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Alexander Gerald Exler

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*On my honor as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.*

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# Abstract

Legitimation relies on several strategies to pursue legitimacy in the eyes of the ruled. This thesis builds upon the research done by Johannes Gerschewski who identified three pillars of legitimation – historical narratives, legal instrumentation, and political discourse. It applies these three pillars to compare the legitimation strategies of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, led by the Hashemite dynasty, and the Kingdom of Bahrain, ruled by the al-Khalifa dynasty. Both states are Arab Sunni monarchies ruling over a population which is either ethnically or religiously different from the monarchy and both have struggled with stability issues. Yet Jordan is regarded as substantially more stable than Bahrain. This thesis examines the ways in which the legitimation strategies pursued have differed to determine what the cause for Jordan's more favorable outcome is. It concludes by finding Jordan has been better able to use its historical narrative to connect with its people, unlike Bahrain which has used it to alienate its people. At the same time, Jordan allows for more token resistance to its policies, giving its people the illusion of state participation through inclusive laws and dialogue. Meanwhile both states engage in political discourse, though Jordan emphasized domestic issues and Bahrain focuses internationally.

## Abstrakt

Legitimation stützt sich auf verschiedene Strategien, um die Herrschaft in den Augen der Beherrschten als rechtmäßig erscheinen zu lassen. Diese Arbeit knüpft an die Forschung von Johannes Gerschewski an, der drei Säulen der Legitimation identifiziert hat: historische Narrative, rechtliche Instrumentalisierung und politischen Diskurs. Diese drei Säulen werden genutzt, um die Legitimationsstrategien des Haschemitischen Königreichs Jordanien und des Königreichs Bahrain zu vergleichen. Beide Staaten sind arabische sunnitische Monarchien, die über Bevölkerungen herrschen, die sich ethnisch oder religiös von der Herrscherfamilie unterscheiden. Zudem waren beide Länder wiederholt mit Herausforderungen für ihre politische Stabilität konfrontiert. Dennoch gilt Jordanien im Vergleich zu Bahrain als deutlich stabiler. Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht die Unterschiede in den jeweiligen Legitimationsstrategien, um zu ermitteln, welche Faktoren zu dem günstigeren Stabilitätsergebnis Jordaniens beigetragen haben. Die Analyse zeigt, dass Jordanien sein historisches Narrativ erfolgreicher genutzt hat, um eine Verbindung zur Bevölkerung herzustellen, während Bahrain historische Narrative eher in einer Weise eingesetzt hat, die Teile der Bevölkerung entfremdet. Gleichzeitig erlaubt Jordanien ein höheres Maß an symbolischem Widerstand gegen staatliche Politik und vermittelt durch inklusive Gesetzgebung den Eindruck gesellschaftlicher Teilhabe. Beide Staaten bedienen sich zudem politischen Diskurses als Legitimationsinstrument; während Jordanien dabei vor allem innenpolitische Themen in den Vordergrund stellt, richtet Bahrain seinen Diskurs stärker auf außenpolitische Fragestellungen aus.

## Research Question:

Four governments fell during the 2010/11 Arab Spring – each one was an autocratic system.<sup>1</sup> However, not all autocratic systems are created equal and the four governments that fell were all nominal “republics,” while the eight monarchies in the region all survived the challenge intact.<sup>2</sup> Much has been written on the stability of Middle Eastern monarchical regimes and how monarchies often enjoy higher levels of legitimacy than other, similar autocratic systems.<sup>3</sup> Legitimacy and legitimation are important topics for regime stability and different types of monarchies choose different strategies in its pursuit.<sup>4</sup> This thesis seeks to answer the research question of why some Middle Eastern monarchies that are otherwise similar in levels of authoritarianism and resilience adopt markedly different legitimation strategies. In looking at this topic, it will perform a comparison between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Kingdom of Bahrain. These two states were chosen as they have much in common – both are Sunni monarchies receiving military aid from the United States and exist in (relatively) close proximity to a feared and hated neighbor. However, despite this, the two have been labeled as pursuing markedly different strategies, though what these differences actually *are* has been left vague.<sup>5</sup> In this study, variations in legitimacy will be treated as the dependent variable, with this relying on the three pillars of legitimation as named by Gerschewski: historical narratives, legal instrumentation, and political discourse.”<sup>6</sup>

## Literature Review:

### Legitimation within autocracies:

Writing in his 2018 article *Legitimacy in autocracies: Oxymoron or essential feature?* Johannes Gerschewski set the precedent for discussing legitimacy in autocracies.<sup>7</sup> In this article, Gerschewski solved the puzzle of speaking of terms like “legitimacy” and

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<sup>1</sup> André Bank, Thomas Richter, and Anna Sunik, *Long-Term Monarchical Survival in the Middle East: A Configurational Comparison, 1945–2012*, GIGA Working Paper no. 215 (Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies, 2013), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07593>.

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> Johannes Gerschewski, “Legitimacy in Autocracies: Oxymoron or Essential Feature?,” *Perspectives on Politics* 16, no. 3 (2018): 652–665, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592717002183>

<sup>5</sup> Bank, Richter, and Sunik, *Long-Term Monarchical Survival in the Middle East: A Configurational Comparison, 1945–2012*.

<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> Gerschewski. *Legitimacy in autocracies: Oxymoron or essential feature?*

“legitimation” when referring to non-democracies.<sup>8</sup> Referencing older literature (such as Beetham’s 1991 book *The Legitimation of Power*), Gerschewski eased normative qualms about calling autocracies “legitimate” by instead focusing on the process-focused concept of “legitimation” whereby rulers pursue obedience by building on three pillars: justifiability, legality, and the concrete expression of consent.<sup>9</sup>

Following Gerschewski’s arguments, these three pillars are roughly analogous to historical narratives, legal instrumentation, and political discourse. The first pillar, “justifiability” relates to historical narratives and how they are used to justify a dynasty’s claims to power.<sup>10</sup> The second pillar, “legality,” describes the settled expectations which arise through the legal instrumentation of that power.<sup>11</sup> The final pillar, “concrete expression of consent,” relates to the direct appeals to political discourse through a common language or symbology and norms established over time through dialog and ritual.<sup>12</sup>

Gerschewski’s work has been expanded upon by several authors (including Gerschewski himself), with similar theories of legitimation being derived by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which offered *four* potential pillars of legitimation for governments.<sup>13</sup> The first three – input, output, and belief – are refinements of the ideas laid out by Gerschewski, while the final pillar – international recognition – represents a novel contribution.<sup>14</sup> However, this literature, while very broad, often fails to evaluate situations by region or regime type, instead seeking to describe autocracies as a whole pursuing a broad goal of “legitimation.”

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<sup>8</sup> Id.

<sup>9</sup> Id.

<sup>10</sup> Id.

<sup>11</sup> Id.

<sup>12</sup> Id.

<sup>13</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *The State’s Legitimacy in Fragile Situations* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2010), [https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2010/02/the-state-s-legitimacy-in-fragile-situations\\_g1ghc6e5/9789264083882-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2010/02/the-state-s-legitimacy-in-fragile-situations_g1ghc6e5/9789264083882-en.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Id.

## Middle Eastern monarchies:

At the same time, an abundance of literature exists on the governments of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).<sup>15</sup> In the wake of the 2010/11 Arab Spring, many authors turned to examining regime survival and adaptation in the region.<sup>16</sup> The authors Bank and Edel found that not all autocratic states used the same strategies – some regimes engaged in more heavy-handed repression while others enacted symbolic reforms, some regimes fell while others survived.<sup>17</sup> This indicates diversity within the autocrat’s playbook, with monarchies in the region exhibiting higher levels of survivability than otherwise similar “president for life” arrangements.<sup>18</sup>

Examining MENA monarchies specifically, Bank et al. examined the survival rates and strategies of all monarchies within the region, treating each monarch as a broad case study.<sup>19</sup> The authors looked for five broad characteristics (US military aid, rents revenues, participation of multiple dynastic members in government, “legitimacy,” and whether protests had occurred) to group monarchies into three rough types: Dynastic Gulf Monarchies, Linchpin Monarchies, and the Third Pathway (which is functionally limited to only the Sultanate of Oman).<sup>20</sup> However, while the authors found these three types to be distinct, they left room for further study in the form of comparisons between the legitimation strategies across type and the outcomes for those strategies.<sup>21</sup> This paper will seek to use the lens of legitimation theory as laid out by Gerschewski to examine across two MENA monarchies: the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (which they categorize as a Linchpin Monarchy) and the Kingdom of Bahrain (which they place in a different category as a Dynastic Gulf Monarchy).<sup>22</sup>

## Case-specific legitimation:

Beginning with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, much has been written on what constitutes the pillars of legitimacy under Gerschewski – the regime’s history, legal framework,

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<sup>15</sup> André Bank and Mirjam Edel, *Authoritarian Regime Learning: Comparative Insights from the Arab Uprisings*, GIGA Working Paper no. 274 (Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies, 2015), [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/191735/wp274\\_bank-edel.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/191735/wp274_bank-edel.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Id.

<sup>17</sup> Id.

<sup>18</sup> Bank, Richter, and Sunik, *Long-Term Monarchical Survival in the Middle East: A Configurational Comparison, 1945–2012*.

<sup>19</sup> Id.

<sup>20</sup> Id.

<sup>21</sup> Id.

<sup>22</sup> Id.

and political narrative. Examining each of these in turn, there is a magnificent article presenting the history of the monarchy and its ties to the people it rules using the lens of the images on the post stamps it issued by Michael Sharnoff.<sup>23</sup> Although this paper fully relates to the subject of a monarchy's legitimation efforts through emphasizing shared history, it is somewhat niche in scope and can be expanded upon.<sup>24</sup>

Turning next to the legal strategies of legitimation in Jordan, two prominent papers stand out in their analysis. The first of these, *POLITICAL REFORM IN JORDAN: Reality and Aspirations* by Mohamed Bani Salameh, concerns the history of legal reforms from 1989-2017.<sup>25</sup> Bani Salameh sets the stage for Jordan's much-maligned One Vote Law (which disincentivizes political parties from forming) before noting the failures of the constitutional amendments of 2011/12.<sup>26</sup> The second article, by Laszlo Csicsmann, focuses specifically on reforms made in the wake of the 2010/11 Arab Spring.<sup>27</sup> Csicsmann expands upon the narrative of failed reform, discussing the mixed bag of reforms in 2021.<sup>28</sup> These papers present strong ties between political machinations and autocracies and provide a strong foundation for understanding the Jordanian legal scene.

Finally, discussing the narrative fabricated by the government of how and why the Hashemite dynasty has ruled so long, no study would be complete without a discussion of the *religious* ties which the Hashemites make great efforts to emphasize.<sup>29</sup> In addition to appeals to Muslim groups, other papers have found the Jordanian monarchy to be significant for its deliberate inclusion of various minority groups, notably Christians.<sup>30</sup> The result of these efforts, the authors write, is that the monarchy enjoys broad support from powerful minority groups and accordingly is regarded by many as "legitimate."<sup>31</sup> However, this final group of authors focus

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Sharnoff, "The Hashemite Regime on Jordanian Postage Stamps: A Visual History of Nation-Building," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 50, no. 3 (2025): 589-611, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03043754241292574>

<sup>24</sup> Id.

<sup>25</sup> Mohammed Torki Bani Salameh, "Political Reform in Jordan: Reality and Aspirations," *World Affairs* 180, no. 4 (2017): 47-78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0043820018765373>

<sup>26</sup> Id.

<sup>27</sup> László Csicsmann, "Political Reform as Regime Survival Strategy in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan After the Arab Uprisings," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 50, no. 3 (2025): 559-573, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03043754241304518>

<sup>28</sup> Id.

<sup>29</sup> *Royal Hashemite Court*. "Speeches." King Abdullah II Official Website. <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches>

<sup>30</sup> Ceren Belge and Ekrem Karakoç, "Minorities in the Middle East: Ethnicity, Religion, and Support for Authoritarianism," *Political Research Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2015): 280-292, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912915580627>

<sup>31</sup> Id.

that section of their analysis devoted to Jordan almost exclusively on the situation of Christians, a group representing only about 5% of the total population.<sup>32</sup>

Turning next to the Kingdom of Bahrain, less has been written about its history, but still enough to provide a basic framework for understanding. In an article primarily focusing on modern grievances, author Kylie Moore-Gilbert references problems with the monarchy going back into history, stating, “political crises... have gripped the Kingdom at least once a decade since the colonial period.”<sup>33</sup> Nebil Husayn explores these historical issues somewhat further in a 2015 article where he traces one source of Bahrain’s instability back to an internal conflict within the dynasty between the reigning branch and its Khawalid sub-branch stemming from a 1923 massacre.<sup>34</sup> Both authors focus their analysis of the history as a means of explaining present instability and illegitimacy by the government meaning that although their work is limited, it is topical.

Husayn’s analysis also touches upon the ways in which the reigning al-Khalifa dynasty uses the laws to control the people.<sup>35</sup> His analysis discusses the ways in which the government controls immigration and in other manners by not controlling the laws directly, but the lawmakers themselves.<sup>36</sup> Of the 23 cabinet positions in the government, nearly half are occupied by members of the al-Khalifa dynasty (including members of the Khawalid branch).<sup>37</sup> Those areas which are not directly controlled by the dynasty, such as the parliament and house of representatives, are greatly limited in their ability to effect change under the 2002 constitution.<sup>38</sup>

Lastly, much has been written on the political narrative of Bahrain, presenting its dynasty as relying on a “better than the alternative” strategy.<sup>39</sup> The result has been a system of divide and rule which several authors have condemned as unstable.<sup>40</sup> Moore-Gilbert views this system as one which leads to “the development of an atmosphere of deep mistrust and fear.”<sup>41</sup> Her work is

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<sup>32</sup> Id.

<sup>33</sup> Kylie Moore-Gilbert, “Sectarian Divide and Rule in Bahrain: A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy?,” *Middle East Institute*, January 19, 2016, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/sectarian-divide-and-rule-bahrain-self-fulfilling-prophecy>

<sup>34</sup> Nebil Husayn, “Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2015): 33–53, <https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.37.1.0033>

<sup>35</sup> Id.

<sup>36</sup> Id.

<sup>37</sup> Id.

<sup>38</sup> Id.

<sup>39</sup> Moore-Gilbert, *Sectarian divide and rule in Bahrain: A self-fulfilling prophecy?*

<sup>40</sup> Christopher M. Davidson, “Bahrain: The Crisis of Monarchy,” *openDemocracy*, July 25, 2011, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/bahrain-crisis-of-monarchy/>

<sup>41</sup> Moore-Gilbert, *Sectarian divide and rule in Bahrain: A self-fulfilling prophecy?*

at least partially vindicated by Bahrain's own King Hamad and Crown Prince Salman who have stressed, in speeches, the dangers and insecurities of "mixed communities."<sup>42</sup> For author Christopher Davidson, the situation is more grim than a division, instead the result of his conclusion is that Bahrain has failed to create any real sense of national identity.<sup>43</sup> For all authors, the discussion of Bahrain's attempts at legitimation is key, with none writing positively of it, but a comparison to another state which is successful in this regard is lacking.

Based on the situation outlined in the preceding paragraphs, this paper seeks to address the gaps in the literature at the macro-, meso-, and case-specific micro-levels. It will unify the existing literature on the situations in Jordan and Bahrain into the three pillars of legitimation theory outlined by Gerschewski with the goal of explaining different monarchical strategies in the MENA region.

## Theoretical Framework:

The comparison between Jordan and Bahrain's legitimation strategies is best understood using the framework provided by Gerschewski, with information provided on the similarities and differences between these two states relying on more specific case studies. This comparison can then be used to explain different legitimation strategies practiced by two MENA monarchies.

