ Independent__ Communist__ Muslim Brotherhood__

I would support an X state for Jordan: Democracy__ Communist__ Muslim__ Other:

Please Rate the Following Statements… (Strongly Disagree) 1 – 5 (Strongly Agree)
The government maintains a fair election system. 1 2 3 4 5
Jordanian youth are significantly involved in politics. 1 2 3 4 5
I support opposition parties in parliament. 1 2 3 4 5
I support the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan. 1 2 3 4 5
I support the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East. 1 2 3 4 5
I am interested in Jordanian politics and elections. 1 2 3 4 5
My family is interested in Jordanian politics. 1 2 3 4 5
Please Briefly Describe Your Views/Feelings on the Following Subjects…

Elections and voting with an informed mindset – Do youth vote with understanding?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Jordanian youth apathy towards politics – Do young Jordanians care about politics/government?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Muslim Brotherhood (MB) policies/role in society – What is the MB doing right or wrong?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Please Check the Top 3 Answers for the Following Questions…

What are reasons why Jordanian Youth care about Jordanian politics / elections?

Economic Situation__  Arab Spring__  Relation to Israel/Palestine__

Relation to USA__  Social Issues __  World Issues__

Role of Religion__  Familial Ties__  Other:

What are reasons why Jordanian Youth do NOT care about Jordanian politics / elections?

No Affect on Daily Life__  Corruption__  Little Importance__

Can’t Change it__  Ignorance__  Apathy__

Political Affiliation__  Religion__  Other:

What 3 reasons do you care / NOT care about Jordanian politics / elections?

Care:  ___________________  ___________________  ___________________

Not Care:  ___________________  ___________________  ___________________
الباحث: جوناثان هافركامب  أجريت في نوفمبر 2012

الاستبيان التالي يستخدم لأغراض البحث فقط وسبيئا تماما، الرجاء الإجابة عن الأسئلة التالية (2 صفحة، 25 سؤال) قدر المستطاع، مع العلم أن أي معلومة ستعطي طوعا وأي سؤال يمكن عدم الإجابة عنه إذا لم يكن ضروريا.

شكرا على مشاركتك

العمر:
الجنس: ذكر أو أنثى
مكان السكن:

الرجاء تحديد كل الخيارات المتاحة و إجابة الأسئلة:

المهنة: لا يوجد طالب عامل (الرجاء التحديد): أخرى

جنسية التعريف الشخصية: أردني، أردني فلسطيني، فلسطيني، أخرى

أخطط للمشاركة في الانتخابات القادمة: نعم لا

إذا كانت الإجابة لا، لماذا؟

شاركك/أنتي المشاركة في مظاهرات سياسية: نعم لا

إذا كانت الإجابة لا، لماذا؟

أنا أدعم الحزب التالي: محلي/وطني مستقل، شيعي، جماعة الإخوان المسلمين.

سوف أدعم الأردن لتكون دولة: ديمقراطية، شيعية، مسلمة، أخرى.

الرجاء تقييم الحالات التالية: (لا توافق بشدة) 1(أوافق بشدة) 5

رقم 3 2 1 5 (أوافق بشدة)

الحكومة تحافظ على نظام انتخابات نزيهة

الشباب الأردنيون يدخلون بشكل ملحوظ في السياسة

أدعم أحزاب المعارضة في البرلمان

أدعم جماعة الإخوان المسلمين في الأردن

أدعم جماعة الإخوان المسلمين في الشرق الأوسط

أنا مهتم بالسياسة والانتخابات الأردنية
الرجاء وصف وجهة نظرك/ مشاعرك باختصار تجاه المواضيع التالية:

الانتخابات و التصويت بعقلية مدركة؟ هل يصوت الشباب بنفهم (عقلانية)؟

لا مبالاة الشباب الأردني بما يخص السياسة، هل يهتم الشباب الأردني بالسياسة/ الحكومة؟

سياسات/ دور جمعة الاخوان المسلمين في المجتمع، مالأشياء الصحيحة والخاطئة التي يفعلها الأخوان المسلمين؟

الرجاء اختيار أعلى 3 اجابات للأسئلة التالية:

ما هي أسباب أن الشباب الأردنيون يهتمون بالسياسات/ الانتخابات الأردنية؟

الوضع الاقتصادي، الربيع العربي، العلاقة الفلسطينية/ الإسرائيلية، العلاقة بالولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، قضايا اجتماعية، قضايا عالمية، دور الدين، روابط عائلية، أُخرى.

ما هي أسباب أن الشباب الأردنيون لا يهتمون بالسياسات/ الانتخابات الأردنية؟

لا تؤثر على الحياة اليومية، الفساد، قليلة الأهمية، لا يستطيع تغييرها، تجاهل، لا مبالاة، انتقاء سياسي، الدين، أُخرى.

تذكر 3 أسباب للاهتمام/ عدم اهتمامك بالسياسات/ الانتخابات الأردنية؟

أهم

لا أهم