


# Executive compliance with parliamentary powers under authoritarianism: Evidence from Jordan

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## Abstract

When are executives in authoritarian regimes more likely to comply with formal legislative powers? Building from theories of authoritarian power-sharing, we argue that executives will be more likely to respect legislative prerogatives when protests or elite organization increase the ability of legislators to undermine the executive's political position. We evaluate this argument by analyzing novel protest and legislative data in Jordan between 2010 and 2015. In line with our expectations, we find that parliamentary queries were more likely to receive the required response from the cabinet during months of higher protest activity and when they were submitted by MPs from Jordan's only well-organized opposition bloc in the parliament. This study extends the burgeoning scholarship on authoritarian legislatures by contributing to understanding of executive-legislative interactions under autocracy and providing new insights into the conditions under which these legislatures are more likely to influence decision-making processes.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Legislatures are nearly ubiquitous in modern autocracies (Gandhi et al., 2020). Once dismissed as window-dressing, a large body of work on these institutions now recognizes their importance to

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the politics of authoritarian regimes. Legislators are often closely intertwined with their constituents and popular politics (Gandhi, 2008; Lust-Okar, 2006; Truex, 2016), and they facilitate power-sharing within the regime by providing arenas through which the executive and legislators can distribute rents and set policy (Lü et al., 2020; Noble, 2020; Williamson & Magaloni, 2020).<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, we still know relatively little about how the legislative and executive branches interact in the day-to-day politics of authoritarian decision-making and why these interactions may change over time (Gandhi et al., 2020). The strength of the legislature can vary significantly within an autocracy (Opalo, 2019, 2020), with the autocrat sometimes trying to ignore or even close the legislature while at other times carefully complying with the body's prerogatives. What explains when the executive in an authoritarian regime is more likely to respect the formal powers of the legislature?

We build from existing theories of power-sharing in autocracies to argue that the executive branch in these regimes is more likely to comply with legislative prerogatives when the legislators become more capable of undermining the executive's political position. Formal legislative powers—ranging from the requirement that legislators approve laws to the right to submit amendments or question ministers—reflect institutional concessions that redistribute power to legislators by making it costlier for the autocrat to bypass them in the decision-making process (Meng et al., 2023). However, authoritarian legislatures are often relatively weak institutions, meaning that these costs can be low, and the executive may have incentives to renege. In these contexts, threat-enhancing factors may be needed to stabilize institutional concessions and facilitate the autocrat's commitment to power-sharing arrangements with the legislature. Building from this framework, we contend that variation in the executive's compliance with the legislature's formal powers can be explained by the extent to which legislators can pressure the executive and threaten their political objectives.

In developing this argument, we focus on the executive's compliance with legislative queries, which represent an important institutional concession that reallocates power to legislators in the decision-making process (Jensen et al., 2013; Norton, 1993). Drawing from authoritarianism literature that emphasizes the need for autocrats to manage threats from both the masses and other elites (Svolik, 2012), we identify two factors that should enhance the ability of legislators to threaten the autocrat's political position and, therefore, increase compliance with this query power. First, legislators can often aggravate popular protests (Reuter & Robertson, 2015), and it should also become easier for legislators to coordinate opposition to the executive among themselves when protests are occurring (Casper & Tyson, 2014). As a result, we expect the executive to comply more with legislative queries during periods of protest mobilization to avoid antagonizing the legislators. Second, legislators who organize themselves more cohesively should be able to coordinate more effectively with each other (Gehlbach & Keefer, 2012), strengthening their ability to push back against the executive's political agenda or stir up discontent when they are displeased. As such, we expect that increasing internal organization within the legislature will also strengthen executive compliance with legislative queries.

Our analysis utilizes original data on legislative queries submitted to the executive branch in Jordan from December 2010 to July 2015, allowing us to investigate the relationship between the executive and legislative branches during and after the Arab uprisings.<sup>2</sup> Jordan is an important case to test our theoretical expectations for two primary reasons. First, Jordan has a directly elected parliament with legislators from diverse backgrounds and affiliations, and the legislature has been a significant arena for rent-seeking (Lust-Okar, 2006, 2008) while also providing elites some influence over policy (Karmel, 2021). This power-sharing is partially enforced by parliamentary powers, including the ability to query the executive branch. Second, despite the

presence of these institutional concessions, the Jordanian legislature remains a relatively weak body where these formal powers are not always respected. For instance, while the prime minister and cabinet in the executive branch are required legally to answer MP questions, sometimes they do not respond. Thus, factors that enhance the ability of MPs to threaten the government's political position, such as more popular unrest or organizing within the legislature, may help to strengthen the government's compliance with the parliament's formal powers. Over the past decade, the country has witnessed frequent episodes of popular unrest with varying levels of "threat-enhancing" effects. The post-Arab uprising era also witnessed the rise of a well-organized organized parliamentary bloc, Mubadara, which contested the executive's policy agenda. These factors allow us to analyze whether the executive in an authoritarian context is more likely to comply with parliamentary powers as legislators acquire more capacity to apply political pressure on the executive.

Indeed, the analysis shows that Jordan's executive branch was more likely to respond to MP queries when it had more reason to be concerned about political pressure from the legislature. Drawing on two different datasets of local protest activity, we find that questions were more likely to receive a response in months of high protest activity nationally and within the MP's governorate. We also show that the government was more likely to respond to legislators in the Mubadara bloc, who were more capable of acting cohesively to pressure the government. By contrast, MPs affiliated with the "disorganized" opposition were not more likely to receive responses to their queries. The analysis accounts for several alternative explanations, including the volume of questions asked, the timing of elections and other major events, question topics, and MP characteristics.

