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## Jordan's Response in Mitigating the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Impact of Public Policy in Addressing a Pandemic

### Cover Page Footnote

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## Jordan's Response in Mitigating the COVID-19 Pandemic: *The Impact of Public Policy in Addressing a Pandemic*

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### Abstract

The world is currently facing one of the most rapidly spreading pandemics of our time, swift actions by governments in controlling the spread of the virus in their countries is determined by the number of cases recorded. This Global pandemic has moved governments in an uncertain space due to the rapid and almost uncontrollable spread of the virus once it hits a community. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is commended for the quick action taken to control and overcome the spread of the COVID-19 virus within its lands. This article discusses the approach Jordan uses to control the spread of the virus in its lands, some which are commendable by the international community. The study further analysis Jordan's public policy approach and the citizens reaction to these policies and its direct impact on their daily lives and economy Post-COVID 19.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 Pandemic Response in Jordan, Public Policy, Economic Impact.

### استجابة الأردن للحد من جائحة فيروس كورونا المستجد: تأثير السياسة العامة في معالجة الوباء

#### ملخص

يواجه العالم في عصرنا الحالي واحدة من أسرع الأوبئة انتشاراً، ويتم تحديد الإجراءات السريعة التي تتخذها الحكومات للسيطرة على انتشار الفيروس في بلدانها بناء على عدد الحالات المسجلة. لقد وضع هذا الوباء العالمي الحكومات في مكان غير مسبوق بسبب الانتشار السريع، الذي لا يمكن السيطرة عليه تقريباً، للفيروس بمجرد أن يصيب المجتمع. ويشاد بالمملكة الأردنية الهاشمية للإجراءات السريعة التي اتخذتها للسيطرة على انتشار فيروس كورونا المستجد والسيطرة عليه داخل أراضيها. تناقش هذه الدراسة النهج الذي استخدمه الأردن للحد من انتشار الفيروس على أرضيه، وكان بعض هذه الإجراءات

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يستحق الثناء من المجتمع الدولي. وكما قامت الدراسة بالمزيد من التحليل لنهج السياسة العامة الأردنية ورد فعل المواطنين على هذه السياسات بالإضافة إلى تأثيره المباشر على حياتهم اليومية والاقتصاد لما بعد فيروس كورونا المستجد.  
الكلمات المفتاحية: استجابة الأردن لجائحة فيروس كورونا المستجد، السياسة العامة، التأثير الاقتصادي.

## Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic is one of the most infectious diseases the world has ever experienced. The disease is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome known as Coronavirus 2. The virus originated from Wuhan, China in 2019 and it quickly spread across the globe. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, over 13 million confirmed cases and 586,000 deaths have been recorded globally. The rapid spread of the virus has put the world on a stand still, the global economy is deeply affected thus resulting to one of the biggest economic crises ever experienced since the global financial crisis in 2008.

This article focused on the impact of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic in Jordan and the response approach taken by the Jordanian government. The study discussed the issuance of the defense law in Jordan and its impact on the daily lives of citizens, a close look at some of the immediate approaches taken by the government to mitigate the spread of the virus, the support available to communities during the lockdown in order to discourage peoples movements, some of the measures taken by the government to flatten the COVID-19 Curve are further discussed. The researcher highlighted the economic impact of the COVID 19 in Jordan and an analysis of early mitigation strategies were discussed to minimize the impact. This article further studied the role of public polices and how important it is to have public policy specialist in decision making institutions and authorities. Lastly the article highlighted public opinion on the above-mentioned policies and actions taken during this pandemic.

## Defense Law: The First Defense Law was in Jordan Issued

The COVID 19 Pandemic is deeply affecting countries across the globe, with the increasing number of cases and deaths being recorded daily due to the fast transmission of the virus which there are ongoing research and debates on the virus being airborne or not. In the case of Jordan, the government is strictly adhering to the safety measures and precautions for governments and individuals to contain the fast spread of the virus recommended by the World Health Organization. The government has taken shift measures to prevent and control the spread of the virus across the country through communicated strategies.

A strategy in place to curtail the spread of the virus was announced in the City of Amman by the Jordanian Royal family, King Abdullah II on March 17<sup>th</sup> 2020, this is known as the defense Law. The defense law is a coping mechanism set to combat the fast spread of the virus within Jordan. The Law enables government authorities with the power to set restraining others such as enforcing curfews, the ban of public gatherings, and inspecting individuals, these measures were set to enable the country to combat the Coronavirus. The issuance of the defense law ensured that citizens wear face masks anytime they are in public places. According to King Abdullah II, the defense law is not meant to deprive Jordanian citizens of their basic rights rather the law is there to ensure the protection and well-being of citizens during this pandemic.