An overarching understanding of "legitimacy/legitimation" when referring to autocracies is given by Gerschewski.<sup>44</sup> He writes that "legitimacy" refers to a "relational concept between the ruler and the ruled."<sup>45</sup> Here, Gerschewski provides some terms. "Power" is the ability of A to make B do what A wants, regardless of B's opinion.<sup>46</sup> "Rule" is a furtherance of this where B acknowledges A's authority over B, believing in "the right of A to rule," and therefore obligated to obey.<sup>47</sup> "Legitimacy" is what leads B to acknowledge this authority, making it the difference between "power" and "rule."<sup>48</sup>

Working within this framework, Gerschewski gives us three pillars to examine when looking at autocratic efforts at legitimation. Legitimacy, Gerschewski writes, is based on:

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<sup>42</sup> *Royal Court of Bahrain, Office of H.R.H. Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa*. "Speeches." HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa Official Website. <https://www.crownprince.bh/en/media-center/speeches/>

<sup>43</sup> Davidson, *Bahrain: The crisis of monarchy*.

<sup>44</sup> Gerschewski, *Legitimacy in autocracies: Oxymoron or essential feature*

<sup>45</sup> Id. at 659.

<sup>46</sup> Id.

<sup>47</sup> Id.

<sup>48</sup> Id. at 660

legality, justifiability, and the concrete expression of consent.<sup>49</sup> Legality need not only be satisfied by democratic practices, but can also result from “settled expectations” which are developed over time, almost as a form of habituation.<sup>50</sup> Accordingly for autocracies the legality by which they rule can be determined by examining the history of their rule, a longstanding and predictable reign is more “legal” than a short, unpredictable reign.<sup>51</sup> Justifiability is established on the legitimation narrative of the ruling caste, referencing their shared culture or history with the ruled.<sup>52</sup> The final criterion is the conferring of legitimacy upon the ruler, via a swearing in ceremony or symbolic election.<sup>53</sup>

Applying this framework to MENA monarchies creates a system which can accurately compare different legitimation strategies of two states beyond mere categorization as “Linchpin Monarchies” and “Dynastic Gulf Monarchies.”<sup>54</sup> This will provide real-world support for Gerschewski’s legitimation theory while searching for meaningful differences in policies and outcomes, adding specifics to the theory begun with Bank et al.’s categories of monarchy.

## Research Design and Methodology:

### *Case Study Selection:*

This thesis compares two MENA monarchies: Jordan and Bahrain. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was selected because a wealth of literature exists on this so-called “island of stability” surrounded by otherwise unstable neighbors and because it was hoped that this nation, physically and ethnically closer to the other MENA monarchies would be a better control for ethnic and cultural variables. At the same time, Bahrain was chosen because it is a similar Sunni monarchy, which also has a low population and high diversity. However, despite these similarities, many articles have been written about the instability of Bahrain (especially in the context of a feared oil shortage which would drastically change its status as a rentier state).<sup>55</sup> Additionally, Bank et al. categorize the two monarchies as being in separate categories – Jordan

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<sup>49</sup> Id. at 660-61

<sup>50</sup> Id.

<sup>51</sup> Id.

<sup>52</sup> Id.

<sup>53</sup> Id.

<sup>54</sup> Bank, Richter, and Sunik, *Long-Term Monarchical Survival in the Middle East: A Configurational Comparison, 1945–2012*.

<sup>55</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, with Max Markusen and Eric P. Jones, “Bahrain,” in *Stability and Instability in the Gulf Region in 2016: A Strategic Net Assessment* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016), 149–166, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep23340.7>

as a Linchpin Monarchy, and Bahrain as a Dynastic Gulf Monarchy.<sup>56</sup> This thesis intended to examine what the differences between these two states legitimation strategies actually are to determine how Jordan seems to be successful where Bahrain is failing.

## *Methodology:*

This thesis conducts a three-part comparison between Jordan and Bahrain to establish the ways in which their legitimation strategies are similar or differ. Each part examines a different pillar of legitimation as outlined by Gerschewski: historical narrative, legal instrumentation, and political dialogue.

Beginning with the historical pillar, the analysis was be a form of process tracing in establishing the length and relative political stability of the respective dynasties. Here, the specific factors which were looked for were historical claims made by the dynasties as justifying their rule as well as factors disputing this “status quo leadership” such as protests or coups (both from within and without the dynasty). For Jordan, the Hashemite dynasty has ruled since 1921 and an abundance of papers and information is available for study. The al-Khalifa dynasty has had a much longer control over Bahrain starting in 1820, though this has been often disputed. This analysis is entirely qualitative. It will provide a broad overview of the history, flagging major issues and patterns, before focusing in post-1999, the year that both Jordan and Bahrain’s kings ascended to the throne, then narrow down to examine the two monarchs’ strategies, then further specify the strategies employed by the monarchies post 2010/11 Arab Spring.

Turning next to the legal pillar, this thesis examines seven factors within the states over the course of the last six years (2020-2026): (1) Executive power expanding into new fields; (2) expansion of executive discretion; (3) parliamentary autonomy; (4) executive meddling via electoral engineering; (5) executive meddling via demographic engineering; (6) limitations upon executive power; and (7) executive control over media and education. Each of these categories is ranked on an ordinal scale of 0-2 using **Table 1** described below, with 0 being less authoritarian and 2 being more authoritarian.

**Table 1. Coding for Legal Factors**

|                    | 0      | 1   | 2       |
|--------------------|--------|-----|---------|
| Expansion of Power | Absent | N/A | Present |

<sup>56</sup> Bank, Richter, and Sunik, *Long-Term Monarchical Survival in the Middle East: A Configurational Comparison, 1945–2012*.

|                       |                                     |                                        |                                          |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Discretionary Powers  | Absent                              | N/A                                    | Present                                  |
| Parliamentary Laws    | Largely Independent Process         | Some Parliamentary Powers              | Token Parliament                         |
| Electoral Engineering | Absent                              | Some Electoral Engineering             | Extensive Engineering                    |
| Demographic Control   | Absent                              | Some Controls                          | Extensive Control                        |
| Limitations on Power  | Many limitations on executive power | Some limitations on executive power    | Little/no limitations on executive power |
| Propaganda Control    | Absent                              | Media or Education somewhat influenced | Both heavily influenced                  |

The final pillar of the analysis examines the political narrative. Jordan has often been described as relying heavily upon its legitimacy narrative, specifically in appealing to religious groups (both minorities and the Sunni Muslim majority).<sup>57</sup> Bahrain occupies a very different place instead relying on assurances that the monarchy provides security.<sup>58</sup> Here, this thesis analyzes speeches made by the kings of Jordan and Bahrain since their inaugurations in 1999, as well as statements made by their foreign ministers and other figures within the ruling dynasties.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, since both Jordan and Bahrain have state-run media, it compares the ways in which the local news networks cover issues to see how they are used to complement or augment official positions in matters of legitimation.

### *Limitations:*

This thesis does *not* intend to study the oft-mentioned fourth pillar to legitimacy: international recognition/aid. The reason for this absence is not an oversight, but because Bahrain and Jordan are currently both supported by substantial US military aid and are both quite active in international organizations – Jordan by mediating conflicts in the Levant and Bahrain in the GCC. Because the two are roughly comparable, and because prior studies have found the impact of this to be very situational,<sup>60</sup> this thesis holds the fourth pillar as a constant in comparing the two.

A further limitation is that this thesis does not intend to carry out a study of the exact categories laid out by Bank et al. The reason for this is twofold: the first is that such a project

<sup>57</sup> Sharnoff *The Hashemite Regime on Jordanian Postage Stamps: A Visual History of Nation-Building*.

<sup>58</sup> Davidson, *Bahrain: The crisis of monarchy*.

<sup>59</sup> Royal Hashemite Court. “Speeches.” King Abdullah II Official Website. <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches>  
Royal Court of Bahrain, Office of H.R.H. Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. “Speeches.” HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa Official Website. <https://www.crownprince.bh/en/media-center/speeches/>

<sup>60</sup> Bank, Richter, and Sunik, *Long-Term Monarchical Survival in the Middle East: A Configurational Comparison, 1945–2012*.

would need to examine all eight MENA monarchies to meaningfully establish patterns, which is significantly beyond the scope of this project; the second reason is that, per the authors' own admission, their categorizations do not necessarily reflect hard truths and their model fails to account for the Sultanate of Oman, which they have been forced to place as a category of its own.<sup>61</sup>

## The First Pillar: Historical Ties between the Monarchy and the State

### How This Chapter Works

This chapter is dedicated to analyzing the historical element of legitimation. For Gerschewski, this is his pillar of “justifiability.”<sup>62</sup> When speaking of “justifiability,” Gerschewski refers to the need of rulers to anchor their credibility in the hearts and minds of their people.<sup>63</sup> These anchors can vary in their origin, but a prominent one is by building upon a historical narrative to differentiate the monarchy's rule from previous rules, which are portrayed as worse, or to compare against previous “lawlessness” which the monarchy dispelled.<sup>64</sup> Governments may also use these narratives to show why they are entitled to rule.<sup>65</sup> Though the OECD does not have a perfect equivalent to this pillar in its own evaluations of legitimation, it is encapsulated as a mix of their pillars of “input” – which refers to the agreed upon rules of procedure – and “belief” – which has elements of historical legacy interpretation.<sup>66</sup>

In this thesis, the historical ties will be read as asking “To what extent has the given dynasty built up a reputation among its people for a justified reign?” In answering this, this chapter will examine the means by which the dynasties came into power, the historical relationships they have had with their people, and the efforts they have made to win their favor. It will begin by conducting a broad survey of the history of the two states and flagging relevant topics for legitimation dealing with religion, national identity, and international support, before focusing in starting at 1999. 1999 is an important year for both Jordan and Bahrain as this was

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<sup>61</sup> Bank, Richter, and Sunik, *Long-Term Monarchical Survival in the Middle East: A Configurational Comparison, 1945–2012*. At 24

<sup>62</sup> Gerschewski, *Legitimacy in autocracies: Oxymoron or essential feature*. At 8.

<sup>63</sup> Id. at 9.

<sup>64</sup> Id.

<sup>65</sup> Id.

<sup>66</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. *The state's legitimacy in fragile situations*.

the year that both countries received new kings – King Abdullah II took the throne in Jordan in February 1999, and King Hamad became *emir* of Bahrain in March 1999.<sup>67</sup> Both kings have reigned since then and both survived the turbulent 2010/2011 Arab Spring. The focused-in section will examine the ways in which the kings have reigned, the methods they employed during the Arab Spring, and any lasting changes this had on their reign since.

The initial assumptions for this chapter are that Jordan will have better historical ties to its people since the Hashemite dynasty claims relations to the Prophet Mohammed. The Hashemites have also led Jordan through several wars against its hated neighbor, Israel, with dynasty members personally fighting as soldiers, another potential source of favor from the people. Counting against the Hashemites, historically, is the fact that they were originally from Syria and were appointed to their position as rulers by the British following the First World War, thus lacking local backgrounds. Bahrain's al-Khalifa dynasty should have fewer ties to its people historically as it represents a Sunni monarchy ruling over a predominantly Shia people for generations. Despite having the specter of Iran as an outside force and a potential common enemy, the al-Khalifas have not been able to capitalize off of this. Additionally, the similarities between the local Shiites and Iranian Shiites might mean these issues with Iran have a negative effect on domestic relations, rather than a unifying one. In terms of the recent kings, both were expected to have started out more progressive, but to have become more authoritarian since the Arab Spring and to have retained whatever emergency powers they may have granted themselves during that time into the present.

## The Hashemite Dynasty and Jordan Before 1999

The Hashemites use history to make appeals to their people in several different ways. One clear way they do so is to use religion and their heritage. They have also been successful in manufacturing a Jordanian identity which is inextricably linked to their dynasty and in making connections between themselves and the East Banker tribes. However, a problem from their new Jordanian identity which they have suffered from since its inception has been lingering senses of otherness regarding Palestinians and a failure to integrate their identity into the larger narrative

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<sup>67</sup> *Royal Hashemite Court*. "About the King." King Abdullah II Official Website. <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/about-the-king> *Royal Court of Bahrain, Office of H.R.H. Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa*. "About His Royal Highness." HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa Official Website. <https://www.crownprince.bh/en/about/>

of Jordan. This section will examine each of these sub-points (religion, Jordanian identity, and the Palestinian issue) in turn.

## The Hashemites Claim Legitimacy through Religious History

The history of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is inextricably linked to the Hashemites themselves and begins in 1921, but the Hashemites have existed for far longer. The Hashemites trace their ancestry to Hashem, a member of the Quraish tribe and an ancestor of the Prophet Mohammed.<sup>68</sup> The ruling family of Jordan claims to be even closer to the Prophet and states that they are descendants of Mohammed's eldest son Hasan.<sup>69</sup> The importance of this claim is not to be underestimated as it gives the Hashemites extremely high religious legitimacy and is something they emphasize frequently in speeches and dedications at mosques. Even though this type of legitimacy might not play a role in everyday life, it is still a fallback invoked in times of crisis.<sup>70</sup> By relying on their strong Islamic heritage in a majority-Muslim state, the Hashemites are able to anchor their credibility in the eyes of the people, following the logic of Gerschewski's "justifiability" pillar.

The Hashemites have also emphasized the importance of religion to the people as a means of legitimizing claims to land currently in Palestine and Israel. Appeals to religion are able to provide the people with a common ground that does not affect national differences. A consequence of this emphasis is that the Hashemites began stressing the importance of *Christian* holy sites under their custodianship and King Hussein met with the Pope in 1964.<sup>71</sup> This tolerance brought in tourism and strengthened Jordan's image internationally. It also brought in support from Christians for the monarchy. Christians are currently estimated to be a little less than 5% of the population of Jordan, but report greater satisfaction with the Hashemite monarchy than Muslims.<sup>72</sup> These appeals to religious justification (across multiple religions) mean that not only the largest religious groups support the monarchy and instead build upon a common symbology and agreed-upon rules of procedure to utilize the pillars the OECD describes as "input" and "belief."

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<sup>68</sup> Mohammad S. Bani Issa, "Factors of Stability and Sustainable Development in Jordan in Its First Centenary 1921–2021 (An Analytical Descriptive Study)," *Heliyon* 9, no. 8 (2023): e18201, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e18201>

<sup>69</sup> Id.

<sup>70</sup> Oliver Schlumberger and André Bank, "Succession, Legitimacy, and Regime Stability in Jordan," *The Arab Studies Journal* 9/10, no. 2/1 (Fall 2001/Spring 2002): 50–72, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27933804>

<sup>71</sup> Sharnoff, *The Hashemite Regime on Jordanian Postage Stamps: A Visual History of Nation-Building*. At 597.

<sup>72</sup> Belge and Karakoç, *Minorities in the Middle East: Ethnicity, Religion, and Support for Authoritarianism*.

## The Hashemites Created a Jordanian Identity Tied to Themselves

The Hashemites administered the city of Mecca from 1201 until 1925 and are best known internationally for the actions of Hussein bin Ali in 1916. Hussein bin Ali was the leader of the Great Arab Revolt in 1916 against Ottoman rule and is seen as something of a father to the pan-Arabist movement.<sup>73</sup> As a result of this revolt and the failures of the Ottomans in the First World War, much of the region was liberated from Istanbul, though the area still remained under the British Mandate.<sup>74</sup> Britain granted territory to two of Hussein's sons – Faisal and Abdullah – Faisal received land in Syria while Abdullah received an artificially created “emirate of Transjordan.”<sup>75</sup>

Transjordan, and the later state of Jordan, was not based on any historical empires or nationalities, creating a distinct lack of any sense of national identity.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, even if there *had* been a sense of Transjordanian pride, the newly appointed emir Abdullah was a foreigner. Accordingly, Abdullah was tasked with justifying his reign and finding a place for his dynasty in this new country. This was accomplished by several means. One was that Abdullah courted the Bedouin in the south of Jordan. The Bedouin represented rural groups who were known for their discipline and who had fought during the Great Arab Revolt. Here, Abdullah had natural allies as his background gave him a common ground with the tribes. Abdullah was reported as preferring horses and tents to palaces and luxury vehicles and had grown up playing tribal games, which ingratiated him to the southern tribes.<sup>77</sup> To this day, East Banker tribes from the south represent one of the Hashemites' most supportive power bases.<sup>78</sup>

Abdullah also sought support from the people by fostering a sense of national identity, as can be seen by his issuing of a 14 stamp series showing images of the monarchy alongside landmarks across the new country.<sup>79</sup> Here, monuments in Jerash, Kerak, the Dead Sea, the Jordan River, and Petra were all shown together creating a sense of commonality between them despite their wildly different histories: all were unified by the Hashemites and the only image in the

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<sup>73</sup> Benjamin Batarseh, *Transjordanian State-Building and the Palestinian Problem: How Tribal Values and Symbols Became the Bedrock of Jordanian Nationalism* (master's thesis, The Ohio State University, 2020)

<sup>74</sup> Id.