Our study makes several contributions to the literature on authoritarian politics and autocratic legislatures. First, we provide an important extension to research on power-sharing in autocracies. To date, this body of work has focused primarily on the theoretical conditions that facilitate credible commitment and big-picture outcomes, such as the existence of a legislature or the appointment of ministers (e.g., Boix & Svobik, 2013; Magaloni, 2008; Meng, 2020; Svobik, 2012). We show that the logic of power-sharing outlined in many of these theories can be used to explain micro-level variation in interactions between the executive and legislative elites in these regimes. Over short periods of time or from one MP to another, the executive is more likely to comply with formal legislative powers as MPs become more capable of applying pressure on the executive's political position. Second, scholars have studied parliamentary questions as an influential legislative power in democratic political systems (e.g., Martin, 2011) but less so in autocracies. We extend this research by analyzing the role of queries in executive-legislative relations in an authoritarian context. Finally, our article also has implications for the study of parliaments in the Middle East. Research on these legislatures has tended to focus on their role in patronage distribution rather than policymaking (e.g., Blaydes, 2010; Lust-Okar, 2006). By documenting the volume of questions MPs submit and how often they receive a response, our findings advance understanding of the internal political dynamics of these legislatures and align with recent work illustrating how some of these parliaments engage actively in the decision-making process (e.g., Karmel, 2021).

This article proceeds as follows. First, we outline our argument about when executives are more likely to respect the powers of authoritarian legislatures. Next, we explain the utility of the Jordan case and describe our original data. We then present our results showing the relationship between protests, legislator organization, and executive responses to legislators' questions. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications for understanding legislative powers in authoritarian politics.

## 2 | EXECUTIVE COMPLIANCE WITH LEGISLATIVE POWERS IN AUTOCRACIES

### 2.1 | Power-sharing and legislatures under autocracy

Legislatures play several important roles in many autocracies, helping to distribute rents and policy influence (Blaydes, 2010; Gandhi, 2008; Lü et al., 2020), represent the public's preferences (Lueders, 2021; Manion, 2015; Shalaby & Aydogan, 2020; Truex, 2016), and redirect blame (Schuler, 2020), among other functions. However, these legislatures' strength and ability to shape political outcomes vary substantially across and within these regimes (Opalo, 2020; Wiebrecht, 2021). Autocrats can often renege on power-sharing arrangements with other elites, and they do not always respect formal legislative powers that are meant to allocate influence to the legislators. We argue that autocratic executives are more likely to respect these legislative powers when the legislators acquire more capacity to threaten the executive's political position. This argument builds from existing conceptualizations of power-sharing in authoritarian regimes, which constitutes a key strategy for autocrats to manage threats from other political elites (Xi, 2019). In a recent review article on the concept, Meng et al. (2023) define power-sharing as an arrangement between the ruler and a potential challenger that must meet two requirements. First, the deal must involve sharing spoils, such as rents or policy influence. Second, the deal must reallocate actual power by making it costly for the autocrat to renege.

Existing literature emphasizes that institutions such as legislatures play a major role in facilitating power-sharing deals (Boix & Svulik, 2013). On the one hand, legislatures provide financial and policy spoils because their members typically possess formal powers to introduce, amend, and approve laws, question members of the government, and direct state spending toward constituents and clients (Malesky & Schuler, 2010; Wiebrecht, 2021). Meanwhile, because these powers are institutionalized, it can be costly for the autocrat to ignore them since the autocrat will need to invest effort in reclaiming agenda control (Meng et al., 2023). These costs can make the provision of spoils enforceable, resulting in power-sharing. This situation contrasts with non-institutionalized interactions between the autocrat and the challenger, in which the challenger must pay a cost by mobilizing for revolt to force the ruler to provide spoils (Meng et al., 2023).

However, many authoritarian legislatures remain relatively weak institutions, and the costs autocrats face for reneging on power-sharing can be low. As a result, autocrats who respect the legislature's powers when it benefits them may later decide it is no longer in their interest to do so (Meng, 2020). In these cases of weak institutions, combining institutional concessions with coercive threats to the autocrat can increase the likelihood that power-sharing persists (Meng et al., 2023). For example, if elites can use their position in the legislature to coordinate opposition against the autocrat, the autocrat should be more likely to adhere to the institutional concessions that provide spoils to the elites (Boix & Svulik, 2013). It follows that executives in authoritarian settings should be more likely to comply with the legislature's formal powers when the legislators can threaten to weaken the executive's political position more credibly.

### 2.2 | Explaining micro-level variation in executive compliance with legislative powers

Most existing research on authoritarian power-sharing has focused on macro-outcomes such as the existence of a legislature, ministerial appointments, elite purges, and the survival of the

autocrat in power (e.g., Boix & Svobik, 2013; Meng, 2020; Svobik, 2012). We contend that the framework described above can contribute to understanding more micro-level variation in executive-legislative relations under autocracy, providing insights into relatively quotidian interactions over legislative powers in the policy process. Even if legislators are unlikely to challenge the autocrat's hold on power directly, they can often complicate the executive's political position by stalling or blocking key policy priorities and stirring up discontent. At moments when the legislators acquire more capacity to apply this pressure, we contend that the executive will take more care to avoid antagonizing them by complying with their formal powers and respecting their influence over decision-making.