In 1992, Jordan's first defense law was established, and this Law allows government security service to strictly enforce curfew within the country. This measure stopped people's movement except during emergencies to limit public gatherings. The law as far as allows authorities to arrest and detain citizens found not abiding to the Law<sup>(1)</sup>.

The 1992 defense law supported the nationwide curfew which was immediately followed by a state of emergency empowering the government to enforce an army imposed curfew with strict measures to be abided by citizens<sup>(2)</sup>.

The strict measures enforced during the state of emergency includes a lockdown of the Capital city of Amman from all regions within Jordan thus directly banning travels outside of the city. Additionally, Jordan's land and sea boarders with its neighboring countries were put on temporary lockdown.

### **How Jordan was a Role Model in Dealing with the Virus**

March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020, Jordan's first case of COVID 19 was confirmed from a traveler from Italy to Jordan. The government's response to the confirmed case was swift. A response that was not experienced in the country since September 1971. A curfew was announced, total lockdown of the country from all entry points, social distancing was immediately imposed especially in the densely populated regions of the country, over 5,000 travelers into Jordan were quarantined, the government used five star hotels as quarantine zones for these visitors which were mainly located within and near the Dead Sea<sup>(3)</sup>.

Jordan's quick and swift measures were no other in the entire Arab region and the objective was achieved because the country recorded low cases of COVID 19 since its first case thus making the country an exemplary role model for other nations in dealing with the COVID 19 pandemic.

By 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020, the country recorded 407 new cases of the Coronavirus, 7 deaths and 250 recoveries were achieved. Jordan's swift response to the

COVID-19 pandemic response was triggered by necessity because of the impact the spread of the virus has made in other countries and regions globally. Thus, the Jordanian government was able to place quick and extensive laws to quickly curtail the impact of the virus. The governments continued and resilient protection of its people both internally and externally with the high number of refugees (over 5million) and refugee camps within the country, the government had to maintain strict measures to avoid a drastic spread and impact of the virus.

On 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020, Jordanians participated both local and national level to contribute to the social-distancing measures as recommended by the WHO, according to Jordan's former minister of Social development, culture, labor and health implementing the defense law wasn't restraining because Jordanians are generally law-abiding citizens and that has enabled government in containing the virus from spreading. Few weeks after the announcement of the curfew, the government decided to loosen few measures such as allowing convenience stores to open across Jordan but at a certain time frame to allow citizens to be able to purchase basic necessities<sup>(4)</sup>.

Notable steps taken by the government during this period was the delivery of basic food supplies to communities and refugee camps across Jordan. The government employed the services of the Jordan armed forces and other security agents to deliver basic food necessities, water, and oil to limit citizen movements thus avoid public gatherings. The Jordan public institutions such as its security services played pivotal roles in not only restricting people's movements to also offering its services in distribution food items. Furthermore, the Government provided citizens with free internet services to keep people busy and entertained by at home, as well as online lectures were conducted to keep students occupied, the less-privileged families were provided with allowances, government staff were paid full salaries and governments urged the private sector to pay staff full salaries when they work from home while 50% salary paid to staff that couldn't work from home due to uncontrol circumstances.

These measures had really paid off for the Jordanian government, major regions in Jordan record very few cases while other regions have no cases such as Southern Jordan. Currently only the densely populated cities are recording cases such as the City of Amman, Irbid and Zarqa these are clear indications of a successful approach to early mitigation of the Coronavirus.

### **The Economic Impact**

The strict lockdown and defense law measures taken by the Jordanian government to mitigate the spread of COVID 19 has placed economic constraints on all governments including the Jordanian Government. Jordan produces a vast quantity of fruits and vegetables available in the country,

agriculture generally contributes 5.6% to the total GDP of the country by 2018. Another sector that contributes to the GDP is Jordan's service sector and this sector is greatly affected due to the lockdown. COVID 19 has great economic impact on governments and with these further constrains governments generally will have to place strategies for post-COVID 19 economic recovery and that includes Jordan.

Governments outlining strategies Post-COVID 19 is a major need right now, the pandemic has affected the Economy of Jordan and the global economy at large therefore we will experience a global shift in international affairs. The crisis after the corona virus will be a restraining economic period for Jordan especially in the service and agricultural sector which are currently affected by the lockdown and current government measures. Jordan produces a vast majority of its agricultural production such as fruits and vegetables and the country is self-sustained in meat and dairy products thus with an effective post-Coronavirus coping mechanism in line and country will effectively reduce the economic impact<sup>(5)</sup>.

