

## Special report: Jordan protests

By [Christopher Williams](#)

Thursday 14 June 2018



Image: Freedom's Falcon

Youth-led protests in Jordan have rocked the country for the last fortnight. Incidentally, I have had to make my way through them twice now, at one point being escorted, like a package, by police. Although they have been peaceful so far, rumours sweep the city that tonight could turn violent, not least because buses of new protesters are travelling into Amman from across the country. What sparked this in a country that, aside from the Arab Spring in 2011, hasn't seen demonstrations for decades?

The most prominent cause has been a recent set of proposed tax reforms which protesters claim (correctly) would hit lower and middle income households hardest. Coupled with this, there are little to no public services in Jordan, including no clean water, transport, state healthcare or numerous other things we take for granted in the UK. One protestor, Mila, told me she and her husband would not mind tax increases if they got something in return, yet she says it also goes deeper. She argues the parliament is stricken by corruption and impotency while the Prime Minister merely organises the government for King Abdullah II, who holds the real power. "What we want is real autonomy for our government" she affirms, "not just the same faces, same people and no new blood". So far the former Prime Minister has resigned in place of a popular non-Jordanian, al-Razzaz. This could show the King's openness to public opinion, considering al-Razzaz's unpopularity with the tribes and intelligence service, significant centres of power in Jordan. However, a constitutional monarchy, which many protesters are demanding, seems to be wishful thinking.

Although this may appear a difficult position for King Abdullah, it certainly has not been without benefits for him. On Tuesday many Middle Eastern leaders phoned in to pledge support for his regime, notably including the Saudi leadership whom the King has been virtually subservient to in recent years. Regardless, the King must decide carefully how to manage the current situation and ensure he uses just enough force to maintain legitimacy, without overstepping the invisible line and incurring public wrath. Surprisingly, he has been extremely supportive of the demonstrations so far, lauding how proud he is that his people can protest their views so peacefully. One political activist described the King's recent letter appointing Prime Minister al-Razzaz, which called for discussions of the tax reforms, as "too good to be true". She is

cautiously hopeful, although she still plans to protest tonight.

Meanwhile, as this goes on, something else is changing in Jordan. Many women can be seen out protesting, something which was not the case seven years ago. Mila asserts that since the Arab Spring there has been a lot of openness, evidenced by the fact that unlike then there are no government-hired thugs throwing rocks at demonstrators. This has been highlighted recently by the trade union elections, in which the Muslim Brotherhood failed to make an impact for the first time in 10 years. Consequently, women have taken to the streets to voice their anger as much as men.

There is an exciting atmosphere in Jordan. The country feels ripe for fresh attitudes. As a combination of social change, economic stress, corruption, and an active political youth, has created the conditions for a potential shift of power to the people. However, the looming interference of the Muslim Brotherhood could undermine the cause, as well as infiltration by the intelligence services. The protests have already led to the resignation of the Prime Minister and his cabinet. Prime Minister Omar Razzaz, newly appointed by King Abdullah II, announced on Thursday that the tax bill which sparked the protests will be withdrawn. It seems likely that new Prime Minister Razzaz will have to make further reforms in a country widely perceived as elitist and exclusionary in order to quell the anger of the young Jordanians who have taken to the streets in re-cent times.

*Chris Williams is a MA student at York. He is doing his Masters in Post-war Recovery Studies. Chris is currently in Amman, Jordan doing a placement with the Save the Children regional office in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. He sends this report from Amman where many of the protests have occurred.*



Most Read Discussed

1. [What is the difference between tax evasion and tax avoidance?](#)
2. [Review: Little Mix - LM5](#)
3. [Penalty for submitting work up to an hour late halved](#)
4. [UK government in contempt of Parliament ahead of key Brexit vote](#)
5. [How to depose a Conservative leader](#)
6. [Led Astray - The Case Against Greta Van Fleet](#)

### Write for Nouse Politics

[Get in touch with the editors](#)

[Join the Facebook group](#)

### More in Politics

[UK government in contempt of Parliament ahead of key Brexit vote](#)

[How to depose a Conservative leader](#)

[Aufwiedersehen: Merkel plans her departure](#)

[US turnout surges in Midterms](#)

[Trans-Atlantic spats overshadow Centenary](#)

[Up to a million Muslims imprisoned by China](#)

- [About Nouse](#)
- [Who's Nouse](#)
- [Website Credits](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Student Discounts](#)
- [Print Editions](#)
- [Mini-Sites](#)
- [Nouse on Twitter](#)
- [Nouse on Facebook](#)
- [Nouse on Google+](#)