We illustrate the applicability of these power-sharing dynamics to legislative-executive interactions in authoritarian politics by focusing on the ability of legislators to question the executive branch. Most legislatures have the formal power to submit these queries, to which the executive is meant to respond (Jensen et al., 2013; Martin, 2011b; Norton, 1993; Wiberg, 1995). The query power is not just a feature of democracies but is also reasonably common in autocracies: according to data from V-Dem, legislatures in approximately one-third of authoritarian country years from 1950 to 2022 "routinely" questioned the executive. The query power grants influence to legislators by allowing them to acquire information that can be used to lean on the executive, draw public and elite attention to issues, and thus shape the policy process. Queries can also be instrumental in cultivating relationships with constituents by allowing legislators to demonstrate competency in pursuing constituency-focused concerns (Malesky & Schuler, 2010). Thus, queries provide the "spoils" inherent to power-sharing arrangements. This power also reflects an institutional concession for which renegeing creates some costs for the executive, since not responding is observed by the legislature and can carry formal repercussions. Despite these costs, the executive may decide to respond to some queries but not others, generating micro-level variation in compliance with a key legislative power.

In line with the power-sharing framework, if the legislators pose a more credible threat to the executive's political position, the executive should become more likely to respond to legislative queries. In authoritarian regimes, autocrats need to be concerned about threats from below (i.e., popular opposition) and within (i.e., other political elites within the regime). We, therefore, identify two factors that should influence the likelihood of complying with the query power: increasing protest activity, reflecting a potential threat from the masses that the legislators can use against the executive, and increasing organization among the legislators themselves, reflecting a potential elite threat.

Regarding protests, not all mobilizations lead to mass uprisings in authoritarian regimes, and some can even be useful for autocrats (Lorentzen, 2013). Nonetheless, protests often cause political complications capable of undermining the autocrat's policy agenda (e.g., Ketchley et al., 2023), and they have the potential to spiral into a major challenge to the regime (Kuran, 1991). Legislators can often influence the extent to which protests become a more serious problem for the autocrat. Because autocrats use legislatures to co-opt social groups, legislators frequently have strong ties to their constituents (Bonvecchi & Simison, 2017; Gandhi, 2008). These connections mean that legislatures can shape the trajectory of protests, helping to de-escalate them or potentially contributing to mobilization (Reuter & Robertson, 2015). Furthermore, protests can also act as a signal that facilitates coordination among political elites against the executive (Casper & Tyson, 2014) since the display of public opposition makes it easier for elites to organize among themselves. These dynamics suggest that protests should enhance the coercive threat that legislators can bring to bear against the executive—even if the goal is not to overthrow the executive outright. As a result, increasing popular mobilization should incentivize the executive to comply

more carefully with legislative powers, which should be visible in a higher response rate to legislative queries. Thus, we expect the following:

**H1.** As public mobilization increases, executives in authoritarian regimes should be more likely to comply with legislative queries.

Regarding organization within the legislature, elites are better able to challenge the autocrat when they can coordinate more effectively (Gehlbach & Keefer, 2011, 2012). Horizontal ties forged between legislators in party organizations or legislative blocs should make it easier for them to share information with each other and act collectively in cases where the autocrat reneges on power-sharing arrangements. To reduce this coordination, many autocrats manipulate electoral or legislative rules to minimize the likelihood that cohesive parties or blocs form within the legislature, encouraging representation by disconnected independents (Sawi, 2018) or members of hegemonic parties who prioritize vertical ties with their constituents and party leaders (Truex, 2016). In some cases, however, opposition-oriented elites acquire enough seats to advocate for their agenda within the legislature (Gandhi, 2008). Though they may not be strong enough to overthrow the autocrat, they can use their formal powers to create procedural headaches for the regime while also generating pressure on the executive by drawing the public's attention to poor governance (Loidolt & Mecham, 2016). In addition, even independent legislators or members of a dominant party can form coalitions to advance policies that may not align with the autocrat's agenda (Lü et al., 2020; Noble, 2020). To the extent this internal organization strengthens the legislators' effectiveness at coordinating to apply pressure on the executive and their policy agenda, it should increase the incentives of the executive to respect the legislators' powers. We therefore expect to observe the following:

**H2.** As legislators become more organized, executives in authoritarian regimes should be more likely to comply with legislative queries.

We test our argument by analyzing the relationship between executive compliance with legislative queries, popular protest, and legislator organization in Jordan. The following section describes the case in detail and links it to our argument.

### 3 | THE JORDANIAN CASE

Jordan is governed by a hereditary monarchy and is consistently coded as an authoritarian regime (e.g., Geddes et al., 2014). It provides a fitting case to test our theoretical expectations about when the executive in an autocracy is more likely to comply with parliamentary powers. This section includes an overview of the Jordanian legislature and its interactions with the executive, and it describes the query power that we use as the dependent variable in our analysis.

#### 3.1 | The Jordanian legislature and executive

The Jordanian parliament is a weak institution that provides an important arena for rent distribution (Lust-Okar, 2006, 2008) while exercising some influence over policy (Karmel, 2021). Historically, the legislature experienced periods of outright closure and moments of significant political



strength. The monarchy has allowed regular parliamentary elections since 1989, but electoral and party laws ensure the elected lower house favors independent and tribal candidates who focus on service provision over policy agendas (Brand & Hammad, 2013; Lust-Okar, 2006). Given these dynamics, most MPs have no party affiliation, except for the Islamic Action Front (IAF) and a few small leftist parties. Legislators often form parliamentary blocs based on blurry ideological lines and/or shared policy interests, but only after being elected (Esber, 2021). These blocs are mostly incapable of pressuring the government, as they have little impact on MPs' reelection prospects and fail to incentivize coordination between their members. However, following the Arab Spring, the Mubadara bloc was established in 2013 and briefly proved an exception to this rule, as explained in more depth in the following discussion.