<sup>75</sup> Sharnoff, *The Hashemite Regime on Jordanian Postage Stamps: A Visual History of Nation-Building*.

<sup>76</sup> Id. at 592.

<sup>77</sup> Batarseh *Transjordanian state-building and the Palestinian Problem*. At 10.

<sup>78</sup> Csicsmann, *Political reform as regime survival strategy in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan after the Arab uprisings*.

<sup>79</sup> Sharnoff, *The Hashemite Regime on Jordanian Postage Stamps: A Visual History of Nation-Building*. At 593.

series not to feature a landmark instead showed Abdullah wearing a Bedouin headdress.<sup>80</sup> In this way, the aim was “to manufacture a perception that the Hashemites are integral to the new Jordanian state and represent an unbroken chain between Jordan’s past and future.”<sup>81</sup> This strategy is explained by Gerschewski’s “justifiability” pillar as simultaneously anchoring the monarch with local symbology as well as differentiating this new inclusive rule from the previous Ottoman imperialism.

## The Hashemites Have Failed to Adequately Solve the Palestinian Issue

Abdullah did not perfectly create a sense of a Jordanian identity and was hampered in his efforts by his own expansionist ambitions. One issue was his desire to control Syria after his brother Faisal was deposed by the French. To justify his claims, he leaned towards a form of Arabism as is made evident by the naming of the Transjordanian army as the “All-Arab Army,” a name it still goes by to this day.<sup>82</sup> When it became clear to Abdullah that his Syrian ambitions would not succeed, he next saw an opportunity for expansion to the west. By 1948, Britain had granted the land its independence and Abdullah proclaimed it as the Kingdom of Transjordan, taking the title of king for himself.<sup>83</sup>

Jordan moved into Palestine immediately after the proclamation of the state of Israel and declared its protection of the West Bank all the way to the Old City of Jerusalem.<sup>84</sup> Just a few months later, a new series of stamps were issued which featured the name “PALESTINE” directly overprinted onto the image of the king. The result of the war was a tripling of the population of Jordan such that Palestinians now outnumbered the “native Jordanians” 2:1, altering the demographics of the country forever.<sup>85</sup> The king moved to integrate this new influx of refugees by extending citizenship to all of them directly, a move not repeated by any other state.<sup>86</sup> However, by outright annexing Palestinian territory, the king angered some Palestinians who felt their identity as Palestinians, distinct from other groups including the newly created “Jordanian” identity, was under attack. King Abdullah was assassinated by a Palestinian

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<sup>80</sup> Id. at 594.

<sup>81</sup> Id.

<sup>82</sup> Bani Issa, *Factors of stability and sustainable development in Jordan in its first centenary 1921–2021*

<sup>83</sup> Id.

<sup>84</sup> Sharnoff, *The Hashemite Regime on Jordanian Postage Stamps: A Visual History of Nation-Building*. At 594.

<sup>85</sup> Id.

<sup>86</sup> Batarseh *Transjordanian state-building and the Palestinian Problem*. At 22.

separatist while praying at the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, his grandson and heir Hussein was also shot at, but survived the incident due to the bullet deflecting off a medal he was wearing.<sup>87</sup>

Hussein came to the throne of Jordan at the age of 17 and would rule over the country for the next 47 years. Hussein continued the work of trying to integrate the Palestinians into the new Jordanian country and did so by issuing images of Palestinian heritage sites alongside Jordanian ones all linked with the words “The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.”<sup>88</sup> However, the Palestinian desire for their own state and to be more than citizens of Jordan persisted, as did international skepticism about Jordan’s annexation of the West Bank.<sup>89</sup> This meant that the language of the “custodianship” of the West Bank and Jerusalem had to be issued. Under this language, Jordan did not claim to own the territories of Palestine, merely that it was entrusted as a custodian over these lands and holy sites and that it would administer them until such time as they could become independent.<sup>90</sup>

Still, the situation could not hold and Hashemite custodianship was brought into conflict with both Israelis and Palestinians in the succeeding years. After the Arab-Israeli war led to the conquest of the West Bank, Jordan was left only with the religious custodianship of certain sites in Old Jerusalem and internal disputes arose when the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) attempted to establish a state-within-a-state in Jordan.<sup>91</sup> This group, in 1970, led the most recent coup attempt in Jordan’s history in what is referred to Black September.<sup>92</sup> Although the event was a failure, it led to a deemphasis on Palestinians as Jordanians and a refocus on the traditional East Banker tribes in terms of representation.<sup>93</sup> This event also establishes the limits of a government pursuing Gerschewski’s “justifiability” pillar when relying on national/ethnic heritage in a multinational/multiethnic state, though whether this is an inherent limit (a state can only court one ethnicity) or a failing of the Hashemite dynasty specifically could warrant further study.

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<sup>87</sup> Sharnoff, *The Hashemite Regime on Jordanian Postage Stamps: A Visual History of Nation-Building*. At 595.

<sup>88</sup> Id. at 597.

<sup>89</sup> Id. at 598.

<sup>90</sup> Id. at 597.

<sup>91</sup> Sharnoff, *The Hashemite Regime on Jordanian Postage Stamps: A Visual History of Nation-Building*. At 600.

<sup>92</sup> Id. at 604.

<sup>93</sup> Id. at 600.

## The Hashemites Since 1999

King Abdullah II took the throne after his father Hussein died of cancer in 1999.<sup>94</sup> Up until a few weeks before he assumed this power, Abdullah II had not known he would become king.<sup>95</sup> Instead, the crown prince had been Hassan, the king's brother.<sup>96</sup> Explanations for the sudden shift in successors vary, though the formal reason given by King Hussein was an accusation that his brother had been improperly meddling in military affairs.<sup>97</sup> The choice of Abdullah II, who had been an otherwise unremarkable officer in the army, confused many as the new king ascended to the throne.<sup>98</sup>

By all accounts, Abdullah was able to survive his first few years as king fairly competently.<sup>99</sup> However, the extent to which this was his own doing and not merely an adherence to his father's policies is questionable.<sup>100</sup> Although Abdullah implemented some reforms economically, he retained his father's policies of tight control over NGOs and the media.<sup>101</sup> The most significant action was his retention of his father's controversial Electoral Law, which still is in effect today. Under this law, elections are stymied, political parties are weakened, and the Hashemites retain great control over the government.<sup>102</sup> Reform or outright abolition of this law has been a top priority for various political parties since its adoption in 1993.<sup>103</sup>

With the rise of terrorism in 2001, the Hashemite king claimed that "regional conditions did not permit holding parliamentary elections" and dissolved the sitting parliament.<sup>104</sup> Successive parliamentary elections are alleged to have been rigged and the country is believed to have undergone serious democratic backsliding during this time.<sup>105</sup> Although Abdullah did increase the number of electoral districts and implemented a quota system to include at least six

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<sup>94</sup> Id. at 607.

<sup>95</sup> Id.

<sup>96</sup> Douglas Jehl, "King Hussein Selects Eldest Son, Abdullah, as Successor," *New York Times*, January 26, 1999, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/01/26/world/king-hussein-selects-eldest-son-abdullah-as-successor.html>

<sup>97</sup> Id.

<sup>98</sup> Id.

<sup>99</sup> Schlumberger and Bank, *Succession, Legitimacy, and Regime Stability in Jordan*

<sup>100</sup> Id. at 61

<sup>101</sup> Id. at 62

<sup>102</sup> Bani Salameh, *POLITICAL REFORM IN JORDAN: Reality and Aspirations*

<sup>103</sup> Id. at 53

<sup>104</sup> Id. at 54

<sup>105</sup> Id.

seats reserved for women in parliament, he did not address any of the underlying issues and the elections were widely regarded as sham elections.<sup>106</sup>

When the Arab Spring hit Jordan in 2011, it launched a series of protests that would create the cycle of protest/token reform which is still ongoing. In general, Jordan has been remarkably peaceful in its protests and government responses, even if the effect of these has been a smokescreen hiding an uncompromising autocracy. The initial 2010 protestors demanded moderate political reforms and a reduction of government corruption.<sup>107</sup> A notable absence among the protestors' demands was any form of check on Hashemite power. This is often believed to be due to King Abdullah's successful cultivation of an image of himself as an enlightened technocrat, educated in the West and seeking gradual reform.<sup>108</sup> Accordingly, the government did not respond violently to protestors and Abdullah seemed to give the protestors what they wanted: he dismissed the current unpopular prime minister and appointed a new one.<sup>109</sup> This type of "reform" is a popular option among autocracies since it is generally a "low-cost, low risk move as it does not not imply any structural change in the system."<sup>110</sup> Additional reforms were also implemented, though none were systemic reforms.

Succeeding protests occurred in 2012, 2016, 2018, and 2021.<sup>111</sup> None of these were aimed against the monarchy.<sup>112</sup> The 2012 protests were tied to a decrease in government subsidies on fuel.<sup>113</sup> The protests in 2016 and 2021 were both linked to deals made with Israel, a hated state by the majority Palestinian population.<sup>114</sup> The 2018 protests were tied to a tax increase.<sup>115</sup> Abdullah's response to all of these has been to appease the protestors through small reforms which did not change any of the root causes.<sup>116</sup> It was not until the most recent protests in 2021 and 2022 that violence occurred, although even in these it was at a small scale.<sup>117</sup> Still, both protestors and law enforcement officers were killed as a result and the Hashemites responded to this unusual shift

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<sup>106</sup> Csicsmann, *Political reform as regime survival strategy in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan after the Arab uprisings*

<sup>107</sup> Salameh. *POLITICAL REFORM IN JORDAN: Reality and Aspirations*. At 55.

<sup>108</sup> Csicsmann, *Political reform as regime survival strategy in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan after the Arab uprisings*

<sup>109</sup> *Id.*

<sup>110</sup> *Id.*

<sup>111</sup> *Id.*

<sup>112</sup> *Id.*

<sup>113</sup> *Id.*

<sup>114</sup> *Id.*

<sup>115</sup> *Id.*

<sup>116</sup> *Id.*

<sup>117</sup> *Id.*

by increasing their hold over the country.<sup>118</sup> Although the initial reforms following the Arab Spring, as well as a second round of reforms in 2016 raised Jordan's Freedom House status to "partly free," these did not last long and were soon replaced or repealed.<sup>119</sup>

Aside from these issues, Abdullah II has continued implementing laws that favor native East Banker over Palestinian-Jordanian citizens.<sup>120</sup> In part this is related to the country's necessary ties to Israel upon whom they are dependent for both water and gas.<sup>121</sup> Despite this necessity, dealing with Israel favorably is very politically challenging with a majority Palestinian population and their disenfranchisement might be viewed by the monarchy as a necessary evil. Using the lens of Gerschewski's "justifiability" this might reflect an abandoned or else greatly reduced attempt to legitimize the reign over Palestinians as both sides seem to have settled into a weary de facto acceptance of their situation. However, a source of great concern for Abdullah II is that he has failed to resonate with rural East Bankers tribes, the traditional basis for Hashemite support, instead focusing on a new intelligentsia class based in Amman.<sup>122</sup> Because of this lack of rural support, Abdullah II has been insecure in his own dynasty resulting in the Hamzah Affair in 2021.

Abdullah's brother Hamzah, previously crown prince until Abdullah replaced him with his son in 2004, began openly leveling criticism against the king in April 2021.<sup>123</sup> Hamzah does enjoy popular support from rural tribes and rumors even persist that his statements were to have been the initial steps of a coup backed by the Saudis, making him a significant threat to the monarch.<sup>124</sup> Hamzah blamed the country's issues with corruption and lack of government effectiveness on his brother, rather than on a softer target as the protestors before him, meaning the king was forced to engage him directly, placing him under house arrest. The issue was swiftly resolved, with Hamzah being released after issuing a statement swearing allegiance to his brother, but the trend towards authoritarianism remained. It was not until 2025 that Jordan returned to the "partly free" status under the Freedom House reporting.<sup>125</sup> As has been the case for decades in Jordan, these fluctuations of freedom are the result of minor reforms to the

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<sup>118</sup> Id.

<sup>119</sup> Id.

<sup>120</sup> Id.

<sup>121</sup> Id.

<sup>122</sup> Id.

<sup>123</sup> Id.

<sup>124</sup> Id.

<sup>125</sup> Freedom House, "Jordan: Freedom in the World 2025 Country Report," *Freedom in the World 2025*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-world/2025>

Electoral Law.<sup>126</sup> The Hamzah Affair also offers an insight into the increasingly fragile arrangement of the Hashemites' appeals to local symbology as different members of the family appeal to different groups and are building different, sometimes conflicting, power bases.

## The al-Khalifa Dynasty and Bahrain Before 1999

The al-Khalifa dynasty has used historical narratives poorly and often alienatingly in their efforts to legitimize their reign. Beginning with religious narratives that still frame the al-Khalifas as religious conquerors over a people that have yet to submit to their religion, the al-Khalifa dynasty has struggled to meaningfully connect with its own people. The dynasty has therefore been required to submit to powerful suzerains in exchange for stability. At the same time, mismanagement of religious issues and disagreement within the ruling family led to the open rebellion of a branch of the family, which continues to pose questions of legitimacy in the state. This section will examine three sub-points: religion, powerful allies, and the rival Khawalid branch.

## The al-Khalifas Use Religious Framing of Their Conquest of Bahrain

Bahrain's history, like Jordan's, begins in ancient times when the island was known as Tylos and offered a rich source of fresh water along seafaring lanes.<sup>127</sup> Bahrain passed through the hands of various empires over the course of history, with its rulers including the Persians, Ottomans, and Omanis.<sup>128</sup> In 1783, a large Kuwaiti tribe called the al-Utub invaded the island following the weakening of the Persian garrison stationed there.<sup>129</sup> The commander of these forces, Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Khalifa, was a member of a sub-tribe founded by his grandfather the al-Khalifas and he became the next *emir* of the island.<sup>130</sup> Bin Khalifa, like most Kuwaitis, practiced Sunni Islam while Bahrain, which had been controlled by Persia, was largely Shiite.<sup>131</sup>

What is interesting about this initial invasion is not only the origin of the al-Khalifa reign over the island, but the way in which the current government chooses to frame the incident.

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<sup>126</sup> Id.

<sup>127</sup> Andrew M. Gardner, "Pearls, Oil, and the British Empire: A Short History of Bahrain," in *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt7z9b5.5>

<sup>128</sup> Id.

<sup>129</sup> Id.

<sup>130</sup> Id.

<sup>131</sup> Id.

Today's al-Khalifas refer to Ahmed bin Mohammed as Ahmed *al-Fateh* – Ahmed the Opener.<sup>132</sup> This is significant because the other time this language of “opening” has been used in Arabic history refers to the initial Islamic conquests of the Rashidun caliphate in the 600s when the immediate followers of Mohammed “opened” non-Muslim lands to Sharia rule.<sup>133</sup> Thus, the al-Khalifas imply that their ancestor brought Islam to the island and that the Shiite population there at the time were not true Muslims.<sup>134</sup>

This has important consequences both historically and in the present day. Historically, if these initial Shiites were infidels and not true Muslims, then under Sharia law their lands could be forfeit to a proper Muslim leader.<sup>135</sup> This justified land appropriation and redistribution undertaken by Ahmed bin Mohammed as being in accordance with Sharia law. Additionally, the language of “Fateh” persists with the largest mosque in Bahrain being the al-Fateh Grand Mosque and the main thoroughfare the al-Fateh Highway.<sup>136</sup>

At the same time, the current population of Bahrain is estimated to be around 1.5 million with Shiites comprising roughly 55-70% of the population (Bahrain refuses to acknowledge censuses which report these higher figures).<sup>137</sup> Of the Shiites, the largest group are the ethnically Arab *Baharna* while the largest group of Sunni are the *Hula*, who are ethnically Persians. Sunni Arabs like the al-Khalifas are in the vast minority.<sup>138</sup> By framing their conquest of the island as a liberation from the ignorance of Shia, the al-Khalifas are not winning favor from the majority of their citizens today. The reason for why they still do it then can be explained as a misguided attempt at pursuing Gerschewski's pillar of “justifiability.” One method for pursuing this is by differentiating the current, “just” rule from the previously “lawless” or “Godless” rule. Here, the language of “Fateh” attempts to evoke the idea that the previous rulers were not in accordance with God and that the current rulers are justified in their actions. Unfortunately, this does not resonate with the majority of the population which still identifies more with the defeated rulers rather than the current dynasty.

