Promoting Democracy, Reinforcing Authoritarianism

Jordan is one of the highest recipients of US and European 'democracy promotion' funding and simultaneously demonstrates a remarkably stable authoritarian system. Against this backdrop, *Promoting Democracy, Reinforcing Authoritarianism* investigates what external 'democracy promoters' *actually do* when they promote democracy. By examining why Jordanian authoritarianism is so stable, not despite but in part because of external attempts at 'democracy promotion', Benjamin Schuetze demonstrates the depth of Orientalist attitudes among 'democracy promoters'. In highlighting the undermining of democratic values as they become circumscribed by the free market and security concerns, Schuetze suggests that although US and European policy in Jordan comes under the cloak of a universal morality which claims the surmounting of authoritarianism as its objective, its effect is not very different to traditional modes of imperial support for authoritarian regimes. As a result, this is a vivid illustration of what greater US and European policy presence in the Global South really means.

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Promoting Democracy, Reinforcing Authoritarianism

US and European Policy in Jordan

Benjamin Schuetze

University of Freiburg and Arnold Bergstraesser Institute

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For Delphine and Félix

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Figure 1.1 Map of Jordan.
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Preface: In Jordan 'Reform Is Not a Strange Word'

Commissioning external reports that they then deliberately ignore, holding a political party fair at which participating youth end up celebrating the king, organising a 'score for democracy' football cup which is won by the Ministry for Political Development, holding graduation ceremonies at which participating students celebrate 'their commitment to democracy', mobilising voters for an utterly toothless parliament, teaching students proposal-writing skills so they can secure funds from the regime's own 'democracy promotion' initiative, assisting in the privatisation of public goods and linking the resulting socio-economic problems to the deficient 'nature of Jordanians', establishing a military training centre in which affluent customers learn how to best use a shotgun and hide in a fake refugee camp: the world of 'democracy promotion' is both full of contradictions and highly diverse, with activities spanning from institutional engineering, election observation and civil society support to the promotion of certain economic and security frameworks. While the existing body of literature on 'democracy promotion' is indeed vast, an in-depth study of what 'democracy promoters' *actually do* when they promote democracy is still lacking. Instead of discussing the intentions of 'democracy promoters', their theoretical assumptions and supposedly universally valid models of democratisation, this book will first and foremost discuss what US and European 'democracy promoters' *actually do* when they promote democracy.

As 'democracy promotion' is arguably one of the defining features of global liberalism, this book will provide a critical discussion of the liberal project at large and of the seeming moral hierarchies between interveners and those intervened upon that inform the latter. The case of Jordan constitutes an extremely interesting example for a deconstruction of such liberal worldviews. Jordan is thus one of the main recipients worldwide of US and European foreign assistance in general and of 'democracy

promotion' programmes in particular.[1] In 2018, only Israel and Egypt were projected to receive more US foreign aid than Jordan, a country with a population of only about 10 million people: $40 million out of the envisaged total of $1 billion in US assistance were assigned to programmes related to democracy, human rights and governance, which makes the 'democracy promotion' portfolio of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Jordan one of the biggest worldwide, in absolute terms but especially relative to population figures.[2] On the European side, the EU's bilateral assistance to Jordan was scheduled to be around €90 million per year in 2014–2017, with a budget of approximately €22.5 million dedicated to activities aimed at reinforcing political reform and promoting democracy.[3] On top of this comes additional assistance from individual EU member states.

For a number of reasons, a study of US and European 'democracy promotion' programmes in the country is also both relevant and insightful beyond merely questions concerning 'democracy promotion' and Jordanian politics. In particular, it is the extent to which the teleological and deeply functionalist narrative of US and European 'democracy promoters' – according to which processes of democratisation, economic liberalisation, economic prosperity, a pro-Western foreign policy and stability are all mutually reinforcing – is also embraced by the Jordanian regime itself that makes Jordan such an interesting and fascinating case study. In this regard, select Western officials have described the country as, for instance, a 'model for the region in democracy, human rights and economic reforms on the one hand, and political development and the socio-economic transformation on the other',[4] or have more concisely simply stated that 'Jordan is on the right track'.[5]