The Coronavirus pandemic has placed great constrains on foreign aid and the availability of foreign aid post COVID 19 pandemic from affected donor agents will be challenging because these countries are also affected by the global economic downturn. Therefore, with the economic challenges faced by donor agents Jordan will face a complete reduction in foreign aid which will impact the economy even though foreign aid now contributes 7% of the economy. Even with the reduction in foreign aid the country needs the contribution of foreign aid post COVID 19 pandemic in other to sustain Jordan's economy. Thus, the Jordanian government needs to set up policies and strategic actions to move its economy from potential recession<sup>(6)</sup>.

### **Evaluating the Public Policy: What is the Policy and Drafting Government Decisions? What is the Theory of Unitary Decision?**

A unitary system of government, or unitary state, is a sovereign state governed as a single entity. The central government is supreme, and the administrative divisions exercise only powers that the central government has delegated to them.

The system of governance in Jordan is the unitary system approach which is overseen by the country's constitution Monarchy which was adopted in 1952. This constitution is the supreme law that directly governs the Monarch, which directly governs the other legislative bodies such as the government, bicameral legislature, and judiciary<sup>(7)</sup>.

Since the first case of the Coronavirus was recorded in Jordan, the Jordanian authorities strategized a set of measures to immediately mitigate the spread of the COVID 19 virus. Some of the mitigating approaches taken by the government are: closing of all borders and the airspace, schools were short down including Universities, public gatherings were cancelled by shorting down businesses and leisure centers that will encourage such gatherings, citizens were placed in self-quarantine.

Government decisions were put into action through the implementation of the defense law thus enforcing strict curfews, to limit the movement of people by enforcing it. Government authorities further lunched a campaign for effective communication awareness's about the virus among the people of Jordan. Another measure taken by the government is to increase the number of medical staff in hospitals, additionally government used the services of its security personnel to distribute provisions within communities.

The concept of unitary decision is the case of Jordan can be directly linked to the decision made by King Abdullah II to adopt the defense law and this decision was supported by the government, bicameral legislature, and judiciary<sup>(8)</sup>.

#### **Who are the Main Figures in the Decision-Making Process?**

In Jordan, the fight to mitigate Coronavirus pandemic is led by the Jordanian Government by collaborating with various institutions such as the Jordan's National Center for Security and Crises Management (NCSCM). The NCSCM is the Jordanian government crisis management task force responsible for decision making and strategic planning for the fight against the Coronavirus in Jordan and this task force consist of various ministries across the government, institutions both private and public and Multi-lateral organizations with the sole objective of identifying and provide the best mitigation procedures, recommendations and action points.

#### **The Impact of Public Opinion, the Opinion of His Majesty and the Forces of Pressure**

The public opinion about governments approach to control covid-19 in Jordan is not positive, this came as a results of governments decision to activate the Defense Law<sup>(9)</sup>. The Defense Law No.13 of 1992 was activated following a royal decree that was issued by His Majesty King Abdullah II upon the recommendations of the council of ministers. This law is meant to give the Prime Minister the ultimate power to curtal citizens' rights and to take all the necessary actions to fight a treat that the country faces and in this case is the spread of covid-19 in the country<sup>(10)</sup>. Violators of this law can face a penalty of up to 3000



Jordanian Dinars or a jail term of up to three years<sup>(11)</sup>. The lockdown was initially set to last for two weeks after the announcement of the Defense Law, but the government later extended it until the 30<sup>th</sup> of April.

Aside from implementing the recommendations from the WHO, the Jordanian authorities went on to activate the defense law which was announced on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020<sup>(12)</sup>. This was followed by a suspension of all work duties in the private and public sectors and the closure of all industrial activities until further notice<sup>(13)</sup>. Following the lockdown was a decree that criminalizes the sharing of news or any information that is deemed to "cause panic" and the announcement was made on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020. The Jordanian authorities have arrested many journalists regarding their discussions in the media or online about Jordan's response to the covid-19, two other prominent media executives were also arrested and detained, a former member of the Jordanian parliament and a foreign journalist due to public criticism of the Jordanian government<sup>(14)</sup>. Many others were arrested for allegedly spreading fake news and these arrests were made after the Prime Minister stated that the decree will not interfere with the freedom of expression and the political rights of the Jordanians<sup>(15)</sup>.

These and other decisions of the authorities caused public outrage as a majority of the citizens are not happy with the authority's decision to criminalize the sharing of information or criticizing government actions toward the covid-19. The citizens believed that it is their right to discuss all covid-19 related issues and share covid-19 related news and information without fearing arrest, these they feel is their rights to and that the governments should not tamper with it<sup>(16)</sup>.

In contrast with the public opinion, His Majesty King Abdullah II thinks it is suitable to implement the Defense Law and announces a royal decree based on the cabinet's decision<sup>(17)</sup>. The King feels that covid-19 is a national threat and thus a need to cease the normal country laws in order to flatten the curve, the Jordanian government believes the Defense Law has helped the country with its rapid response in controlling the spread of the virus<sup>(18)</sup>.