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<sup>132</sup> Abbas Busafwan and Stephan Rosiny, *Power-Sharing in Bahrain: A Still-Absent Debate*, GIGA Working Papers no. 280 (Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies [GIGA], 2015), page number, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07626>

<sup>133</sup> Id. at 8

<sup>134</sup> Id.

<sup>135</sup> Id.

<sup>136</sup> Id.

<sup>137</sup> Id. at 7

<sup>138</sup> Id.

## The al-Khalifa Survived by Relying on Stronger Protectors

Ahmed bin Mohammed reigned for thirteen years before dying of a heart attack in 1796 and bringing about a succession crisis.<sup>139</sup> Bahrain, and its rulers, maintained their independence through balancing the interests of two stronger neighbors – the Sultanate of Oman and the Wahabi Saudis – against one another.<sup>140</sup> This had several effects, one of which being establishing ties with the Saudis, who are currently Bahrain's closest allies. Despite the fact that Bahrain often had to balance *against* the Saudis, these negative interactions are downplayed in favor of stressing the long partnership between the two nations. However, the Saudi partnership was abandoned some twenty years later in favor of a stronger ally: England.<sup>141</sup>

The British had been in the area as part of their control over India and were expanding into the Arabian Peninsula while possible as part of their goal of reducing “piracy” surrounding the shipping lanes.<sup>142</sup> Though Bahrain was not at the time engaged in piracy, it and several other states were forced into signing the General Treaty of Peace in 1820.<sup>143</sup> Under this treaty, Britain awarded itself substantial rights over the local rulers.<sup>144</sup> Yet the al-Khalifas were early signatories and supporters of British rule as the stability the British provided in the region was worth the expense of the al-Khalifas' ability to dictate some elements of their foreign affairs.

With this new (relative) external stability, Bahrain's monarchs were able to focus on domestic affairs. This involved investing in stronger feudal arrangements to increase the al-Khalifas control over coastal areas, especially the valuable pearl trade.<sup>145</sup> The other significant development during this time was a disastrous war in 1867-68 against Qatar which required British intervention and resulted in the establishment of the al-Thani dynasty in Qatar, formerly controlled by Bahrain.<sup>146</sup> Largely, though, the tensions during this century remained domestic and related to al-Khalifa discord among the people it ruled and between members of the royal

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<sup>139</sup> Roby C. Barrett, “Bahrain: Tribalism, Sectarianism, and the Challenges of the 21st Century,” *Manara Magazine* (Cambridge Middle East and North Africa Forum), October 19,

2022, <https://manaramagazine.org/2022/10/bahrain-tribalism-sectarianism-and-the-challenges-of-the-21st-century/>  
<sup>140</sup> Sani Ali Bashir, *A Study of Al-Khalifah's Rule in Bahrain, 1783–1820* (master's thesis, McGill University, 1979), <https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/theses/jh343t547>

<sup>141</sup> Id. at 73

<sup>142</sup> Id. at 18

<sup>143</sup> Id. at 70

<sup>144</sup> Id. at 73

<sup>145</sup> Husayn. *Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain*

<sup>146</sup> Barret, *Bahrain: Tribalism, Sectarianism, and the Challenges of the 21st Century*

family itself, the result of nearly ever squabble being an increase of British control over the island.<sup>147</sup>

Because of Bahrain's rich oil deposits – discovered in 1935 – the United States took the role of Bahrain's hegemonic defender after the British left.<sup>148</sup> Subsequent reforms following Bahraini independence were largely hollow. The National Assembly, a parliamentary body created in 1973, was disbanded after just two years.<sup>149</sup> Under pressure from his people, in 1996, the emir Isa al-Khalifa offered expanded representation of Shiites in his council, though these were largely limited to symbolic roles and the opposition “wanted nothing short of reforms that would ultimately end al-Khalifa rule.”<sup>150</sup> The importance of this issue of internationally powerful allies seems to be one of security from threats both within and without. Applying the lens of legitimization to this area, this seems to be captured both by the OECD's concept of “international legitimacy” as well as various elements of “input” legitimacy piggybacking off of the legitimacy of another state to give the current ruler a boost. However, as the people of Bahrain still chafe against the al-Khalifa dynasty, the degree to which this strategy is effective is called into question.

## The al-Khalifa Struggle With a Dissident Subbranch

Things with the Shiites came to a head in the 1920s when, after years of petitions, the Baharna (Arab Shiites) issued one final demand for equity to the British, complaining of the unequal treatment under then-monarch Isa al-Khalifa.<sup>151</sup> The British relented and deposed the emir and appointed his son Hamad bin Isa in his place.<sup>152</sup> The appointment of Hamad and not the emir's half brother, Khalid, greatly angered him and his descendants who formed the rival subbranch of the al-Khalifa dynasty, the Khawalid. The Khawalid allied themselves to Wahabi extremists from Saudi Arabia and engaged in the massacre of the Shiite town of Sitra in 1923.<sup>153</sup> The British tried the Khawalid and banished them, forbidding them from occupying any government positions at any point until the end of British rule in 1971.<sup>154</sup> Following the British departure, the Khawalid were invited back into the government by the al-Khalifas and they

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<sup>147</sup> Id.

<sup>148</sup> Id.

<sup>149</sup> Busafwan and Rosiny. *Power-Sharing in Bahrain: A Still-Absent Debate*. At 8.

<sup>150</sup> Barret, *Bahrain: Tribalism, Sectarianism, and the Challenges of the 21st Century*

<sup>151</sup> Busafwan and Rosiny. *Power-Sharing in Bahrain: A Still-Absent Debate*. At 8.

<sup>152</sup> Id.

<sup>153</sup> Husayn, *Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain*

<sup>154</sup> Id.

remain staunchly conservative, anti-Shia advocates to this day. Their continued criticisms show the limits of relying on international legitimacy over domestic factors of “justifiability,” as this branch might not have rebelled were it not for mismanagement of the Shiites population.

Additionally, the Shiites have successfully negotiated against the monarchy by forming coalition groups. In 1954, during the British mandate, following Hamad’s ascent saw the formation of the National Union Committee (NUC).<sup>155</sup> This was a cross-sectarian group, composed of both Sunnis and Shiites and demanded increased parliamentary representation and trade rights from its government.<sup>156</sup> This was worrying to the al-Khalifas as the traditional Shia underclass had long protested al-Khalifa reign, but this could be dealt with by forming Sunni coalitions. The monarchy attempted to split the NUC by creating the National Convention Committee (NCC), a group for Shiites specifically.<sup>157</sup> However, the NUC remained impervious to these attempts to split it and was able to win real concessions from the government.<sup>158</sup> The British banned the NUC after it began criticizing the British handling of the Suez Crisis.<sup>159</sup> The National Convention Committee was allowed to persist and formed the basis of al-Wefaq, the largest Shiite political party in Bahrain.<sup>160</sup> To further aid the monarchy, the British approved of a set of laws which enabled the monarchy to engage in much heavier repression under the guise of providing security.<sup>161</sup>

## The al-Khalifas Since 1999

It was into a hectic world of internal unrest that Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa came to the throne after his father’s unexpected death. The last function the previous ruler had attended was the funeral of Jordan’s King Hussein. Initial reactions to Hamad were mixed. Though many saw the man as reform-minded,<sup>162</sup> the concern was that he would be a puppet to more conservative members of his dynasty.<sup>163</sup>

Since the return of the Khawalid sub-branch into the government of Bahrain, members of the ultra-conservative, anti-Shiite group had attained positions of power including the Minister of

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<sup>155</sup> Moore-Gilbert, *Sectarian divide and rule in Bahrain: A self-fulfilling prophecy?*

<sup>156</sup> Id.

<sup>157</sup> Id.

<sup>158</sup> Id.

<sup>159</sup> Id.

<sup>160</sup> Id.

<sup>161</sup> Barret, *Bahrain: Tribalism, Sectarianism, and the Challenges of the 21st Century*

<sup>162</sup> Husayn, *Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain*. At 36.

<sup>163</sup> Barret, *Bahrain: Tribalism, Sectarianism, and the Challenges of the 21st Century*

Defense, Khalifa bin Ahmad, and the Royal Court Minister, Khalid bin Ahmad.<sup>164</sup> As Bahrain is a *dynastic* autocracy, power does not solely lie with the monarch and any potential liberal tendencies of the new emir were reined in by more conservative members of the family. The initial reforms promised by Hamad included constitutional reform and a renewed parliament, including the National Action Charter, a new organization offering representation.<sup>165</sup> These reforms were cut short the very next year with the unilateral issuing of a new constitution by the monarchy.<sup>166</sup> This new constitution, implemented in 2002, raised the emir to the status of king and granted him broad powers over all branches of the government.<sup>167</sup>

Four years later in 2006, after the Shiite party al-Wefaq won 40% of the vote, demands for a branch with “real legislative power” returned.<sup>168</sup> This same year a leaker provided documents which would begin the Bandar-gate scandal.<sup>169</sup> The scandal revealed that the al-Khalifa dynasty considered Shiites to be a strategic threat.<sup>170</sup> The reasons for this position varied from simple bigotry, supposed ties to Iran, and the belief in an “unspoken agenda on the part of Shiite movements to control Bahraini society.”<sup>171</sup> To counteract the Shiites, Ahmad bin Atiyyat, a Khawalid and nephew of the conservative Minister of Defense, was given charge of a secret cell of government agents.<sup>172</sup> This group monitored Shiites at home and abroad, promoted the increased naturalization of Sunnis to counteract demographics, infiltrated Shiite NGOs, and funded Shia-Sunni conversions.<sup>173</sup> This appeared in direct opposition to the idea of courting Shiites, instead standing as an admission that the government had failed to justify its reign in their eyes.

The Arab Spring hit Bahrain on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011.<sup>174</sup> This date was chosen online for a protest titled the “Day of Rage” and is significant as February 14<sup>th</sup> was the day that the promised (but powerless) National Charter met.<sup>175</sup> The protestors were largely Shiites who had had enough

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<sup>164</sup> Husayn, *Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain*. At 35.

<sup>165</sup> Moore-Gilbert, *Sectarian divide and rule in Bahrain: A self-fulfilling prophecy?*

<sup>166</sup> *Id.*

<sup>167</sup> Constitution of the State of Bahrain (2002), chapter IV, section 1, art. 33

<sup>168</sup> Barret, *Bahrain: Tribalism, Sectarianism, and the Challenges of the 21st Century*

<sup>169</sup> Busafwan and Rosiny. *Power-Sharing in Bahrain: A Still-Absent Debate*. At 14.

<sup>170</sup> *Id.*

<sup>171</sup> *Id.* Quoting 2006b. Al-Bahrain: al-khiyār al-dimùgrati wa aliyat al-iqsa' [Bahrain: The Choice of Democracy and the Machinery of Exclusion; "The Bandar Report"; Second volume, documents]

<sup>172</sup> *Id.*

<sup>173</sup> *Id.*

<sup>174</sup> Brandon Friedman, “Battle for Bahrain: What One Uprising Meant for the Gulf States and Iran,” *World Affairs* 174, no. 6 (March/April 2012), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23210463>

<sup>175</sup> *Id.* at 76.

of government discrimination and demanded a limitation on the al-Khalifas' power.<sup>176</sup> The protestors mistakenly demanded a system like that in Morocco, which is also an absolute monarchy, but which they believed to be a constitutional monarchy.<sup>177</sup>

Instead of providing a united front against the protestors, the dynasty was divided. Crown Prince Salman withdrew the military and made a televised appeal for unity, promising dialogue.<sup>178</sup> These efforts were stymied by fellow al-Khalifas, notably the Khawalid brothers and officials Khalifa and Khalid bin Ahmad who are considered the architects of the crackdown on the protests.<sup>179</sup> These men claimed the Shiites were supported by Iran as an effort to destabilize the country.<sup>180</sup> Giving credence to these claims, an opposition leader told Lebanese reporters that Iran would support the protestors if they needed it.<sup>181</sup>

The monarchy reclaimed Pearl Roundabout, which the protestors had been using as a base, and called in help from the Gulf Coast, receiving funding and over a thousand troops from Saudi Arabia to combat "Iranian" influence.<sup>182</sup> By this point, the opposition demanded nothing less than an end to the al-Khalifas' rule altogether and the firing of Khalifa bin Ahmad.<sup>183</sup> The monarchy presented a stick-and-carrot approach, using force against protestors while Crown Prince Salman headed a "dialogue" for reconciliation and reform.<sup>184</sup> Hardliners bulldozed over thirty Shiite mosques during the Arab Spring, claiming the buildings lacked proper permits (statements others claim to have been fabricated).<sup>185</sup> Meanwhile the Crown Prince's dialogues (held over the course of the next few years) were almost entirely run by the government with one government-appointed minister, Samira Rajab, claiming that she did not see "an elected government as part of the conditions for democracy."<sup>186</sup> The result of the dialogues was either a status quo or, in some areas, an increase in monarchical power.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Id.

<sup>177</sup> Id.

<sup>178</sup> Id.

<sup>179</sup> Husayn, *Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain*. At 35.

<sup>180</sup> Friedman, *Battle for Bahrain: What One Uprising Meant for the Gulf States and Iran*. At 77.

<sup>181</sup> Id.

<sup>182</sup> Id. at 78.

<sup>183</sup> Id.

<sup>184</sup> Busafwan and Rosiny, *Power-Sharing in Bahrain: A Still-Absent Debate*. At 20.

<sup>185</sup> Husayn, *Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain*. At 39.

<sup>186</sup> Id.

<sup>187</sup> Id. at 22.

Following the Arab Spring, political parties were banned in Bahrain.<sup>188</sup> Since the Arab Spring, the monarchy has gained in power and repression has increased.<sup>189</sup> Pearl Roundabout, where the protestors met, was destroyed and paved over to prevent it from becoming a symbol of resistance.<sup>190</sup> Bahrain initially drew criticism from Democrat administrations in the US, but has since seen praise from Donald Trump, who remains committed to protecting it as an ally.<sup>191</sup> Trump has even removed trade barriers which were once linked to increased human rights records in Bahrain.<sup>192</sup> The al-Khalifa dynasty has been forced to rely more heavily on the United States as the current war in Iran continues, in the hope that this might be a chance to put an end to the source of its supposed Shiite threat.

## Pillar Review

The Hashemites and al-Khalifas have been in charge of their respective countries for a long time. Both dynasties came into power as outsiders and have had to struggle to create a narrative which explains their rule. In Jordan, the Hashemites have had to build a national identity and integrate Palestinians (who now make up the majority of the population) into this identity, meeting mixed results. The al-Khalifas of Bahrain have had their own issues with their Shiite majority. Both dynasties have relied upon religion as a justification for their rule, though the Hashemites have been far more successful in this regard not only because of their heritage, but because religion is something which binds them to their people, rather than the barrier it is in Bahrain. Because both dynasties have imperfectly sought to legitimize their reign through the “justifiability” pillar, both dynasties have been faced with internal schisms as various members appeal more or less to interest groups. In Jordan, this has been evident in the more moderate Hamzah Affair, while in Bahrain (where legitimation was handled worse than in Jordan) the result has been the near rebellion of an entire branch of the al-Khalifa family.

When it comes to the current kings, both came to the throne amid uncertainty, but the truth has been that both have followed largely in their fathers’ footsteps and neither has brought about a change of the status quo. Both kings also experienced protests during the Arab Spring

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<sup>188</sup> Barret, *Bahrain: Tribalism, Sectarianism, and the Challenges of the 21st Century*

<sup>189</sup> Amnesty International, “*Bahrain: Dreams of Reform Crushed 10 Years After Uprising*,” February 11, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/02/bahrain-dreams-of-reform-crushed-10-years-after-uprising/>

<sup>190</sup> Id.