Also, the case of Jordan (see Figure 1.1) provides a great example of a regime that – unlike Syria under Assad, Libya under Gaddafi, Iraq under Saddam and Egypt under Nasser – does not attempt to develop any

[1] See, among others, Khakee, A. et al., 'A long-lasting controversy: Western democracy promotion in Jordan', Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies and Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center (UJRC), Malta and Amman, 2009, p. 5.
[2] US Government, Map of Foreign Assistance Worldwide, available at: www.foreignassistance.gov/explore.
[3] The figures are based on my own calculations related to the information provided in European External Action Service (EEAS) and European Commission (EC), *Programming of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) – 2014–2020 – Single Support Framework for EU Support to Jordan (2014–2017)*, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/single_support_framework_2014-2020.pdf, p. 9.
[4] US Ambassador in Amman, Edward Gnehm, paraphrased in: 'Jordan a model for the region – US ambassador', *Jordan Times*, 7 January 2004.
[5] EU Ambassador to Jordan, Patrick Renault, quoted in: Hazaimeh, H., 'Jordan makes tangible progress in reports – EU', *Jordan Times*, 13 May 2010.

distinct ideology, but instead openly embraces liberal democracy and free markets as political goals. In its near absence of counter-hegemonic ideological discourses, Jordanian politics can be seen as exemplary for the supposed gradual universalisation of liberal democratic forms of governance. As such, this book provides valuable insight to scholars with an interest in what precisely greater US and European policy presence in the Global South means. A study of US and European 'democracy promotion' in Jordan is also likely to tell us more about whether liberal democracy can indeed be promoted, and is likely to allow for a better understanding of power, rule, the politics of intervention and the creation of moral authority in the Middle East in general. Of central importance for the assumed exemplary role of Jordan in the region and for the alleged positive effects of external 'democracy promotion' interventions is the narrative of Jordan as a gradually reforming, liberalising and modernising state, as one where the king is 'ahead of the streets' (as a prominent member of the Jordanian regime put it in late 2013 at a non-public meeting) or as one where the liberal democratic dream indeed appears to be realisable.

Much research on Jordan reproduces deeply problematic notions of Jordanian society as fundamentally traditional and/or only gradually modernising. Such analyses tend to have a very clear idea of who acts upon whom, of the people, social practices and forms of behaviour in Jordan that are to be considered 'modern' as opposed to 'traditional', and of the developmental path on which Jordan supposedly finds itself. The troublesome tradition-modernity binary inherent to such approaches comes in different disguises, some of which I will briefly outline here.

Perhaps the most prominent theme in research on the Jordanian state is its artificiality.[6] Scholars regularly invoke 'the famous stroke of Churchill's pen'[7] that drew the country's borders; the fact that Transjordan's first designated ruler, Abdullah, came from the *ḥijāz* in present-day Saudi-Arabia; and the relative unattractiveness and remoteness of a territory that Wilson dismissively called a 'patch of desert'.[8] While these points and descriptions are indeed either true or at least somewhat understandable, the problem lies in the way in which they are often overemphasised. This has occurred to such an extent that a

[6] See for instance Krämer, G., 'Good counsel to the king: the Islamist opposition in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco', in: Kostiner, J. (ed.), *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000), pp. 257–288.
[7] Shlaim, A., *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p. 19.
[8] Wilson, M.C., *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 102.

considerable amount of research on Jordan appears to be more about the British colonial rulers and the Hashemite ruling family than actually about Jordanians themselves.[9]

As demonstrated by Tell, such an account of Jordanian history and politics fails to adequately explain the origins and, as such, also the resilience of monarchy in Jordan.[10] While Abdullah and the British indeed quite literally had to produce Jordanian national identity, this process also involved the construction of local Bedouins 'as the carriers of Jordan's true and authentic culture and traditions'.[11] Given that 'the tribe and the nation-state [thereby became] mutually dependent on each other',[12] as Massad remarks, it is clear that a simplistic understanding of Jordanian tribes – as, for instance, inherently traditional – fails to do justice to a much more complex reality.

