

Jordanian parliament moves to ban Muslim Brotherhood's political party

Country/Region: Jordan, Middle East and North Africa

The Jordanian parliament has voted to ban the establishment of any political party on a "religious basis" in a move that would block the Muslim Brotherhood from running in upcoming elections.



Jordan's King Abdullah
has restrained the influence of
Islamists
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A narrow majority – 46 out of 83 – in the Lower House voted on 16 April to add the clause to the country's draft political parties law. If approved by the Upper House, as expected, the measure would disqualify the Muslim Brotherhood's political party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), from taking part in parliamentary elections.

The amendment also seeks to ban the establishment of parties on an "ethnic or sectarian basis".

The IAF is Jordan's leading opposition party and as such would be likely to gain power if allowed to stand. Leaders of the Islamist movement said that the government is trying to ensure the continued dominance of tribal groups loyal to King Abdullah's regime.

The political parties law was brought before parliament in response to the Arab Spring protests by pro-democracy activists that have been happening in Jordan for over a year. As in other countries affected by the uprisings, Islamists in Jordan jumped on the bandwagon and are now seeking greater political influence.

But unlike the leaders of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, who were toppled by the movement, King Abdullah has held onto his position, promising reform. He established an independent election body and constitutional court, and hinted at increasing the role of parliament in a move that would weaken his own extensive powers. But the pace of change has now slowed considerably.

The move to block the IAF from gaining power in Jordan is undoubtedly an attempt to maintain the status quo, but it is nevertheless consistent with King Abdullah's efforts to clamp down on Islamism in the country. The ousted Arab Spring dictators had likewise restrained such influence, but the Islamists have now been unleashed, becoming the largest parties in the new Tunisian and Egyptian political orders. This has led to worsening conditions for Christians in those countries, which were previously of a more secular character.

Christians in Jordan currently enjoy a much greater degree of freedom, as well as opportunities in public life, than Christians in many Arab lands. Were Islamists to assume power in Jordan, it would certainly lead to increased restrictions and even danger for the Christians there, as has happened elsewhere in the region.