<sup>191</sup> Congressional Research Service, “*Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy*,” [https://www.congress.gov/crs\\_external\\_products/RS/HTML/95-1013.html](https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/RS/HTML/95-1013.html)

<sup>192</sup> Id.

though to different extents. Abdullah II experienced relatively moderate, but sustained protests which have led to cycles of reform and repression. Hamad experienced much more intense, but shorter-lived protests. Both kings have engaged in democratic backsliding and become more authoritarian over time, despite claims of them being “reform-minded.”

Holistically, the Hashemites have been moderately successful in legitimizing their reign through the pillar of “justifiability.” They have been aided by the artificiality of their state since, due to a lack of there being a “Jordan” before the Hashemite rule, the concepts of the monarchy and Jordanian-ness have become linked. Their direct appeals at winning the favor of the people have not always met with success, but the result has been an enduring legacy of support from various groups, something which can be seen in the fact that no protest demand ever included the abolition of the monarchy or even curtailing their authority. Still, the cyclical nature of protests in the country are a worrying pattern and do not suggest a stable system.

The al-Khalifas have been largely unsuccessful in using the historical narrative to their benefit. Though they continue to use the language of the “opening” of Bahrain under their rule, this has a tendency to alienate more than unite a largely Shiite population. Whereas the Hashemites sought to integrate Palestinians, the al-Khalifas have continued to persecute their majority population and have allowed anti-Shiite hardliners in the Khawalid to attain positions of power at the highest levels of authority. The comparative lack of success can be evinced in protests seeking nothing less than the end of al-Khalifa reign and requiring the use of military force to put down.

In conclusion, the old adage of “you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar,” seems to hold true of the Hashemites and al-Khalifas. While both are still seeking to “catch” and control their subjects, the Hashemites have not had the resources the al-Khalifas have and have thus had to resort to more diplomatic, inclusive programs. The result has been that the Hashemites enjoy significantly more legitimacy when reflecting on the historical narrative than the al-Khalifas. This, despite the fact that both dynasties have maintained a stranglehold on politics for the duration of their existence.

# The Second Pillar: Legal Implementation as a Tool for Legitimization

## How This Chapter Works

This chapter is dedicated to analyzing the legal implementation of authoritarian power and legitimation within the states. This pillar is what Gerschewski refers to as the “legality” of the regime.<sup>193</sup> By “legality,” Gerschewski does not intend to imply that authoritarianism is a legal use of power. After all, legal governance is usually understood to be derived from the democratic will of the people.<sup>194</sup> Instead, Gerschewski argues that this pillar may be satisfied by achieving one of the primary purposes of law – settling expectations.<sup>195</sup> When norms and obligations have been clearly defined, citizens may determine their expectations and thereby achieve a form of stability required for legitimation, regardless of the actual political structure.<sup>196</sup>

The OECD is slightly more direct in defining its forms of legitimation, but the legality pillar is encapsulated by parts of its “input” and “output” legitimacy.<sup>197</sup> Input legitimacy refers to the agreed rules of procedure, which are usually found in the constitution, but may also have historical roots.<sup>198</sup> The idea behind these laws is a linking of the state to society – the state follows these clear guidelines and the people are able to predict and rely upon these state procedures.<sup>199</sup> Output legitimacy relates to the state’s ability to provide goods and services to its people.<sup>200</sup> Although less directly linked to the concept of legality, this may be relevant when speaking of the implementation and distribution of state services such as media controls and education.

This chapter will perform its analysis by looking at seven factors within the last six years: (1) Executive power expanding into new fields or else expanding power in previously less-regulated fields; (2) increased availability of discretionary action by the executive – this would allow the monarchy to selectively use laws to enforce its will; (3) autonomy of the legislative branch in passing laws; (4) executive control through electoral engineering; (5)

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<sup>193</sup> Gerschewski, *Legitimacy in autocracies: Oxymoron or essential feature?*

<sup>194</sup> *Id.* at 8

<sup>195</sup> *Id.*

<sup>196</sup> *Id.*

<sup>197</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. *The state’s legitimacy in fragile situations.*

<sup>198</sup> *Id.* at 23

<sup>199</sup> *Id.*

<sup>200</sup> *Id.*

executive control through demographic management; (6) meaningful limitations upon executive power; and (7) executive control over media and education. Each of these categories will be ranked on an ordinal scale of 0-2 using **Table 1** described below. Higher scores are more authoritarian while lower scores reflect less monarchical influence.

**Table 1. Coding for Legal Factors**

|                       | 0                                   | 1                                      | 2                                        |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Expansion of Power    | Absent                              | N/A                                    | Present                                  |
| Discretionary Powers  | Absent                              | N/A                                    | Present                                  |
| Parliamentary Laws    | Largely Independent Process         | Some Parliamentary Powers              | Token Parliament                         |
| Electoral Engineering | Absent                              | Some Electoral Engineering             | Extensive Engineering                    |
| Demographic Control   | Absent                              | Some Controls                          | Extensive Control                        |
| Limitations on Power  | Many limitations on executive power | Some limitations on executive power    | Little/no limitations on executive power |
| Propaganda Control    | Absent                              | Media or Education somewhat influenced | Both heavily influenced                  |

The reason for the six-year timeframe is that this is meant to examine a post-COVID world, when expanding executive power was most permissible, but also when a relinquishing of emergency powers would be expected as the crisis wound down. This chapter hypothesizes that both Jordan and Bahrain will exhibit strong authoritarian tendencies, with great executive control and few to no checks on their power. It hypothesizes that Jordan, which has received less international condemnation, will earn a lower total score (and therefore be less authoritarian) than Bahrain.

## Legalization of the Monarchy in Jordan

**Table 2. Table with Results for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan**

|                      | Jordan |
|----------------------|--------|
| Expansion of Power   | 2      |
| Discretionary Powers | 2      |
| Parliamentary Laws   | 2      |

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Electoral Engineering | 1 |
| Demographic Control   | 1 |
| Limitations on Power  | 1 |
| Propaganda Control    | 2 |

Jordan scores very highly when it comes to the ways in which the monarchy uses the law to maintain its power over the people. Beginning with the expansion of monarchical powers, Jordan did not so much enter into any new fields as it greatly expanded regulations in an existing field with the controversial Cybercrime Law no. 17.<sup>201</sup> Under this law, the government is empowered to fine or imprison those who are convicted of using the internet to: insult religion, engage in character assassination, promote indecent sexual activity (a field which may include the LGBT community, Jordan has historically been ambiguous on this issue), or “expose public morals.”<sup>202</sup> This law came seemingly out of the blue from the monarchy in 2023 and was roundly criticized by both politicians and the public.<sup>203</sup> It represents a significant expansion upon the previous law, written in 2015 and increases governmental (that is, Hashemite) control over online activities.<sup>204</sup> Accordingly, Jordan has expanded its power in this domain and earns a 2 in this category.

The Hashemite king also gained discretionary powers during the last six years. By far, the biggest gain during this time was during the COVID crisis of 2020-21. This crisis activated the Jordanian Defense Law no. 13.<sup>205</sup> This law, passed in 1992, enables the king to pass emergency decrees (“defense orders”) directly. Though many of these orders expired in 2023, King Abdullah II had used them to exercise power until then. Coinciding neatly with the expiration of the defense orders, the new Cybercrime Law was passed the same year. Under this law, which deliberately uses vague language, the executive is given discretion in determining when to

<sup>201</sup> Edmund Ratka, *Das Jordanische Paradox: Partizipation und Kontrolle* (Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2023), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep52999>

<sup>202</sup> Jordan Open Source Association, “Cybercrime Law no. 17,” 13 August 2023, <https://www.josa.ngo/publications/33>

<sup>203</sup> Ratka, *Das Jordanische Paradox: Partizipation Und Kontrolle*. At 1.

<sup>204</sup> Amnesty International, “Jordan: New Cybercrimes Law Stifling Freedom of Expression One Year On,” August 13, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/08/jordan-new-cybercrimes-law-stifling-freedom-of-expression-one-year-on/>

<sup>205</sup> Shatha Ahmad Al-Assaf, “Protecting Right to Privacy in Jordan in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Restrictions and Guarantees.” *Cogent Social Sciences* 11 (2025) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2024.2445166?scroll=top&needAccess=true#abstract>

prosecute.<sup>206</sup> An example of this vague language can be seen in article (17) where behavior that is “likely to stir up... sedition [or] target social peace” is prohibited.<sup>207</sup> This type of behavior is undefined and no examples are given. This discretion has enabled the Hashemites to control the types of dialogue which are permitted in Jordan and Amnesty International has documented the false arrests of over 15 individuals in connection to this law.<sup>208</sup> Examples of the types of behavior the government has deemed to be seditious include activist Rani al-Zawahra posting on Facebook that the Jordanian Intelligence Department was guilty of intimidating citizens (he received a three month prison sentence) and several anonymous citizens who made statements which were either pro-Palestine or else anti-Israel.<sup>209</sup> The narrow tailoring of enforcement of this law has led several to accuse the Jordanian government as using the law to muzzle dissent.<sup>210</sup> Because the monarchy has used multiple laws to establish discretionary powers, adopting new laws as the old ones cease to be, Jordan earns a 2 in this category.

The third category pertains to the extent to which the Jordanian parliament is a neutral or executive-led organization. Here, Jordan scores a 2. Based on the Jordanian constitution, the ruling regime is parliamentary.<sup>211</sup> Although the king is vested with legislative powers, the parliament receives these same powers.<sup>212</sup> The parliament is divided into a senate and house of representatives with a prescription for eligibility for either house being that no member may be “of the relatives of the King.”<sup>213</sup> Although the parliament may only promulgate laws after they receive approval by the King, there are provisions enabling the parliament to override the King’s veto if they pass a two-thirds vote.<sup>214</sup> Accordingly, in terms of the legal system under the constitution, the parliament has at least some independence from monarchical influence *when it is sitting*. King Abdullah II dissolved the Jordanian parliament in 2020 and again in 2024 after a new parliament was elected.<sup>215</sup> Although new elections were held the same year to replace the parliament, voter turnout remained low at around 32%.<sup>216</sup> Despite the nominal independence

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<sup>206</sup> Id.

<sup>207</sup> Jordan Open Source Association, “Cybercrime Law no. 17”

<sup>208</sup> Amnesty International, “*Jordan: New Cybercrimes Law Stifling Freedom of Expression One Year On*”

<sup>209</sup> Id.

<sup>210</sup> Ratka, *Das Jordanische Paradox: Partizipation Und Kontrolle*. At 4.

<sup>211</sup> Constitution of Jordan Article 1(1)

<sup>212</sup> Constitution of Jordan Article 25

<sup>213</sup> Constitution of Jordan Article 75(1)(g)

<sup>214</sup> Constitution of Jordan Article 93(4)

<sup>215</sup> Freedom House, “Jordan,” <https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-world/2025>

<sup>216</sup> Id.

Jordan's parliament should have under the constitution, the constant threat of the king abolishing the institution means that Jordan scores a 2 on this category.

In terms of the electoral system (which here is separate from the parliament's powers), Jordan exhibits some levels of electoral engineering. Historically, this was much more prevalent with tribes forming the bases of parties – especially during those times when political parties were banned.<sup>217</sup> One criticism of districting leveled against the government has been that it favors rural tribes over the inhabitants of cities because districting is not done on a basis proportional to population.<sup>218</sup> This means that individual votes in Amman – Jordan's capital and home to nearly 40% of all Jordanians – count for less than votes in the southern and eastern desert provinces. This has been addressed by the introduction of some electoral reforms in 2016 and again in 2022, but the underlying concerns remain.<sup>219</sup> Additionally, political parties (while legal) are disfavored and the historical repression of parties has resulted in reluctance on the part of citizens to join these. The Jordanian intelligence service is believed to be involved in elections and to favor tribal affiliations over political aims.<sup>220</sup> Despite these strong factors towards authoritarianism, as well as the low voter turnout, the result of the most recent election was a huge win for the opposition party, the Islamic Action Front.<sup>221</sup> Although this win will likely be checked by the regime, the fact that it was possible means that Jordan scores a 1 in this category.

Demographic control in Jordan is a thorny issue which the country has yet to engage in a frank discussion on.<sup>222</sup> The main issue is that Jordanian identity – discussed in chapter one here – has been difficult to define. The question lies in whether to consider those Palestinians who have lived in the country (sometimes for generations) to be Jordanians.<sup>223</sup> Some of the original East Banker tribes hold the view that these Palestinians should be granted equality but not citizenship and that their underrepresentation in government is a just solution because their presence ought only be temporary until the restoration of a Palestinian homeland.<sup>224</sup> On the other side of the

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<sup>217</sup> International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *Building Democracy in Jordan: Women's Political Participation, Political Party Life and Democratic Elections* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2005), <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/building-democracy-in-jordan.pdf>

<sup>218</sup> Id. at 19

<sup>219</sup> Freedom House, "Jordan,"

<sup>220</sup> Id.

<sup>221</sup> Id.

<sup>222</sup> Marwan Muasher, "Jordan's Identity Question," *Diwan* (blog), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 12, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/diwan/2021/08/jordans-identity-question>

<sup>223</sup> Id.

<sup>224</sup> Id.

equation, some Palestinians have felt that considering them to be Jordanians would amount to an erosion of the definition of a Palestinian and give in to Israeli dreams of the Palestinians leaving their homeland.<sup>225</sup> The king himself seems uncertain as to the resolution to this situation (his namesake was killed by a Palestinian radical) with the result being both that he frequently praises his country for the number of Palestinian citizens it took in, while simultaneously allowing Jordanians of Palestinian origin to risk arbitrary revocations of citizenship and discrimination in the workplace.<sup>226</sup> These same Palestinian-Jordanians tend to live in Amman, providing a potential explanation for Amman's deliberate underrepresentation in elections.<sup>227</sup> Because the issue frequently pertains to legal matters, but does not have a dedicated policy itself, Jordan scores a 1 in demographic controls.

Jordan has some nominal limitations on executive authority. As mentioned previously, the Jordanian constitution does contain clauses whereby the parliament has the power to overrule the king.<sup>228</sup> However, while such an event remains technically possible, in reality it is functionally impossible given the king's substantial power over parliament. The king can and has issued unilateral decisions which remain in effect. The judiciary is guaranteed independence under the constitution as well as the *theoretical* power to overturn laws.<sup>229</sup> This means that this branch *may* also impose limitations on the king. However, judges of the Constitutional Court are appointed by the king without review.<sup>230</sup> Additional amendments to the constitution, implemented in 2022, granted the king the sole authority to appoint members of the religious court as well.<sup>231</sup> Despite this control, the branches do seem to have at least *some* autonomy with the opposition winning the most seats in the recent parliamentary election and citizen victories against state actors in court being "not uncommon."<sup>232</sup> Though this does not immediately suggest that the branches exert actual authority over the king, the idea that they may operate independently and sometimes even against King Abdullah's wishes means Jordan receives a 1 in this category.

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<sup>225</sup> Id.

<sup>226</sup> Freedom House, "Jordan,"

<sup>227</sup> Id.

<sup>228</sup> Constitution of Jordan Article 93(4)

<sup>229</sup> Constitution of Jordan Article 97

<sup>230</sup> Freedom House, "Jordan,"

<sup>231</sup> Id.

<sup>232</sup> Id.

Lastly, Jordan exhibits high levels of control of the media and education as a means of propaganda control. The primary media sources in Jordan are state-run news outlets and expanding authority into the cyber dimension through the Cybercrime law has enabled for further control over the information to which citizens have access.<sup>233</sup> The government appoints editors and controls the financial access of media outlets, incentivizing them to report positively about the government.<sup>234</sup> Independent journalists who have been critical of the government have been jailed and several agencies have had their offices raided.<sup>235</sup> In terms of education controls, Jordan monitors life at universities and scrubs academic papers for politically sensitive content before allowing them to be published.<sup>236</sup> The result here is that many papers published about Jordan by Jordanians are nearly sycophantic in terms of their support of the government and the King, making it harder for non-Jordanians to get accurate information about the situation. Because both of these fields are directly controlled by the monarchy, Jordan earns a 2 in this final category.