Likewise, while Israeli claims about Jordan as Palestinians' 'alternative homeland' are a topic of heated debate in Jordanian politics,[13] an understanding of the latter as fundamentally shaped by a clear separation between East Bank Jordanians as passive supporters of the regime and West Bank Jordanians as agents of transformation is overly simplistic and misleading.[14] As a result of discrimination against Palestinian-Jordanians, in particular following the Jordanian civil war in 1970–1971, a number of scholars have noted a 'public sector/private sector divide that closely followed intercommunal lines'.[15]

But while public employment has indeed become a matter of patronage primarily distributed to East Bank Jordanians,[16] the social reality is marked by much more diverse, overlapping and changing forms of identification and mobilisation. Urban-rural tensions, rapidly growing income disparities and widespread feelings of estrangement with clientelist

[9] For similar critiques see Robins, P., *A History of Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 4, and Tell, T.M., *The Social and Economic Origins of Monarchy in Jordan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 3 and 22.
[10] See Tell, *The Social and Economic Origins of Monarchy in Jordan*.
[11] Massad, J.A., *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 71.
[12] Massad, *Colonial Effects*, p. 74.
[13] In 2019, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) estimated the number of registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan at more than 2 million. See UNRWA, *Where We Work*, available at: www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan. Most Palestinian refugees in Jordan have Jordanian citizenship.
[14] See for instance Tell, who strongly criticises such accounts. Tell, *The Social and Economic Origins of Monarchy in Jordan*, p. 22.
[15] Brand, L.A., 'Palestinians and Jordanians: a crisis of identity', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Summer 1995, p. 53. See also Robins, A History of Jordan, p. 3.
[16] By 1986, half of the entire Jordanian labour force was working for the state. Brynen, R., 'Economic crisis and post-rentier democratization in the Arab world: the case of Jordan', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 25, No. 1, March 1992, p. 81.

politics among Jordanian youth at large are thus at least as important as the widely referenced East Banker-West Banker divide.[17]

As Jordan's external debt rapidly increased between 1980 and 1987, the country was forced to ask the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for debt rescheduling agreements and an associated economic stabilisation programme. This included the removal of a number of subsidies, which quickly led to heavy rioting and demonstrations. The 'Hashemite Compact' – the exchange of loyalty for economic security – suddenly appeared to be caught in a process of gradual disintegration.[18] Fully aware of the volatile situation, King Hussein tried to appease widespread feelings of disaffection by initiating a process of political liberalisation. It is at this particular point in Jordan's history that many contemporary descriptions of Jordanian politics by both the Jordanian regime and Western researchers and officials set in,[19] and the foundations for the popular narrative of an exceptional Jordanian reform-mindedness were laid. While most recent research on Jordanian politics is decidedly critical of such an understanding,[20] variations of the Jordanian reform narrative continue to inform analyses of contemporary Jordanian politics.

For instance, while Ryan provides a very detailed account of Jordanian politics in *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings* and pointedly remarks that

[17] For a discussion of the deep tensions in Jordan over national identity see Schwedler, J., 'Cop rock: protest, identity, and dancing riot police in Jordan', *Social Movement Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, September 2005, pp. 155–175. See also Ryan, C.R., *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics beyond the State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), chapter V, and Lynch, M., *State Interests and Public Spheres: The International Politics of Jordan's Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[18] The term 'Hashemite Compact' is also used by Tell in *The Social and Economic Origins of Monarchy in Jordan*, pp. 12–13.

[19] See for instance Knowles, W., *Jordan since 1989: A Study in Political Economy* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), p. 210.