The decision-making process in Jordan is dominated by the executive branch, which includes both the monarchy and the government. The autocratic king wields substantial political influence, but the government (i.e., cabinet) manages much of the day-to-day decision-making and is formally responsible for all state policies. The king appoints the prime minister, and the prime minister chooses the cabinet with informal involvement by the monarchy. Governments leave office when dismissed by the king. The government also sets the legislative agenda, and nearly all laws are proposed by the government rather than by MPs.

Despite the wide range of prerogatives granted to the executive, the legislature does have some formal powers that operate as institutional enforcement mechanisms of power-sharing. For instance, the constitution specifies that the parliament must vote to approve the government and can hold votes of no confidence. MPs also possess several formal powers that directly influence the decision-making process (Karmel, 2021). MPs oversee and approve the general budget, participate in floor debates, ratify laws proposed by the government, suggest changes to legislation, and vote in committees and the full house. These powers let them influence the cabinet's agenda as it winds through the legislative process. The parliament also has significant monitoring powers that can be used to pressure the government on policy matters. Legislators can pose parliamentary questions, interrogate ministers, submit petitions and complaints, establish investigative committees, and hold votes of confidence in the government.

### 3.2 | Parliamentary queries in Jordan

MPs' ability to query the government represents a particularly important formal power that allows them to influence decision-making. Ministers to whom the questions are addressed are legally required to respond within eight days (Article 117, Lower Chamber Internal Bylaws, 2013). When the answer is returned, the head of parliament informs the MP of the answer and files both the answer and question in parliamentary records. The question is then discussed in the first monitoring session (Articles 128–129, Lower Chamber Internal Bylaws, 2013). The MP has the right to accept the answer, respond briefly to the minister's response, or escalate the question to an investigation (Article 129, Lower Chamber Internal Bylaws, 2013). In addition, an MP can request an investigation if a response is not received within a month (Article 132. b, Lower Chamber Internal Bylaws, 2013). The ability to pose questions is widely used. For instance, the first legislative term in Jordan's 17th legislature dedicated almost 30 out of 65 sessions for government oversight and monitoring (Beni Amer, 2014), and 124 out of the 150 MPs posed at least one question during the 17th legislature.

The queries provide policy and political influence to the MPs in several ways. First, most questions criticize the government and allow the MPs to signal their policy priorities and

discontent to the executive. Second, MPs often request important information about the government's spending, health policies, employment decisions, and many other controversial issues.<sup>3</sup> This information can be used to pressure the government to adjust its policies or offer concessions to the MPs in other areas for their support. Third, posing questions can bolster legislators' popularity and visibility, especially amidst times of high uncertainty and popular dissatisfaction. Many legislators post the government's responses on social media to promote their legislative work and show they can hold the government accountable. The legislative query sessions are aired on national television and are widely viewed by the public, further reinforcing the ability of the MPs to build their reputations while pressuring the government with the information they receive from the queries.

Not responding to the queries imposes costs on the government. The requirement to respond means that MPs have grounds on which to publicly criticize the cabinet for failing to provide an answer. Furthermore, the MPs have the right to escalate to a formal investigation after a certain amount of time. As such, it is useful to conceptualize the queries as an institutional concession that facilitates power-sharing by giving influence to MPs that is costly for the executive to ignore. Nonetheless, the government does refrain from answering some queries, as we show below in our discussion of the data and analysis.

### 3.3 | Parliamentary pressure on the Jordanian government

Why would the government be more or less likely to comply with parliamentary prerogatives like the query power? Though the parliament is a subordinate institution in the context of Jordan's authoritarian regime, it can still complicate the executive's policy agenda and political power. In fact, the legislature often creates headaches for the executive branch, especially the government. Legislators frequently criticize the cabinet in public. Frosty relations with the legislature can worsen the government's political fortunes and increase the likelihood of dismissal by the king. For example, many MPs excoriated the government of Prime Minister Hani Al-Mulki for its austerity policies. Opposition deputies forced a vote of no confidence against Mulki's government, which barely survived with the support of only 54% of the MPs who were present (Omari, 2018). A few months later, mass protests erupted over proposed tax increases, leading to Mulki's dismissal. His replacement, Prime Minister Omar Razzaz, eventually succeeded in passing similar tax increases, but only after contending with pushback from parliament. One MP, for instance, told him to "withdraw the [tax] law or fall like Hani Al-Mulki" (Magid, 2018). Because of the political pressure that parliament can create, Jordan's cabinets typically take great pains to maintain good relations with the body. Some prime ministers will appoint a deputy to communicate with MPs and keep them satisfied. Cabinet ministers will also provide favors for MPs, for instance, by helping them find jobs for their constituents (Personal Interviews with Former Jordanian Minister, Amman 2018).

The parliament has more capacity to complicate the executive's political fortunes during periods of unrest. The king fears that protests could escalate into a popular challenge against the monarchy, and he frequently dismisses the cabinet when it fails to contain large protests. Because MPs are elected by voters in their districts and want to remain in office, they often pile onto the cabinet with criticism when Jordanians are dissatisfied, worsening the cabinet's political prospects. Recent years have witnessed multiple such instances. In 2020, for example, MPs aligned themselves with protesters against a government-backed deal in which Jordan's state-owned utility company began importing gas from Israel. Parliament helped to escalate the discontent



by proposing and then unanimously passing a law to ban gas imports from Israel, reflecting the protesters' demands and going against the government's goals (Al-Khalidi, 2020). Likewise, during a month of unrest in 2022 triggered by rising taxes on kerosene, some members of parliament sided with the demonstrators and openly criticized the government's refusal to remove the increase. The MP Ahmed al-Qatawneh, from one of the areas most affected by the protests and strikes, called on the government to "assume its responsibility and resign" because it did not "have a plan to solve the fuel problem." Some parliamentarians negotiated with the government to offer concessions to striking truckers most affected by the rising prices (Ersan, 2022). At the same time, other MPs inserted themselves directly into negotiations with the truckers, seeking to use their local connections to end the strike (Kuttab, 2022). These actions illustrate how MPs can draw on their positions to either help or worsen the executive's political position during periods of unrest. In an effort to keep the MPs on their side, we expect the government to be more likely to comply with parliamentary queries during these periods of mobilization.