## Legalization of the Monarchy in Bahrain

**Table 3. Table with Results for the Kingdom of Bahrain**

|                       | Bahrain |
|-----------------------|---------|
| Expansion of Power    | 0       |
| Discretionary Powers  | 0       |
| Parliamentary Laws    | 2       |
| Electoral Engineering | 2       |
| Demographic Control   | 2       |
| Limitations on Power  | 2       |
| Propaganda Control    | 2       |

Bahrain earns a very high authoritarian score in terms of legalization of monarchical power. However, the first number provided for Bahrain may be misleading if not read in context. This category represents expansion of executive power into new fields or a growth of executive power within an already regulated field. The al-Khalifa dynasty has not meaningfully expanded

<sup>233</sup> Amnesty International, “*Jordan: New Cybercrimes Law Stifling Freedom of Expression One Year On*,”

<sup>234</sup> Freedom House, “Jordan,”

<sup>235</sup> Amnesty International, “*Jordan: New Cybercrimes Law Stifling Freedom of Expression One Year On*,”

<sup>236</sup> Freedom House, “Jordan,”

its power by issuing new laws since 2020. This is not to say the monarchy has not been responsible for the issuing of laws which did increase its power, Bahrain has usually *already had* many such laws prior to the start of the review date. Bahrain earned a 0 in the field of expanding monarchical power, but such a lack of deterioration ought not be mistaken for improvement.

In terms of the second category, Bahrain has also formalized very few laws granting new discretionary powers to the executive during the timeframe examined. As a matter of fact, the trend during the past six years has thus far been one of symbolic reforms of existing laws while retaining executive authority. One example of this can be seen in the government's policy on political organizations and trade unions. In 2022, the government stated that "political associations can only be dissolved by court order."<sup>237</sup> This, ostensibly, protected such associations. However, determining the difference between which organizations are *political associations* and *civil society organizations* (CSOs) remains at the government's discretion.<sup>238</sup> Those groups with aims contrary to the monarchy's are usually found to be CSOs and may be dissolved without a court order.<sup>239</sup> Even those CSOs which the government permits to exist are subject to severe controls. In the same year that the government promised protection for "political associations," it issued a circular to CSOs warning them not to engage in politics and to submit board of director candidates to the government for approval.<sup>240</sup> In this way, the government "reformed" a law so as to suggest a less authoritarian trend, but power remained firmly with the monarchy.

Bahrain's parliamentary laws remain unchanged and are both formally and practically in favor of a powerless legislature. The constitution of Bahrain establishes a legislature with two chambers, each with forty members.<sup>241</sup> One chamber – the Council of Deputies – is elected while the second – the Consultative Council – is appointed by the king.<sup>242</sup> This enables the king to have a hold over the legislative branch, something which is further cemented by the fact that both groups must agree to create a law.<sup>243</sup> Elections for the Council of Deputies were held in 2022, but

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<sup>237</sup> Gulf Centre for Human Rights, "Overview of Human Rights Violations in Bahrain," August 9, 2025, <https://www.gc4hr.org/overview-of-human-rights-violations-in-bahrain/>

<sup>238</sup> Id.

<sup>239</sup> Id.

<sup>240</sup> U.S. Department of State, "2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bahrain," <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/bahrain/>

<sup>241</sup> Constitution of Bahrain Chapter IV, section 3, art. 51

<sup>242</sup> Constitution of Bahrain Chapter IV, section 3, art. 54 and Chapter IV, section 3, art. 56

<sup>243</sup> Constitution of Bahrain Chapter IV, section 3, art. 70

political parties remained banned.<sup>244</sup> Members of political associations were allowed to run for office, but al-Wefaq, the largest political opposition group and the largest party in Bahrain was banned in 2016 after the government obtained court approval.<sup>245</sup> The result is that the Council of Deputies which was elected in 2022 is very supportive of the monarchy and does not offer even token resistance. In this way, the monarchy ensures that it appoints half of the legislature directly, that that half which it does not appoint is almost guaranteed to be friendly to it, and that both halves must receive the king's approval to pass laws. For these reasons, Bahrain receives a 2 on the question of legislative independence.

Bahrain engages in extreme levels of electoral engineering. Because of heavy gerrymandering of electoral districts, northern Shiites have significantly less of a voice in the electoral process than southern Sunnis.<sup>246</sup> In Bahrain, the largest electoral district – Northern 1 – has a population which is 21 times greater than the population of the smallest district – Southern 6 – both districts have equal voting power, which means that a voter in Southern 6 enjoys 21 times the political say than a voter in the larger Northern 1.<sup>247</sup> For reference, in the United States it is considered unconstitutional if the populations of any two districts within the same state differ by more than 1%.<sup>248</sup> In addition, the banning of political parties altogether leads to largely symbolic elections, and it is for these reasons that Bahrain scores a 2 in this category.

In terms of demographic control, Bahrain has sought to counter its internal situation of a Sunni minority ruling over a Shiite majority by importing Sunnis from abroad.<sup>249</sup> As revealed in the wake of the Bandargate scandal – the details of which are discussed in Chapter 1 – the government has engaged in the concentrated effort to encourage Sunni immigration from Yemen, Jordan, Syria, and Pakistan.<sup>250</sup> Other Bandargate documents show the government subsidizing Shia-Sunni conversions and paying large sums of money to spy on the political opposition.<sup>251</sup> At the same time as the government has been recruiting Sunnis, it has also revoked citizenship from

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<sup>244</sup> Freedom House, “Bahrain,” <https://freedomhouse.org/country/bahrain>

<sup>245</sup> Congressional Research Service, “*Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy*,” [https://www.congress.gov/crs\\_external\\_products/RS/HTML/95-1013.html](https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/RS/HTML/95-1013.html)

<sup>246</sup> Jadaliyya Reports, “*Gerrymandering in Bahrain: Twenty-One Persons, One Vote*,” 11 February 2013 <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/28083>

<sup>247</sup> Id.

<sup>248</sup> Id.

<sup>249</sup> Busafwan and Rosiny. *Power-Sharing in Bahrain: A Still-Absent Debate*.

<sup>250</sup> Id. at 16

<sup>251</sup> Husayn, *Mechanisms of Authoritarian Rule in Bahrain*. At 35.

hundreds of Shiites, including the mass revocation of citizenship of 138 Shiites in one trial.<sup>252</sup> Although the monarchy has since restored citizenship to 551 following international outcry, hundreds more remained without citizenship.<sup>253</sup> For this reason, as Bahrain addresses its demographic issue by both bringing in Sunnis and attempting to reduce the number of Shiites, Bahrain scores a 2 in the area of demographic control.

Bahrain has functionally no limits on monarchical control. According to the constitution, the legislature may propose laws to the king and should the king veto such a law, the legislature is empowered to overrule the veto if the legislature votes to do so by a two-thirds majority.<sup>254</sup> However, the constitution also enables the king to dissolve the legislature<sup>255</sup> and to amend the constitution at will.<sup>256</sup> Similarly, because of the ban on political parties and electoral engineering, the legislature is functionally powerless to exercise its authority over the king in the event of a conflict. The judiciary is even less effective as a check on royal authority, largely because it does not exist as a separate branch of government. According to the constitution of Bahrain, “The King chairs the Higher Judicial Council. The King appoints judges by Royal Orders, as proposed by the Higher Judicial Council.”<sup>257</sup> Accordingly, the constitutional court, headed by the king and with its judges appointed directly by him has no chance of going against the monarchy’s wishes whatsoever. For these reasons, and because no meaningful battles have been won by any domestic group against the al-Khalifa’s aims, Bahrain scores a 2 in terms of limitations on executive authority.

Lastly, Bahrain exhibits high levels of control over its media and education sectors as a means of spreading propaganda. All media outlets are directly owned by the government or else are owned by private individuals with very close ties to the state.<sup>258</sup> Under the Press Law, the government is entitled to censor any media which is critical of the king or Islam and to determine which articles are guilty of such offenses at its discretion.<sup>259</sup> Online publication is only possible

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<sup>252</sup> BBC News, “Bahrain Revokes Citizenship of 138 People After Mass Trial,” April 16, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47947036>

<sup>253</sup> BBC News, “Bahrain King Reinstates Nationality to 551 Citizens Tried in Courts,” April 21, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48011493>

<sup>254</sup> Constitution of Bahrain Chapter IV, section 1, art. 35(d)

<sup>255</sup> Constitution of Bahrain Chapter IV, section 1, art. 42(c)

<sup>256</sup> Constitution of Bahrain Chapter IV, section 1, art. 35(a)

<sup>257</sup> Constitution of Bahrain Chapter IV, section 1, art. 33(h)

<sup>258</sup> Freedom House, “Bahrain”

<sup>259</sup> Id.

with a valid license which must be renewed yearly.<sup>260</sup> Public speech is heavily censored and many journalists have been imprisoned.<sup>261</sup> In terms of educational influence, Bahrain's propaganda usage is overt: in 2023, Crown Prince Salman put a sudden halt to curriculum changes citing concerns that these might not be "compatible with Bahrain's national values designed to protect religion and its core pillars."<sup>262</sup> Following the 2011 Arab Spring, many students were expelled and staff members who had supported democracy were dismissed from universities.<sup>263</sup> Those academics who remained at their posts were required to sign loyalty pledges to the government.<sup>264</sup> Because of this overt control of both the media and education through the law, Bahrain scores a 2 in terms of propaganda control.

## Pillar Review

Both the Hashemites and the al-Khalifas use the law as a tool for legitimization and both scored highly authoritarian scores of 11/14 for Jordan and 10/14 for Bahrain. Both regimes possessed a strongly independent and unchecked executive branch which either directly controlled or else influenced other branches. The hypothesis that Jordan would score more positively than Bahrain in this pillar was disproved, it actually came out as more authoritarian. However, this data is skewed if read out of context. In the first two categories, the time limit of six years biases the data in favor of Bahrain. The issue is that this examines *new* laws expanding executive power and discretion *within the past six years*. The Hashemites of Jordan have passed such a law via the Cybercrime Law no. 17, and have faced significant domestic and international backlash for it. This new law has also given the Hashemites new grounds for executive discretion by deliberately using vague language. In Bahrain, this framework appears to have already been laid somewhat earlier. Equivalents to Jordanian laws exist in the form of broad cybercrime laws passed prior to the examined timeframe.

In terms of parliamentary independence, both Jordan and Bahrain possess "rubber stamp" parliaments which are at the mercy of executive whims. Although they are guaranteed constitutional independence to at least some extent, the arrangement is nearly identical for both:

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<sup>260</sup> Id.

<sup>261</sup> Id.

<sup>262</sup> Court of the Crown Prince, Kingdom of Bahrain, "HRH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister Directs for the Immediate Cessation of Any Changes to Educational Curricula That Are Inconsistent with the Kingdom's National and Religious Values," accessed March 20, 2026, <https://www.crownprince.bh/en/news/13182/>

<sup>263</sup> Freedom House, "Bahrain"

<sup>264</sup> Id.

a lower house which is elected and an upper house directly appointed by the king. Both legislatures face additional controls from the monarchy: in Jordan via the disfavoring of political parties under the One Vote Law as well as two recent parliamentary dissolutions and in Bahrain through the outright abolition of political parties. In terms of actual parliamentary results, both Jordan and Bahrain have been accused of using gerrymandering to favor rural supporters over the mostly urban opposition. Jordan earned a better score than Bahrain in this regard because, even with these districts in place, the system was not so burdensome that the opposition was not able to win the most recent election, suggesting at least some leeway given to voters.

Jordan also faces fewer significant demographic issues than Bahrain. Although the question of Palestinian integration is of vital importance and has even resulted in the death of one Hashemite king, King Abdullah II has taken a schizophrenic approach to the issue meaning no clear policy has been outlined. This is in contrast to the Bahraini situation where the al-Khalifas have actively sought to change the demographics of their state by importing Sunnis and supporting Shia-Sunni conversions and very little has been done legally in terms of reconciliation between the two groups. In terms of checks on power, both states have no real limits to the monarchies' powers in terms of constitutional provisions, but Jordan appears to have more functional limitations upon the king than does Bahrain. Lastly, both states heavily regulate their media and academic spheres under the law to ensure a supportive message is preached by both. Those who allow heterodox messaging are quickly silenced or imprisoned. It is through this legalization of monarchical power that the dynasties have enshrined traditions of their influence and have, following Gerschewski's reasoning, managed to "settle expectations" that theirs will be the final word regarding all political issues in the countries.

## The Third Pillar: Political Narratives within the States

### How This Chapter Works

This chapter is dedicated to analyzing the political narrative within the states. This pillar builds upon Gerschewski's concept of a concrete expression of consent,<sup>265</sup> which the OECD

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<sup>265</sup> Gerschewski, *Legitimacy in autocracies: Oxymoron or essential feature?*

refers to as the “belief” category.<sup>266</sup> By this term, OECD refers to the “belief” by the people that the government or regime is broadly justified in its claim to rule.<sup>267</sup> Although such beliefs may be based on history, they may also result from the ways in which governments market their rule to their citizens. To analyze the ways in which governments use this pillar, this chapter will focus in on the appeals the governments make to their own people.

For the sake of simplicity, these appeals will be divided into three overarching categories: (1) “National Unity” – statements asserting that the government is the guarantor of social cohesion, often by highlighting diversity and attempting to appeal to minority groups or those seeking inclusion; (2) “Reform” – statements promising coming political reform, promising modernization or increased government representation even if these promises do not come to pass; and (3) “Security Concerns” – statements suggesting that the government provides safety and that changes to the government represent potential threats to the citizens. In analyzing all three of these categories the most important factor is *not* if the government actually delivered on its promises, increased representation or civil rights are tangential to this analysis. It is also less important to determine whether the people actually believed the government. Instead, what matters is whether the government *promised* or else *suggested* that it was responsible for this as an appeal to the people. This is purely meant as a comparison of the strategies the governments make when legitimizing – pursuing legitimacy – it is not meant to suggest one strategy is superior to another.

The sources for this analysis will come from official government statements. The first source for both governments will be the speeches made by the two kings and their respective crown princes. Both kings have official websites which provide transcripts of their speeches and forty speeches from both nations will be analyzed to compare.<sup>268</sup> The next best sources for government perspectives are actually the official newspapers of Jordan and Bahrain. Both monarchies have state-run medias which are dictated by the government. For Jordan this is the “Petra” Jordan News Agency and for Bahrain the similarly named “Bahrain News Agency.”<sup>269</sup> For the monarch’s speeches, the date range will extend from 1999 to the present. Here it is

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<sup>266</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. *The state’s legitimacy in fragile situations*.

<sup>267</sup> *Id.*

<sup>268</sup> Royal Hashemite Court. “Speeches.” King Abdullah II Official Website. <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches>  
Royal Court of Bahrain, Office of H.R.H. Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. “Speeches.” HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa Official Website. <https://www.crownprince.bh/en/media-center/speeches/>

<sup>269</sup> Jordan News Agency <https://www.petra.gov.jo/Include/Main.jsp?lang=en>,  
Bahrain News Agency <https://www.bna.bh/en/index.aspx>

additionally worth noting that governments use these two tools – royal speeches and state-run media – in different ways. Royal speeches tend to be more euphemistic and subtle in their messaging whereas the media articles tend to be much more overt in their propaganda and hagiography.

Beginning with the initial assumptions, Jordan has often been described as relying heavily upon its legitimacy narrative, specifically in appealing to religious groups (both minorities and the Sunni Muslim majority).<sup>270</sup> The reason for this, as mentioned in chapter one is due the fact that the Hashemite dynasty claims direct descent from Mohammed and also enjoys the stewardship over holy sites in Jerusalem. Accordingly, Jordan will likely focus most heavily on promises of National Unity with religious appeals. Bahrain occupies a very different place, instead relying on assurances that the monarchy provides security.<sup>271</sup> As the country has been noted to rule by a divide-and-conquer style learned from the British, diversity and foreigners are likely to be viewed as tools to pit rivals against one another. Therefore, it would make the most sense if this country pursued a strategy relying on Security Concerns and much less upon National Unity. Even if the al-Khalifa dynasty does speak on the topic of Unity, it will likely do so in a way which is different from Jordan as it lacks the same popularity surrounding its own religious background in the eyes of its people. Neither state is expected to speak much about Reform. This makes sense given the known stability of Arab monarchies. If nothing is broken in the eyes of the government, there should be very little reason to even hint at change. Additionally, for both states, legal reform would likely imply some diminishing of the monarchies' powers, which is something they are likely to regard as unfavorable.