[20] See for instance Schwedler, 'The political geography of protest in neoliberal Jordan', *Middle East Critique*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 2012, pp. 259–270; Yom, S. and Al-Khatib, W., 'The politics of youth policymaking in Jordan', in: *POMEPS Studies, No. 31, Social Policy in the Middle East and North Africa* (Washington, D, October 2018), pp. 41–45, available at: https://pomeps.org/2018/08/02/the-politics-of-youth-policymaking-in-jordan/; Valbjørn, M., 'The 2013 parliamentary elections in Jordan: three stories and some general lessons', *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2013, pp. 311–317; Albrecht, H., and Schlumberger, O., '"Waiting for Godot": regime change without democratization in the Middle East', *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 25, No. 4, October 2004, pp. 371–392; Bank, A. and Sunik, A., 'Parliamentary elections in Jordan, January 2013', *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 34, 2014, pp. 376–379; Valbjørn, M. and Bank, A., 'Examining the "post" in post-democratization: the future of Middle Eastern political rule through lenses of the past', *Middle East Critique*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2010, pp. 183–200; and Martínez, J.C., 'Jordan's self-fulfilling prophecy: the production of feeble political parties and the perceived perils of democracy', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2017, pp. 356–372.

'regimes change in order to stay the same',[21] in more policy-oriented publications he speaks of political liberalisation in Jordan as an 'unfinished journey'[22] that began in 1989 and supposedly continues into the present. Despite Ryan's apt assessment that the word 'reform' may by now have lost most of its meaning for many Jordanians,[23] his use of such terminology importantly gives the rather teleological impression that Jordan is indeed caught in an ongoing process, or in what he has elsewhere called a 'continuing transition'.[24] Knowles even prematurely described 1989 as the start of a genuine process of democratisation.[25] While King Hussein did announce the end of martial law, order the first parliamentary elections since 1967 and end the ban on political parties that had been effective since 1957, this did certainly not amount to the start of a genuine democratic transition.[26]

Just as this political opening significantly boosted King Hussein's popularity, so did his opposition to the US-led military intervention in Kuwait and Iraq in 1991. Eager to regain the trust of the US after the Gulf war and to once again benefit from US foreign aid payments, King Hussein quickly shifted his foreign policy alignment and began to strongly support the US-sponsored Arab-Israeli peace process. Domestically, this strengthened the Muslim Brotherhood, which staunchly opposed the king's policy together with a number of other political parties. Above all else, the conclusion of peace with Israel, which had domestically only been made possible by a slide back into repression,[27] was part of a major foreign policy reorientation that made the US and Israel the new external guarantors of the Hashemite regime's survival.[28]

When Jordan implemented the second IMF economic adjustment programme in 1996 and again reduced public subsidies for basic foodstuffs, Jordanians once more responded with widespread riots. Unlike in 1989, however, the regime now adopted a policy of forceful repression and political de-liberalisation, thereby showing that the alleged democratic process initiated in 1989 was nothing but part of a constant

[21] Ryan, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings*, p. 8.
[22] Ryan, C.R., 'Jordan's unfinished journey: parliamentary elections and the state of reform', *Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)*, Policy Brief, March 2013.
[23] Ryan, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings*, p. 145.
[24] Ryan, C.R., *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), chapter 6.
[25] Knowles, *Jordan since 1989*, p. 210.
[26] Lust-Okar, E.M., 'The decline of Jordanian political parties: myth or reality?', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 2001, pp. 545–569.
[27] Bouillon, M., 'Walking the tightrope: Jordanian foreign policy from the Gulf crisis to the peace process and beyond', in: Joffé, G. (ed.), *Jordan in Transition: 1990–2000* (London: Hurst & Co., 2002), p. 13.
[28] Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, p. 554.

'oscillation between political liberalization and deliberalization'[29] under the larger goal of authoritarian stability and regime maintenance. In addition to the economic distress that a growing number of Jordanians had to withstand, the initial promises of a 'warm peace' and its alleged positive effects on Jordanian state and society were more and more openly counteracted by an increasingly aggressive Israeli foreign policy. As the Jordanian anti-normalisation movement gained greater popularity, King Hussein adopted a more and more authoritarian stance against his domestic critics.