Jordanian MPs are also more likely to create problems for the government when they are well-organized within the legislature. As previously mentioned, most MPs are independents and do not coordinate. However, the rise of the Mubadara bloc in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings was an exception. Mustafa al-Hamarneh, an advocate for democratic reforms in Jordan, founded Mubadara. The bloc was significantly more organized than its counterparts (Ryan, 2018), with its MPs presenting a coherent policy agenda, making united demands on the cabinet, and voting strategically together. Though its MPs represented just over 10 percent of the parliament, it was effective at using the media to advocate for its agenda, which created pressure on the cabinet to consider its policy goals. The bloc also spearheaded important policy initiatives, mainly the decentralization law enforced in 2015 (Personal Interview with Mubadara Leader, Amman 2018). The executive was so disoriented by Mubadara that Hamarneh's re-election was allegedly rigged against him—a relative rarity in Jordanian elections. However, while Mubadara was functioning, the pressure it was able to create on the cabinet may have incentivized more compliance with its members' queries to avoid triggering a backlash from the bloc.

## 4 | DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The limited work on the inner dynamics of authoritarian legislatures can be attributed largely to the scarcity of reliable data (Gandhi et al., 2020). We overcame this challenge by leveraging connections with the Jordanian parliament to compile a new dataset that includes detailed information on all parliamentary questions asked in Jordan between December 2010 and July 2015, including whether they received a response from the government.

For our outcome variable, we collected and translated a comprehensive dataset of parliamentary queries with the assistance of a team of multi-lingual researchers.<sup>4</sup> This data is part of a large multi-country data collection project: The Governance and Elections in the Middle East Project (GEMEP). GEMEP is the only dataset with information on the legislative records of MPs in several Arab countries. The Jordan queries dataset includes the name of the legislator, a summary of the question, the submission date, and whether the question was answered. We also collected legislator-level data on age, education, political affiliation, political experience, bloc membership, quota status, and ideological orientation. This data was obtained from the parliament's website, Jordan-based parliament-monitoring websites, and research centers. We relied on the Higher Commission of Elections data to obtain the winners' vote share for the 2010 and 2013 elections.

TABLE 1 Questions and answers by year.

Year	Questions asked	Questions answered	Percent answered
2010	57	56	98%
2011	349	324	93%
2012	134	124	93%
2013	1482	1418	96%
2014	966	823	85%
2015	407	350	86%

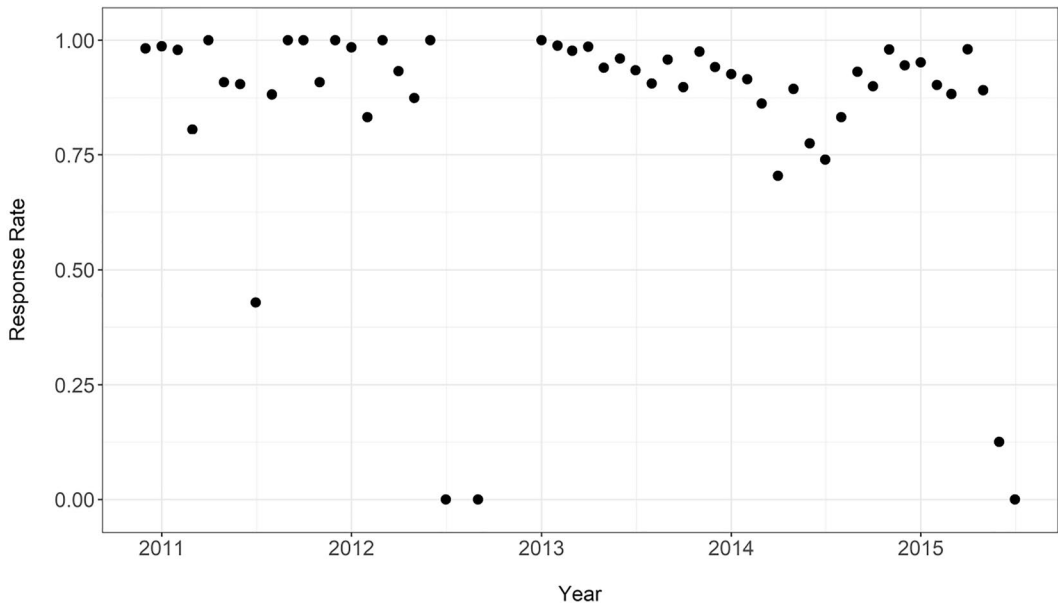


FIGURE 1 Response rate to MP questions by month. Months with particularly low response rates (under 50 percent) had few questions asked (7, 1, 2, 26, and 4 questions respectively) compared to the mean of 63 questions per month, and we account for these outliers in our analysis.

Then, we systematically coded the topics of the parliamentary questions according to the Comparative Agenda Project (CAP) coding scheme.<sup>5</sup> Studies relying on the CAP have made important contributions to the understanding of the level of congruence between the issue priorities of the public and politicians in more developed and democratic settings (Bonafont & Palau Roqué, 2011; Jones & Baumgartner, 2004; Lindeboom, 2012). Topics range from banking and finance to health or corruption. The main coding categories and the distribution of answered and unanswered questions in Jordan's 16th and 17th legislatures combined (2010–2015) can be found in SI-2. As shown in Table 1, the executive branch responds to most questions submitted by MPs across the 6 years in the dataset. However, there is significant variation in the response rate. Whereas 96% of questions were answered in 2013, only 85% received a response in 2014. Figure 1 also plots the response rate by month, revealing variation in the government's willingness to answer the MPs' questions. In other words, despite the legal requirement that parliamentary queries be answered, the government does not respond to many of them. For our analysis, our outcome variable is an indicator of whether each individual question received a response.