### **Theories Regarding the Evaluations of Government Procedures and Response**

The fight against the covid-19 is led by the Jordanian government in collaboration with the National Center for Security and Crisis Management (NCSCM), the task force to handle this crisis is made up of people from organizations, ministries and sectors in order to come up with the best recommendations in combatting the virus<sup>(19)</sup>. A website was immediately created by the ministry of health and the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship to raise awareness and provide real time information to the public regarding covid-19<sup>(20)</sup>, the government also collaborated with Facebook to

boost their awareness campaign on covid-19 as Facebook is the most used social media platform currently<sup>(21)</sup>. The Jordanian government has responded quickly to the treats of covid-19, in protecting its citizens and residents from the virus, tuff measures were taken one of which is the declaring of a state of emergency to have a complete control over the movement and interactions of its citizens<sup>(22)</sup>. As mentioned above a complete shutdown was made to public and private institutions including non-essential industries to control the transition of the virus in the country<sup>(23)</sup>.

The country started with conducting temperature screenings at the entry ports and a mandatory quarantine to those who came from highly affected countries. This was followed by some preventive measures taken by the government and these measures include: the government placing strict laws by banning non-Jordanian citizens travelling from countries that have recorded high number of cases, additionally, the government placed control mechanisms to reduce the interactions between the public and private sector, academic institutions were placed on lockdown and lastly, government restrictions were placed on religious functions to promote social distancing<sup>(24)</sup>:

All above measures were intensified after the government decision to issue an emergency decree on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020, a ban was put to all the above mention until further notice except the essential workers industries like food, energy and healthcare<sup>(25)</sup>. A platform was created to support the vulnerable and the families facing financial problem through official means<sup>(26)</sup>.

Recent years, the country battles with high influx of refugees from neighboring countries which consist of about 20% of the population with lots of high concentration camps around the border areas to provide shelter for the refugees, this camps post a big challenge to the Jordanian government responds because people had to leave very close to each other in the camps<sup>(27)</sup>. Team of experts in epidemiological surveillance have conducted random and targeted testing's in the whole country at the early stages, this combined with the lockdown has helps the governments in figuring out their challenges<sup>(28)</sup>.

Finally, the Jordanian government did a great job in their fight against covid-19. Compared to other countries in the Middle East, Jordan became the first country to flatten their Covid-19 curve<sup>(29)</sup>. Nonetheless, the Kingdom receives a heavy criticism from the Human Rights Watch over the criminalization of criticizing government response and the sharing of covid-19 related information in the media or online<sup>(30)</sup>.

### Objective Evaluation in Public Policy Decisions

Public policy is the process by which governments translates their policies into programs to address public concerns and problems, the policies are important in governance because governments policies and decisions affects every aspect of the citizens and non-citizens daily lives in a country<sup>(31)(32)</sup>.

Every government need experts in the field of public policy to address the needs of their citizens, these experts will be the ones to establish the procedures, rules and the regulations that will guide the actions of every citizen within the government's jurisdiction<sup>(33)</sup>. Failing to involve experts in public policy can lead governments to come up with bad policies which can lead to unintended consequences in the country. It is difficult for public policies to satisfy all the stakeholders, but it should at least satisfy the majority, many believe that a public policy can be considered good when the its positive impacts is more than the negative ones<sup>(34)(35)</sup>.

Moreover, governments will face many challenges if experts are not part of the decision makers. Thus, this can be a recipe for developing bad policies for the in a country<sup>(36)</sup>. Some of the mistakes that nonexperts face in public policy are as follow:

- Failures of defining the problems at hand
- Failures to engage the citizens who will be affected by the policies
- Stereotyping and being bias in policy formation
- Changing policy makers before completing the process

Finally, public policies should be taken very seriously, and governments should make sure that public policy experts are involved in every public policy development in the country. Today, government's decisions affect our lives in all aspect. Therefore, it is important for the citizens support candidates that will come up with sound policies that will protect and address their needs.

### Conclusion

Lastly, the need for immediate and continuous action by governments to set public policies that aims to set strong and effective institutions that enable governments to overcome challenges. This article have strongly analyzed and discussed approaches used by the Jordanian government to swiftly control and minimize the spread of the virus, part of the response approach was Jordan's public policies set in addressing the pandemic such as the enforcement of the defense law. The study further discusses Jordan's government structure and how the unitary system is applied in Jordan and identifying who are the main figures in the decision-making process and the public opinion on these laws and policies. Based on Jordan's unitary system the King is the highest authority and decision maker.

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