King Abdullah II's succession to the throne in 1999 marked another break in Jordanian politics, as he – unlike his father – put a much stronger emphasis on economic liberalisation and privatisation, and wholeheartedly endorsed a neoliberal discourse of reform and modernity. The new king had undertaken most of his education in the US and England, briefly served in the British Army and, up until 1999, was probably only known to a wider Western audience due to his supporting role in a *Star Trek* episode. His (at least initially) less-than-perfect command of Standard Arabic, his Western education and his marriage to Queen Rania, who is of Palestinian origin, prompted some scepticism and made his interaction with East Bank Jordanian tribal leaders in particular much less cordial than that enjoyed by his late father. At the same time, however, Abdullah's prior position as Commander of the Jordanian Special Forces ensured the strong backing of the military. His enthusiasm for rapid economic liberalisation was quickly manifested in Jordan's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1999 and in the signing of free trade agreements with the USA in 2000, and the EU in 2001, thereby further consolidating the image of Jordan as a 'forward-looking nation',[30] as remarked in a USAID document.[31]

Following the suspension of parliament in 2001, King Abdullah II governed until 2003 through more than one hundred 'temporary' laws, which – once parliament was reinstated – were retroactively ratified in their totality, thereby providing a good illustration of the role of the Jordanian parliament. Rather than a strong and independent legislative body, the latter plays an instrumental role as safety valve, as it helps the regime to 'shift responsibility for citizens' standard of living . . . away from the Palace, thereby insulating the Palace from popular discontent with

[29] Albrecht and Schlumberger, 'Waiting for Godot', p. 385.
[30] USAID, *Strategic Statement Jordan 2007–2011*, p. 29, available at: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacn487.pdf.
[31] See also Bank, André and Schlumberger, Oliver, 'Jordan: between regime survival and economic reform', in: Perthes, V. (ed.), *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004), pp. 35–60.

neo-liberal economic reforms'.[32] The primary role of the government and its agencies is thus to offer a seemingly democratic and representative façade, rather than to function as a truly sovereign executive. Since King Abdullah II's accession to the throne, Jordanian governments last around nineteen months on average before they are dissolved by royal decree. Real power, in terms of appointing positions, defining strategic plans and controlling policymaking, lies primarily with the Royal Court and the influential General Intelligence Directorate (GID).[33] One EU diplomat based in Amman candidly remarked in this regard that 2.5 power centres exist in the country: the GID, the Royal Court and only then, and to a much lesser extent, the government. While she corrected herself after a moment and stated that perhaps it is rather 2¼, in a separate interview a Western 'democracy promoter' insisted on adding the US Embassy as most powerful actor, even before the GID and the Royal Court.[34]

The many top-down reform campaigns that King Abdullah II initiated in addition to his efforts at economic liberalisation not only failed to address the just-mentioned powerful role of the military, which effectively operates outside of any civilian control, and to curtail the far-reaching prerogatives of the king, but were not followed up by meaningful efforts to actually implement the lofty goals that had been agreed upon. The importance of the 'Jordan First' campaign in 2002, the 'National Agenda' in 2006 and the 'We are all Jordan' initiative in 2006 thus primarily lies in the construction of an impression of reform and in the reinforcement of Jordanian national identity. The importance of this façade of reform can scarcely be overemphasised, as it is what allows the regime to postpone confronting otherwise irreconcilable demands for equal representation and democracy, on the one hand, and for protection of Jordanian national identity *vis-à-vis* the perceived threat of a Palestinian 'takeover' on the other. Once the image of Jordan as 'reforming', 'liberalising' and/or 'democratising' is established, the deeply authoritarian nature of political power structures in the country can easily be downplayed and the scene is set for US and European 'democracy promoters' to further 'modernise' and 'reform' the country and support an allegedly already ongoing process.

The 'National Agenda' is particularly insightful in this regard. A royally appointed steering committee developed it in 2005 as a master plan for

[32] Greenwood, S., 'Jordan's "new bargain": the political economy of regime security', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 2, Spring 2003, p. 257.
[33] Moore, P., 'A political-economy history of Jordan's intelligence directorate', unpublished article, 2018, p. 1.
[34] Interviews with Isabella, an EU diplomat based in Jordan, Amman, 13 March 2013, and Paul, a 'democracy promoter' working in Jordan, Amman, 15 January 2013.