To test our first hypothesis about public mobilization increasing government responses, we draw on monthly protest data in Jordan. Protests occur frequently in the country and are an important part of its politics, with demonstrators using protests to pressure the government on its policies and, in some cases, to challenge the monarchy directly (Schwedler, 2022). We draw on two local protest datasets. The first is a dataset of protests from January 2010 to December 2019 compiled by a team of researchers based in the Middle East. We refer to this dataset as the Jordan Event Data. Protests were identified using reports from 20 local media outlets in Jordan.<sup>6</sup> Each protest constitutes a single observation in the dataset, with duplicate coverage compiled together. In the months for which we have data on MP queries, 2887 protests were recorded. As our primary explanatory variable, we created an indicator for months when the protest count was above the median of 32 separate mobilizations. As robustness checks, we also use the continuous protest count and an indicator for months above the mean.

The second source of Jordan protest data focuses exclusively on mobilizations by unions and workers. This data comes from the Phenix Centre, a research institute in Jordan that has collected monthly counts of labor protests since 2011. They also collect their data by monitoring Jordanian media and interviewing protesters.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the previous source, this data captures only one form of collective action. However, it remains useful since mobilization by workers and unions constitutes an important feature of popular politics in Jordan (Adely, 2012). As with the first dataset, we rely primarily on an indicator variable for months with protest counts above the median, but we also report results using the count variable and an indicator for months above the mean in SI-4.

Protest data is challenging to collect because of reporting biases that favor larger and wealthier areas, and this concern applies to the data we use here. However, datasets collected through careful assessment of local reporting, as with the two used in our analysis, are more likely to provide a relatively complete picture of mobilization patterns (Clarke, 2021). In addition, our use of two separate datasets should provide more confidence in our results.<sup>8</sup> Finally, it should be noted that Jordanian political elites likely acquire much of their information about protests through local reporting, so our data should reflect how much pressure the government feels from the public even if there remains bias in the protest coverage.

For our second hypothesis regarding legislator organization, we identify legislators who were part of the Mubadara bloc, which was discussed in Section 3. Because it was one of Jordan's first well-organized, opposition-oriented blocs in parliament and the only one during the period covered by our data, it provides the most useful indicator of a legislator organization capable of applying pressure on the government. We code a binary variable for whether MPs were members of the Mubadara bloc formed after the 2013 election. See SI-3 for summary statistics on all variables.

## 5 | RESULTS

We use OLS regressions to analyze whether the relationships between question responses, protest mobilization, and Mubadara membership align with our hypotheses (Hellevik, 2009). Each query is an observation, and standard errors are clustered by the MPs posing the query. For our analysis, we first report the naive models and then rely on control variables and fixed effects to account for omitted variable bias. For the protest analysis, we use MP fixed effects to account for characteristics specific to each MP. Since Mubadara membership is one of these MP-specific characteristics, we do not take this approach but rely on control variables instead. These controls

include MP-specific factors that may influence the likelihood that questions are answered by the executive, such as Islamist ideology, membership in a political party and legislative bloc, being elected through quotas, educational attainment, gender, being from a district in Jordan's largest cities (Amman, Zarqa, and Irbid), political experience, age, and the total number of votes received in the most recent election.<sup>9</sup> For both analyses, we also incorporate fixed effects for year, week, and the CAP-coded question topic. The year-fixed effects address common time shocks, including different prime ministers and cabinet ministers in office and regional developments such as the Arab Spring protests. The week-fixed effects account for seasonal variation in protest and parliamentary sessions. The topic fixed effects control for differences in topic sensitivity, importance, and complexity. Finally, we also control for the volume of questions asked each month, since months with more queries may burden the government and reduce its ability to respond, while a small number of outlier months with low numbers of queries could also bias the results.

## 6 | PROTEST AND QUERY RESULTS

We first report results for H1. Consistent with the hypothesis, Table 2 shows a statistically significant and substantively meaningful relationship between above-median protest activity and the likelihood of a response to MP queries. Columns 1 and 3 show results with protests identified by the Jordan Event Data, reporting the naive and fixed effects models, respectively. Columns 2 and 4 show results with the Phenix Centre data on protest intensity. In both cases, more protests are associated with an increased likelihood of a government response. The coefficients in the fixed effects model suggest that MPs are 10% points more likely to receive a response in months of above-median protest activity. With approximately nine percent of questions unanswered in the full data, this relationship suggests that protests substantially decrease the likelihood that MPs do not receive the required response.

TABLE 2 Public pressure and responses to MP queries.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Above-median protest (Jordan event data)	0.07** (0.03)		0.10*** (0.02)	
Above-median protest (Phenix data)		0.08*** (0.02)		0.10*** (0.02)
Total queries			0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Constant	0.88*** (0.03)	0.87*** (0.02)	1.24*** (0.12)	1.06*** (0.10)
Topic FE			✓	✓
Year FE			✓	✓
Week FE			✓	✓
MP FE			✓	✓
Observations	3395	3338	3388	3331
Clusters	165	165	165	165

Note: OLS regression models. The outcome is whether the question was answered (1). Standard errors clustered by MP.