## Patterns of Jordanian Dialogue

Jordan largely followed expected trends, emphasizing National Unity topics far above any other topic in both its royal speeches and news articles. When it came to this category, the two issues raised most frequently were calls for aid or support for Palestinians both within Jordan and outside the country as well as reminders that Jordan supports all Abrahamic religions and is the custodian of holy sites. What should be noted here is that even though the Hashemites employ language which is outwardly favorable to Palestinians, it is almost always couched in

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<sup>270</sup> Sharnoff, *The Hashemite Regime on Jordanian Postage Stamps: A Visual History of Nation-Building*.

<sup>271</sup> Davidson, *Bahrain: The crisis of monarchy*

attempts to legitimize or strengthen themselves as a form of conditional inclusion. When refugees are not actively beneficial to the regime, the regime does not seem to show them any more favor than is necessary. Regarding the other two categories, the Hashemites themselves make only a few references to Security in the nation, allowing the media to handle this in the form of numerous propagandist articles highlighting military successes and the importance of service. The issue of Reform is nearly untouched by either the monarchy or the media.

Beginning with the concept of “Unity,” this was the concept that showed up most frequently and prominently, especially as discussed by King Abdullah II. The issues included within this topic were primarily related to either discussion of Jordan’s custodianship over the holy sites of Jerusalem or else supporting Palestinian refugees within the Kingdom. The reason for this is clear and stated by the king himself, “Jordan hosts nearly 4 million refugees of different nationalities [the majority of whom are Palestinian] ... this is over a third of our 11 million population.”<sup>272</sup> By emphasizing Palestinian issues, the king appeals to one of the largest ethnic groups in his country. Similarly, ties between Jordan and Palestine – especially West Jerusalem and the holy sites there – reinforce the notion of the king as the rightful ruler of at least some Palestinian territory. The king also issued speeches supporting Palestinians *outside* of Jordan (a factor which is still noteworthy as it does garner support from those Palestinians who are living in Jordan and also builds upon the king’s image as a defender of Palestine). Yet Jordan’s “unconditional” support for Palestinians should be taken with a grain of salt in part due to the tendency of Jordan to only mention the specific number of refugees it has taken in when it is speaking to large international organizations and seeking support. This could thus suggest at least an element of taking in refugees to earn funding for one of the water-poorest countries in the world.

The “Hashemite Custodianship” of holy sites is also mentioned across seventeen speeches, more frequently than any other phrase or issue. King Abdullah II mentions his “historic duty to safeguard Muslim and Christian holy sites under the Hashemite Custodianship”<sup>273</sup> with great frequency. Another point frequently cited by the king is the “Pact of

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<sup>272</sup> Abdullah II of Jordan, “At the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva,” speech delivered in Geneva, Switzerland, December 13, 2023, Royal Hashemite Court, <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/global-refugee-forum-geneva>

<sup>273</sup> Abdullah II of Jordan, “Address by His Majesty King Abdullah II at the Extraordinary Arab Summit in Egypt,” speech delivered at the Extraordinary Arab Summit, Cairo, Egypt, March 4, 2025, Royal Hashemite Court, <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/address-by-his-majesty-king-abdullah-ii-at-the-extraordinary-arab-summit-in-egypt-1>

Omar” an ancient document whereby the Christians living in the Middle East agreed to become vassalized by the Islamic conquerors in exchange for certain rights including the protection of churches and priests. Three times the king discusses this otherwise fairly obscure point in history, always in justification and explanation for why he, a Muslim, should be a guardian of Christian sites. Other positive lines regarding religious diversity mentioned by the king include “Christianity is vital to the past and present of our region and the Holy Land. It must remain an integral part of our future”<sup>274</sup> and “the only path to a safe and secure future for the people of the Middle East and the entire world—for the Jewish people, for Christians, for Muslims alike—starts with the belief that every human life is of equal value.”<sup>275</sup> This tolerance for other religions serves multiple purposes: it gives Jordan a claim to administer territory within Israel and West Palestine; it encourages tourism to the state; and it helps to give the king the image of an “enlightened technocrat” who values diversity and inclusion and is working towards a better future for all. It is for this reason that, as mentioned in chapter one, Christians make up some of the monarchy’s greatest supporters.<sup>276</sup> In the past, Christian groups received the most aid from the West in the form of schools and missions to support them, leading to their becoming a highly educated and wealthy class.<sup>277</sup> This inequality still exists and Christians still possess an exaggerated power in society relative to their demographic size, making them an attractive group to court.<sup>278</sup>

However, just because so many speeches relate to topics of diversity and winning support from Christians and Palestinian refugees does not mean that they all reference diversity positively – one comment seems to speak against Jordanian diversity. At the Plenary Session of the 78th General Assembly of the United Nations, the king stated, “Syrian refugees’ future is in their country, not in host countries.”<sup>279</sup> This might be taken to suggest that Syrian refugees in Jordan are not welcome in the long term as Jordan is not where their future lies. This is

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<sup>274</sup> Abdullah II of Jordan, “77th Plenary Session of the UN General Assembly,” speech delivered at the United Nations General Assembly, New York, United States, September 20, 2022, Royal Hashemite Court, <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/77th-plenary-session-un-general-assembly>

<sup>275</sup> Abdullah II of Jordan, “Cairo Summit for Peace,” speech delivered at the Cairo Summit for Peace, Cairo, Egypt, October 21, 2023, Royal Hashemite Court, <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/cairo-summit-peace>

<sup>276</sup> Belge and Karakoç *Minorities in the Middle East: Ethnicity, Religion, and Support for Authoritarianism*.

<sup>277</sup> Id.

<sup>278</sup> Id.

<sup>279</sup> Abdullah II of Jordan, “Plenary Session of the 78th General Assembly of the United Nations,” speech delivered at the United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Headquarters, New York City, United States, September 19, 2023, Royal Hashemite Court, <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/plenary-session-the78th-general-assembly-united-nations>.

especially odd given the fact that earlier in this same speech, the king states that for many of these refugees “Jordan is the only place they have ever known—over 230,000 Syrian children have been born in Jordan since 2011.”<sup>280</sup> Again, this is suggesting that Syrians, even those who have only ever known Jordan, do not have a home in Jordan. However other points within this same speech, state that Jordan must “do right by them” until these refugees are able to return, and that “refugees are our brothers and sisters.”<sup>281</sup> All in all, this suggests a nuanced stance on refugees, they are spoken of sympathetically but (possibly because of a lack of a legitimate claim to rule over Syrians), the king still encourages to return home.

When it came to the media, the Jordan News Agency was extremely overt in singing the monarchy’s praises. Largely, the media echoed the monarchy’s positions on religion and the Palestinian issue. A strong example of this is available in an article where the media directly states that the king is “widely respected internationally for his credibility and pragmatic approach to conflict resolution, particularly regarding efforts to achieve a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East... the country has preserved its unity, stability, and sovereignty through the strong relationship between the Hashemite leadership and the Jordanian people.”<sup>282</sup> Tellingly, the media also added a connection between the government and religion in a line pertaining to a government program encouraging energy efficiency by stating “Friday sermons this week will also address the importance of rationalizing energy consumption and preserving resources through more efficient energy practices.”<sup>283</sup> This is intriguing as it implies that the government either exerts control over religious sermons or else that there is some level of coordination between the messaging of the church and state. Accordingly, sermons by religious leaders in Jordan might offer an additional source of propaganda control for the monarchy. One final article bears mentioning in this regard and is titled “King meets former PMs, says diversity of opinion strengthens Jordan, *as long as it serves public interest*,” (emphasis added).<sup>284</sup> Here, the king overtly states that differing opinions are to be tolerated only to the extent that doing so is useful,

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<sup>280</sup> Id.

<sup>281</sup> Id.

<sup>282</sup> Jordan News Agency, “Jordan’s Foreign Policy: Firm National Principles, Global Engagement,” May 24, 2026, <https://petra.gov.jo/en/news/jordans-foreign-policy-firm-national-principles-global-engagement>

<sup>283</sup> Jordan News Agency, “Ministry Launches National Campaign to Promote Efficient Energy Use,” May 21, 2026, <https://petra.gov.jo/en/news/ministry-launches-national-campaign-to-promote-efficient-energy-use>

<sup>284</sup> Abdullah II of Jordan, “King meets former PMs, says diversity of opinion strengthens Jordan, as long as it serves public interest,” 29 May, 2022, Royal Hashemite Court, <https://rhc.jo/en/news/king-meets-former-pms-says-diversity-opinion-strengthens-jordan-long-it-serves-public>

when not deemed “of public interest” different opinions are not worth protection, giving the government a monopoly on what types of speech are allowed.

The media also added an element of cultural unity otherwise unmentioned by the monarchy, tying the Jordanian identity to the concept of Hashemite rule. This can be seen in an article written for Jordan’s Independence Day where the festivals are noted as “reflecting great pride in the nation *and its Hashemite leadership*” (emphasis added) and later saying the flags symbolize “loyalty to the country and its leadership.”<sup>285</sup> Another article highlights the ways that the monarchy leans into Jordanian culture and customs, stating that during a royal wedding “The royal family, cognizant of the significance of these heritage practices, sought to emphasize and elevate them ... In doing so, they shared this joyous occasion with every son and daughter of Jordan, knowing that this national celebration belonged to all and evoked happiness in the hearts of every Jordanian.”<sup>286</sup> The media discussed ties between Jordan’s monarchy and its history repeatedly emphasizing that “Hashemite leadership has served as the foundation for building state institutions, embedding values of moderation, and advancing the comprehensive development process throughout Jordan’s history.”<sup>287</sup>

The second topic within Jordanian dialogue is “Security Concerns.” King Abdullah II seems to attribute a great deal of stability to having powerful armies as, nearly every time he mentioned prosperity, he was quick to thank his military for this. “Jordan is confident, stable, and secure, with the unity of its people and its formidable army and security agencies, as they safeguard the homeland, the people, and national achievements.”<sup>288</sup> This supports the government. A change to the government endangers the military which, in turn, endangers the civilians. Therefore, the civilians ought to support their king or else risk losing the security the monarchy provides through the loyal military. In another speech, King Abdullah II mentions the increased security challenges of the region as a result of the influx of refugees.<sup>289</sup> This might be similar to other ways in which the government uses refugees crises to heighten its power. Here,

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<sup>285</sup> Jordan News Agency, “Roman Theater hosts national celebrations marking 80th Independence Day,” May 24, 2026, <https://petra.gov.jo/en/news/roman-theater-hosts-national-celebrations-marking-80th-independence-day>

<sup>286</sup> Ammon News, “Royal wedding celebrations evoke Jordanian heritage, joyful diversity,” June 1, 2023, <https://en.ammonnews.net/article/66175>

<sup>287</sup> Jordan News Agency, “Ajloun National University President: Jordan’s narrative is built on Hashemite foundations,” May 16, 2026, [https://org.petra.gov.jo/Include/InnerPage.jsp?ID=84697&lang=en&name=en\\_news](https://org.petra.gov.jo/Include/InnerPage.jsp?ID=84697&lang=en&name=en_news)

<sup>288</sup> Abdullah II of Jordan, “On 76th Independence Day,”

<sup>289</sup> Abdullah II of Jordan, “At the Jeddah Security and Development Summit,” speech delivered at the Jeddah Security and Development Summit, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, July 16, 2022, Royal Hashemite Court, <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/jeddah-security-and-development-summit>

instead of using increased numbers of refugees as a way of legitimizing a request for support, the government may be using the refugees to suggest instability around the border and justifying increased military presence and, though this military, increased executive authority. Lastly, the king also highlights Lebanon as a country which failed and laments that this was, at least in part, due to the lack of a strong military to defend Lebanon.<sup>290</sup> The king suggests that restoring Lebanon to stability depends on it receiving a powerful Lebanese Armed Forces unit which will be able to provide security as a basis for other goods, this suggests that the king puts stock in the military as a security provider.<sup>291</sup>

The media was much more direct in its support of the military and numerous articles highlight foiled border infiltrations on all sides. Those seeking to cross the border illegally include both drug traffickers and infiltrators from Syria, possibly refugees.<sup>292</sup> In some cases, multiple such victories were published in one day, even when the events themselves did not occur contemporaneously.<sup>293</sup> The military was also deployed to protect pilgrims on the Hajj, linking the government to religious security and providing a very visible way of displaying the government's authority. Lastly, the media celebrated the new policies of military service by quoting speakers who stated that the new policy is “‘not merely a return to a military tradition, but a revival of national spirit and a reshaping of the Jordanian youth character to be more resilient and capable of meeting the challenges of the modern era,’ in line with royal directives.”<sup>294</sup> This service revives national spirit and reshapes youth character, the article claims.<sup>295</sup>

The final topic – “Reform” – was mentioned far more sparingly than either of the others by both the king and the state-run media. On this topic, the king offered little in terms of specifics. The most frequent mention was a general exhortation to the people to stay strong “so

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<sup>290</sup> Abdullah II of Jordan, “At the Conference to Support the Population of Lebanon,” speech delivered at Amman, Jordan, August 4, 2021, Royal Hashemite

Court, <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/conference-support-population-lebanon>

<sup>291</sup> Id.

<sup>292</sup> Jordan News Agency, “Southern military region foils drone-based drug smuggling attempt,” May 20, 2026

<https://petra.gov.jo/en/news/southern-military-region-foils-drone-based-drug-smuggling-attempt> and Jordan News Agency, “Northern Military Zone Foils Border Infiltration Attempt,” May 20, 2026

<https://petra.gov.jo/en/news/northern-military-zone-foils-border-infiltration-attempt>

<sup>293</sup> Id.

<sup>294</sup> Jordan News Agency, “National military service “revives national spirit and reshapes youth character,” say experts” May 5, 2026,

<https://petra.gov.jo/en/news/national-military-service-revives-national-spirit-and-reshapes-youth-character-say-experts>

<sup>295</sup> Id.

that Jordan may continue on its path of progress and modernization.”<sup>296</sup> In terms of *political* reform, the king only mentioned this subject once, which is consistent with the expectation that this would not be a favorable topic with the established ruler. Here, while speaking at the 76<sup>th</sup> Independence Day, the king did not promise future reforms, but he did note that some reforms had *already* taken place.<sup>297</sup>

We have opened a new chapter of progress and modernization, with the completion of a system of legislation related to political modernization. And we will embark on an important transitional phase to build partisan and parliamentary life, paving the way to platform-based campaigning to serve Jordanians under the umbrella of strong legislative and executive institutions, and a state rooted in the rule of law on all, without discrimination or favoritism.<sup>298</sup>

The Jordan News Agency, for its part, abstained from most conversations about internal politics, though it did include one article which agreed with the Senate President Faisal Fayezi that reform is a vital issue and that modernization efforts in the state aimed at empowering women and upholding human rights ought to continue.<sup>299</sup> Aside from this, very little suggestion of reform can be found and virtually no criticism of any government policy or official has been published as it seems that the media deems it safer to stay out of internal politics altogether. This was the conclusion of the Union Election Observation Mission during the 2024 elections in Jordan where it found that the news “failed to provide an adequate and comprehensive coverage of the election campaign.”<sup>300</sup> One reason for this, the mission believed, was that the news was worried about “being perceived as biased or aligned with any political force [and so] most media outlets chose to focus their prime-time content [elsewhere].”<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Abdullah II of Jordan, “His Majesty King Abdullah II on the 79th Independence Day,” speech delivered in Amman, Jordan, May 25, 2025, Royal Hashemite Court, <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/his-majesty-king-abdullah-ii-on-the-79th-independence-day-1>

<sup>297</sup> Abdullah II of Jordan, “On 76th Independence Day,” speech delivered in Amman, Jordan, May 25, 2022, Royal Hashemite Court, <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/76th-independence-day>

<sup>298</sup> Id.

<sup>299</sup> Jordan News Agency, “Senate President, British Constitutional Expert Talk Reform” February 16, 2026, <https://petra.gov.jo/en/news/senate-president-british-constitutional-expert%C2%A0talk-reform>

<sup>300</sup> European Union Election Observation Mission to Jordan 2024, Final Report: Elections to the House of Representatives, 10 September 2024 (Brussels: European External Action Service, 2024), <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2024/EU%20EOM%20JOR%202024%20Final%20Report.pdf>

<sup>301</sup> Id.