reform in Jordan. Attempting to provide guidelines for Jordan's development up until 2016, it draws an image of a country that is on a 'trajectory path'[35] paved with 'historic milestone[s]'[36] and 'transformation phases'.[37] Despite clearly formulated objectives of political reform, by the time of writing in 2018, neither the envisaged establishment of parties as 'one of the cornerstones in the political development process' nor '[t]he election of a politically representative parliament'[38] have been realised. Finally, the initiative, which included the assurance that it is 'by no means the end of the road, but the beginning of increased reforms',[39] much more likely signifies precisely that: the absence of real reform hidden behind a façade of constant readiness for it. In one important aspect, however, the 'National Agenda' achieved its objective, as both the US and the EU accepted it as starting point for their own efforts at 'democracy promotion', thereby both seemingly validating and subscribing to the regime's questionable reform narrative.[40]

More than ten years into King Abdullah II's rule, the conventional power bases of the regime began to criticise the latter on a thus far unprecedented scale. In May 2010 the powerful National Committee of Military Veterans publicly accused the regime of trying to solve the Palestinian question at the expense of East Bank Jordanians, and in February 2011 a number of tribal figures went as far as to directly criticise the royal family itself – in particular Queen Rania – for corruption and nepotism.[41] In light of the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, the size of protests in Jordan quickly grew when a diverse group of Islamists, leftists and unionists began protesting against price hikes, corruption and unemployment, and demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Samir Rifaʾi.

[35] National Agenda Steering Committee, *National Agenda: The Jordan We Strive for 2006–2015* (Amman: National Agenda Steering Committee, 2005), p. 4, available at: www.nationalagenda.jo/Portals/0/EnglishBooklet.pdf.
[36] National Agenda Steering Committee, *National Agenda*, p. 3.
[37] National Agenda Steering Committee, *National Agenda*, pp. 7–8.
[38] National Agenda Steering Committee, *National Agenda*, p. 14.
[39] National Agenda Steering Committee, *National Agenda*, p. 10.
[40] For the EU see ENPI, *Strategy Paper 2007–2013 & National Indicative Programme 2007–2010 – Jordan*, p. 13, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/csp-nip-jordan-2007-2013_en.pdf. For the US see USAID, *Strategic Statement Jordan 2007–2011*, p. 1.
[41] National Committee of Military Veterans, 'A message from the National Committee for Retired Army Personnel', published in National Committee of Retired Army Personnel, 'Statement on defending state, identity against Israel's 'alternative homeland' – retired army', *Ammonnews*, 5 March 2010; Habib, R., 'Jordan tribes break taboo by targeting queen', *Ma'an News Agency*, 9 February 2011, available at: www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=358567.

Perhaps the most critical phenomenon of the protests was the rise of the so-called Ḥirāk (Arabic for 'movement') – a coalition of various East Bank tribal youth activist groups – which vigorously demanded restrictions on the king's absolutist powers. Unlike many other protestors, the Ḥirāk 'shied away from the anti-Palestinian xenophobia that flavoured the complaints of tribal shaykhs and other East Bank conservatives' and did not simply 'aim to extract economic payoffs from the palace',[42] as shown by Yom. Highlighting both the precarious situation of Palestinian-Jordanian citizens, as well as the importance of East Bank Jordanian identity discourses in Jordanian politics, the Ḥirāk 'deliberately chose to represent themselves as being purely East Banker'[43] – despite Palestinian-Jordanian participation – in order to thereby avoid accusations of disloyalty.[44]

Under increasing popular pressure, the king quickly replaced Samir Rifaʾi and established a National Dialogue Committee (NDC) in March 2011 and a royal committee to review the constitution in April 2011, based on whose recommendations a number of constitutional amendments were implemented. The most important of these included the establishment of a Constitutional Court and an Independent Election Commission (IEC), as well as the adoption of a new political party and electoral law. Despite limiting the king's ability to postpone elections indefinitely, his far-reaching prerogatives were not curtailed and public demands for a constitutional monarchy remained unanswered.