<sup>†</sup> $p < 0.10$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

TABLE 3 Localized public pressure and response to MP queries.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Above-median local protests (Jordan event data)	0.04 (0.03)		0.03 <sup>†</sup> (0.02)	
Above-mean local protests (Jordan event data)		0.04* (0.02)		0.04* (0.02)
Total queries			0.00** (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)
Constant	0.89*** (0.02)	0.90*** (0.02)	1.20*** (0.11)	1.18*** (0.11)
Topic FE			✓	✓
Year FE			✓	✓
Week FE			✓	✓
MP FE			✓	✓
Observations	3393	3393	3386	3386
Clusters	164	164	164	164

Note: OLS regression models. The outcome is whether the question was answered (1). Standard errors clustered by MP.

<sup>†</sup> $p < 0.10$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

The Jordan Event Data codes the governorate where each protest occurred, allowing us to analyze whether queries are more likely to receive a response when submitted by MPs in the areas experiencing high protest intensity. Legislators in these areas may be more emboldened to pressure the government and more capable of exacerbating or tempering the unrest. Using local protest counts also provides a more stringent test of the relationship between protest activity and government compliance since we can compare the likelihood of a response in the same areas when they are or are not facing heightened mobilization.

To conduct the analysis, we create two binary variables indicating months of high protest activity at the local level. The first captures above-mean protest activity for governorates each month (eight or more protests), and the second indicates above-median protest activity (three or more protests). We then report the same specifications as previously, first showing the naive model regressing the response outcome on the protest variables, and then including fixed effects for topic, year, week, and MP, as well as a control for the total queries asked that month. Because MPs are elected in districts within the governorates, using the MP fixed effects allows us to account for MP-specific characteristics and local political dynamics related to the governorate-level protest counts.

Results are reported in Table 3. Columns 1 and 3 show results using the variable for protests above the governorate-level median, while columns 2 and 4 show results with the variable for protests above the governorate-level mean. In general, they indicate that questions asked in months of high protest intensity within a governorate are more likely to receive a response. The naïve model indicates a 4% point increase in the likelihood of a response for both variables, though the estimate is not statistically significant for the above-median variable. When including the fixed effects for topic, year, week, and MP, along with the control for the total number of queries in that month, the magnitude of the coefficient remains similar for both, and the estimate becomes significant at  $p < 0.10$  for the above-median protest indicator. These results suggest that MPs are more likely to receive a response to queries they submit during periods

when the governorate in which their electoral district is based is experiencing heightened mobilization. Accounting for these local dynamics provides further support for the claim that the formal powers of the legislature are more likely to be respected when legislators are more capable of applying pressure on the executive.

## 6.1 | Mubadara and query results

In Table 4, we assess H2 by analyzing whether queries submitted by members of the well-organized, opposition-leaning Mubadara bloc were more likely to receive responses from the government. The naive model in column 1 indicates that Mubadara membership is associated with a seven-percentage point increase in the likelihood of receiving a response. This relationship holds when incorporating the MP-specific controls. In column 3, we include the year, week, and topic fixed effects along with these MP-specific controls, and Mubadara membership remains associated with a seven-percentage point increase in the likelihood of a response.

Comparing the Mubadara coefficient to control variables from columns 2 and 3 suggests the relationship is driven not just by the group's opposition ideology but also by its effective organization that allowed them to apply greater pressure on the government. MPs from political parties or with Islamist ideologies were also likely to advocate for reforms, but these MPs were not well-organized, especially given that the most effective party—the Muslim Brotherhood's IAF—boycotted parliament at this time. Likewise, other blocs did not develop coherent policy agendas, engage regularly with the media, or act with a united front vis-a-vis the executive. Unlike Mubadara membership, these other variables are not associated with increased compliance by the government.

## 6.2 | Robustness checks and alternative explanations

We report robustness checks in SI-4. Results are consistent when using logistic regression. They are similar when utilizing the continuous measure of monthly protest activity or an indicator for above-mean protest activity, though the continuous measure with the Jordan Event Data just misses statistical significance. In addition, results are consistent when dropping months with a particularly low response rate, which tended to occur just before the conclusion of parliamentary sessions.

One concern about the protest findings may be that monthly variation is too fine-grained to reflect meaningful changes in the government's behavior toward the parliament. However, given that the monarchy and prime minister pay close attention to public opinion and parliamentary affairs, we believe it is reasonable that our findings reflect increased compliance with the legislature's prerogatives. We also note that annual patterns are consistent with our argument. Average response rates were higher from 2011 to 2013, during the height of the country's Arab Spring protests, and dropped off during the more stable years of 2014 and 2015. However, our results are not dependent on specific years, and we show in SI-4 that the results hold if the Arab Spring period is dropped from the analysis.

Another related question is whether our results are affected by MPs asking more queries or shifting the focus of their queries toward sensitive topics during periods of higher protest intensity. While our controls for total monthly questions and question topics should reduce this likelihood, we also analyze in SI-4 whether higher protest activity aligns with MPs asking more questions in total and whether protests align with more questions being asked on sensitive topics,



TABLE 4 Mubadara membership and responses to MP queries.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Mubadara MP	0.07*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)
Islamist		0.00 (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)
Party member		0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
Bloc member		0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Quota seat		-0.07 (0.06)	-0.07 (0.05)
Female		0.07 (0.04)	0.07 <sup>†</sup> (0.03)
Major City		0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)
Education		0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Age		0.00* (0.00)	0.00 <sup>†</sup> (0.00)
Experience		0.01 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
Votes		-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Total queries		0.00* (0.00)	0.00*** (0.00)
Constant	0.91*** (0.02)	0.74*** (0.10)	0.98*** (0.08)
Topic FE			✓
Year FE			✓
Week FE			✓
Observations	3395	3346	3339
Clusters	165	160	160

Note: OLS regression models. The outcome is whether the question was answered (1). Standard errors clustered by MP.