In summation, Jordan primarily focused on the topic of Unity, using refugee issues as well as religious claims to garner support in the form of aid internationally and public support for the government domestically. At the same time, when refugee rights were not to the monarchy's advantage, refugees were framed as a problem to be returned to their own countries or even turned back by the military, protecting Jordanians. Reform was a rarely mentioned topic and almost always limited to the work which had already been done, rather than suggesting any future work towards that field. The monarchy appeared to use state-run media with a much heavier hand than it did for its own speeches, having the media run overtly positive articles which directly praised the monarchy and attributed certain ideas of national identity to the Hashemite dynasty.

## Patterns of Bahraini Dialogue

Bahrain, similar to Jordan, followed the expected trend, though with a caveat. Both the king and the media spoke most about Unity though the focus here was mainly on a lack of and need for national unity in the face of foreign threats (meaning Iran). The monarchy also touted the importance of Security while making some concessions to past Reforms which it had already implemented. However, it should be noted that nearly half of all speeches made from the throne did not relate to any topic of legitimation whatsoever. There were no mentions of national unity, reforms, or the military and instead many of these speeches were limited to praising economic growth and seeking investors or else highlighting close relations between Bahrain and other states, keeping matters international rather than referring to the domestic situation. Overall, this might suggest that the matter of legitimation through political dialogue is less stressed by the monarchy itself. Instead, legitimation seems to fall more squarely on the state media which spoke about all of these issues frequently and trumpeted resounding successes in all fields, bordering on raw propaganda.

When the monarchy did speak about Unity, the majority of the time it highlighted the importance of unity, though often to the detriment of issues of diversity. An example of this can be seen in King Hamad's 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Address of the 6<sup>th</sup> Legislative Term.<sup>302</sup> There, he began by highlighting the national identity of Bahrainis and the importance of "upholding national

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<sup>302</sup> Hamad al Khalifa of Bahrain, "1<sup>st</sup> Royal Address of the 6<sup>th</sup> Legislative Term," speech delivered at the Shura Council of Bahrain, His Majesty the King's Words, <https://shura.bh/en/majesty-kings-words?lt=7&cp=23>

identity... and rejecting manifestations of fanaticism, hatred, and *foreign allegiances*” (emphasis added).<sup>303</sup> Given the context of Bahraini society, it is likely that the “fanaticism” being preached against represents the Shia faith and foreign allegiances either refers to the claims by the Bahraini government that Shiite protests demanding equal rights are the product of Iranian meddling or else to the large number of migrant workers from South Asia living in squalor.

This is seen again in the King’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Address of the 6<sup>th</sup> Legislative Term where he exhorted authorities to conduct a comprehensive study to determine ways to “consolidate the Bahraini identity.”<sup>304</sup> Again, this seems counterproductive to the concept of diversity as a “consolidation” would mean a strengthening or reinforcing. If the goal is to strengthen or fortify the Bahraini identity, that necessitates an othering of non-Bahrainis. The Bahraini view on diversity is perhaps best summarized in a 2012 speech by Crown Prince Salman made shortly after the Arab Spring. Here, the Prince laments the “silent majority... who feel their voices are unheard.”<sup>305</sup> The Prince explains that these people are those who “live in mixed communities, representing different sects, ethnicities, and political beliefs. They are the ones who have to live... with the specter of a sectarian conflict.”<sup>306</sup> Diversity, to the government of Bahrain, is a purely dangerous thing because it divides people and is more likely than not to fuel conflict between neighbors.

The media, on the other hand, had much to say about this issue. In terms of national unity, the media frequently praised the nation for its existing unity. The media exhibits close connections with the government and several articles emphasize the role of the media in “promoting national unity, highlighting achievements, and enhancing Bahrain’s standing internationally.”<sup>307</sup> Similar celebrations for promoting national unity can be seen in articles praising the role of the radio,<sup>308</sup> university messaging,<sup>309</sup> and the work done by the monarchy

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<sup>303</sup> Id.

<sup>304</sup> Hamad al Khalifa of Bahrain, “3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Address of the 6<sup>th</sup> Legislative Term,” speech delivered at the Shura Council of Bahrain, His Majesty the King’s Words, <https://shura.bh/en/majesty-kings-words?lt=7&cp=23>

<sup>305</sup> Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, “Speech,” speech delivered in Bahrain, November 11, 2021, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Bahrain, <https://www.crownprince.bh/en/speech/2381/>.

<sup>306</sup> Id.

<sup>307</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “BJA reviews key achievements of Press and Digital Media Law,” November 10, 2025, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=817718>

<sup>308</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “HM King thanked by Information Minister for statement on Radio Bahrain’s 85th anniversary,” November 4, 2025, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=816855>

<sup>309</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “On behalf of HRH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister inaugurates new Abdullah bin Khalid College of Islamic Studies building,” August 14, 2025, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=806075>

itself.<sup>310</sup> Interestingly, the media also spoke of diversity but when it did so, it had two tendencies: either it spoke of how well groups were already getting along, all thanks to the king, or it would promote comparatively “safe” categories of diversity and inclusion by speaking in favor of women’s rights. Examples of the former can be seen in numerous articles which all include variations on the same claim that Bahrain is a “beacon of tolerance, religious and cultural diversity, and coexistence in an environment of stability, harmony, and mutual respect”<sup>311</sup> or else “a global model for embracing cultural and religious diversity and strengthening civilizational exchange.”<sup>312</sup> In this way, it seems that Bahrain is trying to leverage its international standing, though it is unclear to what end: is the state trying to make itself seem tolerant in the eyes of the international community to lure in investors or is the state trying to assure its people that it has international recognition and legitimacy? In terms of diversity, the media largely avoids thorny discussions of Shiites and instead focuses on inclusion of women going forward.<sup>313</sup> As women are equally represented among the favored Sunni groups, promoting women’s rights is a simple way of performative inclusion without actually changing systematic problems. Women’s rights do not seem to be a particularly controversial reform within Bahrain and increasing them wins favor from Western allies.

The monarchy spoke of “Security” only sparingly and always in general terms of a world peace while making speeches at military academy graduation ceremonies. Instead, most of this work was left to the media. Here, the media did not speak of Bahrain’s military itself very often (which is a logical thing to do consider that Bahrain does not possess a particularly significant military), but instead highlighted the role of Bahrain’s many alliances and international cooperation. Articles tout Bahrain’s Interior Minister meeting with a NATO delegation to discuss how “Bahrain’s strategic alliances play a central role in safeguarding the stability, progress, and prosperity achieved under the Kingdom’s leadership.”<sup>314</sup> There are two parts to note in this quote, the first being that the stability and prosperity is attributed to the leadership, meaning the

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<sup>310</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “Foreign Minister highlights Bahrain’s commitment to tolerance as a cornerstone for global peace and prosperity,” November 16, 2024, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=773267>

<sup>311</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “KHGC Chairman: Bahrain under HM the King’s leadership a model of peace and dialogue” November 15, 2025, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=818267>

<sup>312</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “Parliamentary Division affirms Bahrain’s strong foundation for tolerance and cultural coexistence,” October 30, 2025, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=816016>

<sup>313</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “Gulf Air Group honors Bahraini Women pioneering future of aviation,” December 1, 2025, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=820342>

<sup>314</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “Interior Minister meets NATO Parliamentary Assembly delegation,” November 19, 2025, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=818813>

monarchy, and the second being that these things are preserved and protected by powerful international forces. This both signals to the people that the al-Khalifa dynasty is noted on the world stage as well as suggests to theoretical enemies that Bahrain is protected. Bahrain also participated in international security exercises along with several other states, a fact highlighted by the media.<sup>315</sup> These exercises serve to “reinforce regional and international stability.”<sup>316</sup> Similar stability and safety issues are highlighted by the media when speaking of domestic issues. In one article, the media celebrates Bahrain’s high levels of law and order but notes that this “places a major responsibility on the legislative authority to continue supporting the legal and regulatory framework that preserves these achievements.”<sup>317</sup> Here, the idea is to suggest that the legislative authorities need to continue supporting the legislative framework. It is not their duty to *change* the law or to *create* the law, but instead to *support* the law. The true source of the law in Bahrain is the al-Khalifa dynasty, not the legislative branch. Since the framework provided by the monarchy, according to this article, is the root cause for the prosperity, it follows that a change to this framework (or a change to the monarchy’s power) could end the prosperity and security.

On the last issue, when it came to “Reform,” the monarchy spoke of the matter more often than expected. However, those speeches which did speak of reform were backward-looking, highlighting past reforms and speaking favorably about how Bahrain had progressed. This can be seen in Prince Salman’s speech during his 2011 visit to Turkey. There, he discussed the history of the reforms under his father:

When His Majesty the King decided to launch his reform program, over ten years ago today... [h]e instituted a bicameral parliamentary system, an independent judiciary, an independent Prosecutor General, ended the state security law, freed the press law, released all political prisoners, and called for all of those people who were internationally at that time to return and to join in the new job of rebuilding the country. It has been an interesting ten years.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “Interior Minister inaugurates joint International Security Alliance exercise,” October 27, 2025, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=815466>

<sup>316</sup> Id.

<sup>317</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “Shura Chairman highlights Bahrain’s top ranking in 2024 Gallup Law and Order Index,” September 22, 2025, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=810363>

<sup>318</sup> Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, “Official Visit to Turkey,” speech delivered in Turkey, February 10, 2011, Crown Prince of Bahrain, <https://www.crownprince.bh/en/speech/2364/>

This is interesting both for the content but also for the way and time it is delivered. The speech was given in early 2011 just before the height of the Arab Spring. Yet the speech is not about current reforms nor does it promise future reforms, instead, it highlights all of the ways in which the country is supposedly freer than ever, possibly in an effort to appease protestors without having to make any real concessions.

The media highlighted the issue much more frequently, but with a similar pattern as the monarchy, speaking of past achievements rather than moving towards future action. As the media in Bahrain often does, it was very quick to praise the state as already being “a cornerstone of administrative reform and institutional development.”<sup>319</sup> Praise for the existing progress was always given to the monarchy for issues from human trafficking (“[The attorney general] attributed Bahrain’s achievements in combating trafficking to the leadership of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa”<sup>320</sup>) to increased democratization (“the minister commended the role of Parliament in advancing democratic principles, transparency, and human rights, under the leadership of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and the guidance of His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister.”<sup>321</sup>). Again, the topic of women and gender equality appeared numerous times as the government included and celebrated women in leadership roles.<sup>322</sup>

When it came to Bahrain, the country seemed to largely refrain from using political dialogue as a means of legitimation, instead focusing the majority of its energy on international situations and then using its international status as the source of legitimacy. The monarchy and the media when they were dealing with issues of legitimation, did spend time discussing “National Unity,” though often in a way that suggested that diversity was something to be contained and managed by the government lest it become a threat. Surprisingly, the government did not speak much of security issues, but instead mentioned many reforms, even if these were past reforms and not promises of working towards a brighter future. The media was left with most of the heavy lifting in terms of messaging, as the monarchy instead devoted time and

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<sup>319</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “CSB President attends GCC ceremony honouring five Bahraini professionals with Civil Service Medal,” September 4, 2025, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=808324>

<sup>320</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “Bahrain marks World Day Against Trafficking in Persons,” July 29, 2025, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=804469>

<sup>321</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “Bahrain marks International Day of Parliamentarism,” June 29, 2025, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=801555>

<sup>322</sup> Bahrain News Agency, “Parliamentary delegation participates in International discussion on Gender Equality in Nationality Laws,” July 17, 2025, <https://www.bna.bh/en/ArchiveDetails.aspx?archiveId=803314>

resources to international ties. Here, the media mostly went along with the official government narrative while also adding the additional topic of women's rights as a subject of importance.

## Pillar Review

In conclusion as regards this pillar, both states made efforts at using the political narrative to legitimize themselves, however the ways in which they approached this topic differed considerably. The two tools the monarchies had were their own speechmaking abilities and the messaging provided by the state-run media. Here, the governments were most similar as both issued rather moderate speeches from the throne and left the overt hagiography work to the media, which was effusive in its praises for the kings. Jordan, as expected, focused on its national unity narrative in both the speeches made by the king as well as in the media, where the topics of Palestinian and refugee rights were extolled when it was possible for the monarchy to gain something. Bahrain instead spoke of national unity as being under threat by diversity and needing a stronger national identity. In both cases, the underlying issue and the goal (increased government legitimacy) was the same, but the methods by which the governments went about their task were completely different – one celebrated diversity conditionally and one viewed it with skepticism. Both governments were largely supportive of their militaries, both officially and through the media. Jordan favored more local involvement in the military and Bahrain sought protection from international actors. Neither state spoke often on the question of “reform,” which was to be expected as both would view this as an undesirable goal and so both states, when forced into such discussions, tended to speak of reform only in hindsight and after extolling their current progress towards a better society. This chapter has thus shown how states can have very similar goals, issues, and tools, but approach their issues with very different methods. One state turned inwards for support while another turned outwards.

## Conclusion

The Hashemites of Jordan and the al-Khalifa of Bahrain pursue legitimacy in markedly different ways. Both engage in legitimization strategies with broad stroke pillars similar to what would be expected by Gerschewski, using history, law, and politics to shape narratives justifying their rule, but the ways in which these are used differ.

History, also referred to as the justifiability pillar, is important to questions of legitimation as it serves to both differentiate the current government from past governments as well as to create a bond between the people and their rulers. In Jordan, where no government existed prior to the monarchy, the Hashemites have been very effective in tying their story to that of their people. Their work has been imperfect and a comprehensive “Jordanian” identity has not yet been created as questions of the Palestinian persist, but the Hashemites have established themselves historically as being closely tied to their subjects. This stands in marked contrast to Bahrain where the al-Khalifas have used history to frame their rule as a “just, Muslim” rule over previously “non-Muslim” lands, using the language of “fateh” opening identical to the original Muslim conquests. Although it differentiates al-Khalifa rule from earlier, allegedly less Muslim, rule it does not ingratiate the dynasty to the Shiites who still live in Bahrain. The result of this difference in effectiveness is that when both dynasties were faced with internal schisms arising from issues of demographic appeal, the Hashemites saw the much milder Hamzah Affair while the al-Khalifa suffered from the Khawalid breakage which has haunted them for decades.

Legally, the Jordanians have been better at framing themselves as enlightened modernizers, but the truth remains that both regimes are heavily authoritarian. The law is used as a tool to provide a sense of procedure and predictability to the dynasties’ actions, settling the peoples’ expectations. Jordan has allowed at least token resistance against its monarchy, though the actual power the opposition is given might be overstated, as is evidenced by Jordan’s oscillating Freedom House score, which operates on the border between “Partly Free” and “Not Free.” Meanwhile, despite the fact that Bahrain has an oppressive constitution, it is still worth mentioning that prior to the Arab Spring, nearly all calls for reform were always framed as being within the confines of the existing document, not a departure from the constitutional monarchy it outlined.<sup>323</sup>

Politically, narratives can be used to foster a sense of national identity, as well as what is and is not socially acceptable. Those narratives which are pushed by the governments of Jordan and Bahrain show how they seek to present themselves to their people and to the greater international community. Both states have tended to use the media to push stronger narratives than the ones they issue from the throne, but the types of narrative they have offered have

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<sup>323</sup> Gause, F. Gregory. *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994

differed. Jordan has focused far more on issues of religion and diversity, making appeals directly to its own people, legitimizing at home first before going abroad. Bahrain, on the other hand, has sought to use political narratives to show the people that it is internationally legitimate, emphasizing its cooperation networks as well as those honors which international organizations bestow upon it.

In conclusion, the Hashemites have been significantly better able to connect with the people than the al-Khalifas despite both dynasties being foreign to their ruled population. The Hashemites have done this by emphasizing shared history positively, allowing for token concessions legally, and emphasizing their political wins domestically through direct appeals. Going forward, as rumors that Bahrain may exhaust its oil reserves persist, the al-Khalifa dynasty may seek to pivot towards this form of legitimation, deemphasizing its Sunni nature over the Shiites and potentially allowing the recreation (albeit in a very limited form) of the opposition al-Wefaq party.

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