In November 2012 the protests reached another climax when Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour – the fifth prime minister since the beginning of the protests in 2011 – announced the implementation of further IMF-demanded fuel and gas price hikes. The ensuing protests were notable for being the first during which a significant number of protestors not only demanded the reform, but also the fall, of the regime. Despite violent clashes throughout the country and the very limited nature of the reforms implemented thus far, both the US and the EU repeatedly voiced their support for what is regularly described as 'King Abdullah II's roadmap for reform'.[45] In January 2013 Jordan held – under the new electoral law and organised by the newly established IEC – its first parliamentary elections since the beginning of the Arab uprisings. While described by King

[42] Yom, S.L., 'Tribal politics in contemporary Jordan: the case of the hirak movement', *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 68, No. 2, Spring 2014, pp. 229–230.
[43] Karmel, E.J., 'How revolutionary was Jordan's Hirak? what the incognito participation of Palestinian-Jordanians in Hirak tells us about the movements', *Identity Center*, Amman, June 2014, p. 5, available at: http://identity-center.org/sites/default/files/How%20Revolutionary%20Was%20Jordan%27s%20Hirak__0.pdf.
[44] For a detailed analysis of Ḥirāk see Ryan, *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings*, chapter IV.
[45] Toner, M.C. (Deputy Spokesperson, US DoS), 'Daily Press Briefing', Washington, DC, 15 November 2012.

Abdullah II as a 'move from the Jordanian Spring to the Jordanian Summer, a season of work and harvest',[46] gerrymandering and the structurally conditioned functioning of parliament as a service provider rather than an independent legislative power ensured that the elections once again led to a staunchly pro-regime parliament, with the king simply reappointing Ensour as prime minister.

It is against this backdrop that a high-ranking member of the Jordanian regime repeated the mantra of the exceptional Jordanian 'reform-mindedness' in front of Western researchers and policymakers at a non-public meeting in late 2013. Responding to a question about political reform in Jordan, he thus remarked in perhaps the most characteristic way possible that in Jordan, 'the word *reform* is not a strange word'. In light of the oscillation between political liberalisation and de-liberalisation that has been a characteristic of the Jordanian polity for almost thirty years, however, the primary function of this exceptional Jordanian familiarity with 'reform' appears to be that of protecting the stability of the authoritarian regime. In the words of Albrecht and Schlumberger, it is thus perhaps most pertinent to describe democratisation in Jordan by comparing it to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, where the main character just never shows up.[47]

In order to maintain the image of Jordan as a 'model for the region in democracy, human rights and economic reforms', and to protect the notion of Western liberal democracy as both morally superior and universally applicable, it is of fundamental importance to accept the image of an exceptional Jordanian reform-mindedness that relentlessly brings the country closer to the desired ideal. It is in this context that both USAID's description of Jordan as 'a principal voice for moderation, peace and reform in the Middle East ... [and] as an oasis of stability and a model for progress in the region'[48] needs to be seen, as well as the EU's statement that 'Jordan's key strategic importance ... lies in its commitment to reforms, openness to political development ... and willingness to cooperate with the EU in promoting reform in the region'.[49]

The assumption that the Jordanian regime is both willing to reform and that Jordanian reform is indeed part of a wider process of gradual democratic transition is the direct precondition for external efforts at

[46] King Abdullah II, 'To the Jordanian people RE: elections' success', Royal Hashemite Court, Amman, letter translated from Arabic, 29 January 2013, available at: https://kingabdullah.jo/en/letters/letter-jordanian-people-elections.
[47] Albrecht and Schlumberger, 'Waiting for Godot'.
[48] USAID, *Strategic Statement Jordan 2007–2011*, p. 1.
[49] ENPI, *Strategy Paper 2007–2013 & National Indicative Programme 2007–2010 – Jordan*, p. 16.

'democracy promotion'. Drawing on the work of Heydemann, however, I argue that political reform in Jordan constitutes part of a wider strategy aimed at the maintenance and/or upgrading of the authoritarian regime.[50] As a consequence, I suggest that one also must question whether external efforts at 'democracy promotion' in the country, too, are perhaps only reconfiguring Jordanian authoritarianism, rather than challenging it.