<sup>†</sup> $p < 0.10$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

including civil rights, defense, international affairs, corruption, and religion. We find no evidence that MPs ask more sensitive questions as protests increase. We find weak evidence that MPs ask more questions when more protests occur. In other words, when faced with more unrest and more queries from MPs at the same time, the government takes more rather than less care to respond to each query. This pattern aligns with our argument that protests prompt more compliance with the parliamentary query power because the government has more reason to be worried about pressure from MPs at these moments.

In SI-4, we also show results using different types of protests coded by the Jordan Event Data. Consistent with our argument, this analysis suggests protest types most likely to increase pressure on the government are associated with an increased likelihood of responding to MP queries.

Finally, reverse causation is unlikely to be an issue for our interpretation of the findings, as it is not plausible that increased responsiveness to queries would lead to more protest activity by the public.

## 7 | DISCUSSION

To stabilize their rule, autocrats share power with other political elites. However, autocrats often have the capacity to roll back or ignore these power-sharing arrangements. This issue is reflected in executive-legislative relations in many authoritarian regimes. Though authoritarian legislatures often serve crucial functions in these political systems, they are typically weak and subordinate to the executive branch, whose officials may subvert parliamentary prerogatives when it suits their interests. This dynamic raises the question of when the executive in an authoritarian regime is more likely to comply with legislative powers that facilitate power-sharing in the day-to-day politics of authoritarian decision-making, such as providing legally mandated responses to legislators' queries. Our article provides evidence from Jordan that the executive is more likely to respect legislative prerogatives under conditions that enhance the ability of legislators to apply pressure that can undermine the executive's political position.

Regarding the generalizability of our findings, Jordan shares many features with most contemporary autocracies, including a powerful executive branch that dominates decision-making, a weak legislature, power-sharing arrangements between the legislative and executive branches, and a restricted but not completely controlled information environment. However, Jordan also differs in ways that are relevant to our analysis. First, the parliament's query power is a particularly influential institutional concession, and there is a potential for political consequences when the cabinet does not respond since MPs can initiate formal investigations and even demand the resignation of the minister/s in question. This situation may make it costlier for the executive to ignore the parliament's query power than other authoritarian regimes. Our theory would suggest that protests or elite organization that strengthen the coercive pressure legislators can apply may have an even more significant effect on executive compliance in these other cases. On the other hand, Jordan's status as a ruling monarchy creates distance between the autocratic monarch and other political elites in the executive branch. The cabinet ministers, not the king, bear the brunt of parliamentary and popular pressure. In authoritarian regimes where the executive is more unitary, we would still expect our theoretical logic to apply; however, future research may consider whether our findings extend to other types of autocracies, such as hegemonic party regimes.

With these caveats in mind, our findings have important implications for understanding authoritarian politics. First, our study improves our understanding of how the executive and legislative branches interact in authoritarian settings. Existing studies document several ways in which legislatures help autocrats stabilize their rule, and there is growing interest in exploring how specific legislative rules and procedures facilitate these outcomes (e.g., Gandhi et al., 2020; Lü et al., 2020; Noble, 2020; Opalo, 2019; Schuler, 2020). Nonetheless, there has been little research into the factors that increase executive compliance with formal legislative powers and sustain the ability of legislators to influence decision-making in authoritarian contexts. By showing that Jordan's executive branch is more likely to comply with rules that grant influence to the

legislature when faced with popular mobilization or organized blocs of MPs, we shed light on the conditions in which legislative elites are more likely to exercise influence in the “mundane” politics of these regimes.

In doing so, we extend the burgeoning literature focusing on macro-theories of power-sharing to better understand micro-level processes and more quotidian questions of policymaking. Extant work has mainly dealt with the link between power-sharing theories and regime survival, with little attention paid to the effect of these macro-level processes on shaping day-to-day politics and policy choices. As maintained by Gandhi et al. (2020), however, it is unclear if “theories developed to explain regime durability can help shed light on the dynamics of more mundane questions of policy” (p. 1374). Our findings suggest that insights about everyday decision-making in authoritarian regimes can be derived from these broader theories.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data for this study will be made available on the authors’ websites at the time of publication.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> In this paper, we use “executive” and “autocrat” interchangeably. The political system in our case, Jordan, is similar to most autocratic regimes in that it is dominated by the executive branch, which consists of the monarchy and the government (i.e., the prime minister and cabinet).
- <sup>2</sup> This data covers Jordan’s 16th and 17th legislatures. We do not cover the 18th legislature due to the unavailability of response data for the questions posed.
- <sup>3</sup> In SI-2 and SI-7, we provide details on the content of the questions and responses.
- <sup>4</sup> Four graduate-level researchers coded the parliamentary data. The coders received extensive training and worked closely with researchers at the Policy Agendas Project headquarters at the University of Texas, Austin. We had 94 percent inter-coder reliability.
- <sup>5</sup> The Comparative Agendas Project was initiated by Bryan Jones and Frank Baumgartner in 1993, focusing on the US policy agenda. For more details on CAP, see <http://www.policyagendas.org>

- <sup>6</sup> See the SI for additional information on the data-collection process and methodology.
- <sup>7</sup> In their definition, labor protests include strikes, sit-ins, threats to engage in these actions, and individual protests involving self-harm. See the SI for additional information.
- <sup>8</sup> We plot the monthly counts from the two datasets in the SI. They are similar, suggesting we account for monthly variation relatively effectively.
- <sup>9</sup> Summary statistics for these variables are included in SI-3.

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