Many of the Jordanian youth, politicians, officials and activists whom I interviewed in the course of my research were fundamentally sceptical of 'democracy promotion' programmes in the country and at times also doubted the relevance of an entire book focusing on them. One Jordanian economist only remarked that 'everybody realises that money and ... weapons are more important'.[51] But some 'democracy promoters' also questioned my choice of topic. The president of a well-known US 'democracy promotion' firm, for instance, found Jordan to be 'an unusual example in all kinds of ways'[52] for a book on 'democracy promotion'.

In light of the history of political (non-)reform in Jordan set out above, a study of Western 'democracy promotion' in the country amounts not only to questioning the regime's dubious reform narrative, but also to questioning a US and European politics of intervention that champions the Jordanian regime as an important 'anchor of stability' even as it continuously claims the moral high ground with assertions that it is helping to democratise it. The political sensitivity of the project of 'democracy promotion' in Jordan can scarcely be overstated.

Given that 'democracy promotion' interventions never occur in a vacuum, but always in a very specific political context, an analysis of the interaction of US and European 'democracy promoters' with the political context of Jordan is likely to tell us more about the alleged moral superiority and universal applicability of Western liberal conceptions of democracy. As such, the present book will also explore the (re)production of Western liberal democratic self-understandings and seeming moral hierarchies that result from the ongoing binary juxtaposition of external interveners, who supposedly know what democracy means and how it can be implemented, versus intervened-upon 'locals', who are regularly only defined in contrast to the former.

[50] Heydemann, S., 'Upgrading authoritarianism in the Arab world', The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution Analysis Paper Number 13, October 2007, available at: www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/10arabworld.pdf.
[51] Interview with Sami, Jordanian economist, Amman, 13 September 2012.
[52] Interview with Jacob, President of a US 'democracy promotion' firm, Washington, DC, 22 May 2013.

Further, while Jordan may indeed be an 'unusual' case – in so far as, for instance, the repercussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the geopolitical importance of the country to 'the West' are concerned – I argue that this unusualness only has the effect of better illuminating how liberal world views interact with structures that do not neatly fit the desired liberal democratic ideal. The fundamental tension that exists between highly idealised notions of liberal democracy on the one hand and the ways in which these actually materialise on the other is a key feature of the liberal project itself and can be observed in different manifestations all over the world. The specificity and/or unusualness of the Jordanian political context does thus – contrary to what some political scientists may claim – very much lend this exploration of efforts at 'democracy promotion' in Jordan to generalisation beyond that country, as it is ultimately a mere reminder of the fact that the imagined liberal democratic ideal does simply not exist.

Given that Jordan is one of the key recipients of US and European 'democracy promotion' assistance worldwide, scholars interested in what greater US and European policy presence in other regions of the Global South is likely to entail will also benefit from this book. The concrete interventions that international 'democracy promoters' implement are thus frequently not at all specific to the case of Jordan, but part of a universally applied and free-floating body of knowledge that operates irrespective of specific contexts, and which the very same people have often previously already applied in numerous other countries around the world.[53] Against this backdrop, I suggest that US and European 'democracy promotion' in Jordan needs to be understood as part of a much wider phenomenon of Western liberal attempts to export a supposedly universal and democratic model of governance, and to (re)construct conceptions of moral hierarchies.

The main research question that this book investigates concerns what US and European 'democracy promoters' in Jordan *actually do* when they promote democracy. I particularly focus on the unforeseen and contradictory consequences of US and European 'democracy promotion' in Jordan, on its self-perpetuating tendencies and on the usefulness of 'democracy promotion' as a rationale for a politics of control and intervention. On a more general level, this book is about the construction, the interaction and the effects of moral authority and power in the Middle East. Finally, just as 'money and weapons' facilitate external control over

[53] My reasoning here is informed by Ferguson, J., *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development,' Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 257–259.

the Jordanian state and society, I suggest that so too do US and European attempts at 'democracy promotion'.[54] As I attempt to demonstrate, they smooth and ease the effects of 'money and weapons' and make a politics of control and intervention all the more effective, by reinforcing it with conceptions of moral superiority.

[54] An in-depth exploration of this argument – although only with examples of countries outside the Arab world – is provided by William Robinson in *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).