

Collective Actions Digest Jordan – September 1, 2018 - August 31, 2021

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Abstract

Despite the lack of media coverage, Jordanian society is currently witnessing a multitude of pervasive and increasing tensions nested in the shadow of the country's economic downturn and the austerity policies adopted by the state. This digest provides an overview of the collective actions mapped in Jordan between September 1 2018 and August 31 2021, including general trends, demands, and mode of action.

Keywords: Press Freedom, Repression, Jordan, Collective Action, Socio-Economic

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• Disclaimer

Since November 2018, press and media freedoms in Jordan have undergone a [significant contraction](#). Restrictions have further increased since March 2020, following the reinstitution of the martial law as part of the measures adopted by the Hashemite monarchy to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has severely curtailed the mediatic coverage of social protests, including via social media, as news and other media content became sanctioned by the state. Therefore, the following dataset should not be considered as exhaustive, but rather as indicative of the main trends and trajectories of Jordanian contentious politics. Also, due to the greater availability of databases covering labor mobilizations, the predominance of workers as main mobilized actors, as well as of labor-related grievances reported in this digest, might not be fully representative of the precise proportionalities at stake on the ground.

• General Trends

Between September 1, 2018, and August 31, 2021, 406 collective actions were detected in Jordan, according to the following temporal distribution:

Timeframe	No. of actions	Timeframe	No. of actions	Timeframe	No. of actions
III quarter 2018	57	III quarter 2019	29	III quarter 2020	12
I quarter	64	I quarter	75	I quarter	54

2019		2020		2021	
II quarter	19	II quarter	18	II quarter	77
2019		2020		2021	

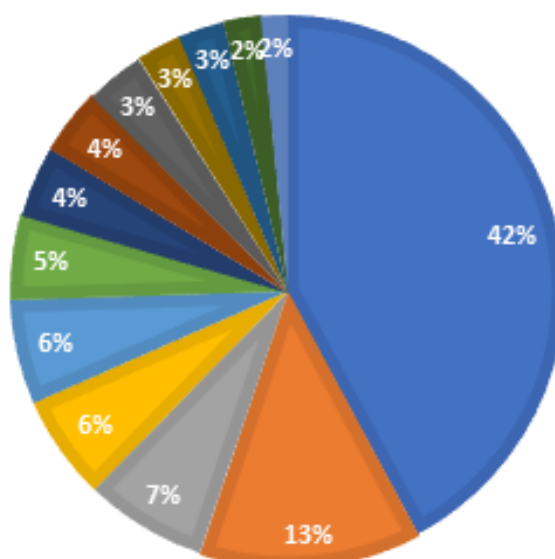
It is worth noting that, despite the implementation of protracted health-related lockdowns from March 2020 until now to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of yearly mobilizations detected in 2019 and 2020 did not experience a substantial variation (-7 actions), and the number of collective actions detected during the first two quarters of 2021 alone (131) has already surpassed those of the years 2019 (112) and 2020 (105). One possible explanation for the phenomenon could be the “multiplier effect” that the pandemic has had on a variety of economic sectors already affected by the country’s economic downturn, which provided an additional source of mobilization. The wave of transnational protests in solidarity with Palestine ignited by the #SaveShaikhJarrah campaign and the subsequent Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip also played an important role (See Infra).

• Geographic Scope, Frequency, and Modes of Mobilization

Throughout the whole triennium, the geographic scope of the mobilizations has been characterized by a high degree of decentralization, with about 60% of collective actions taking place outside of Amman.

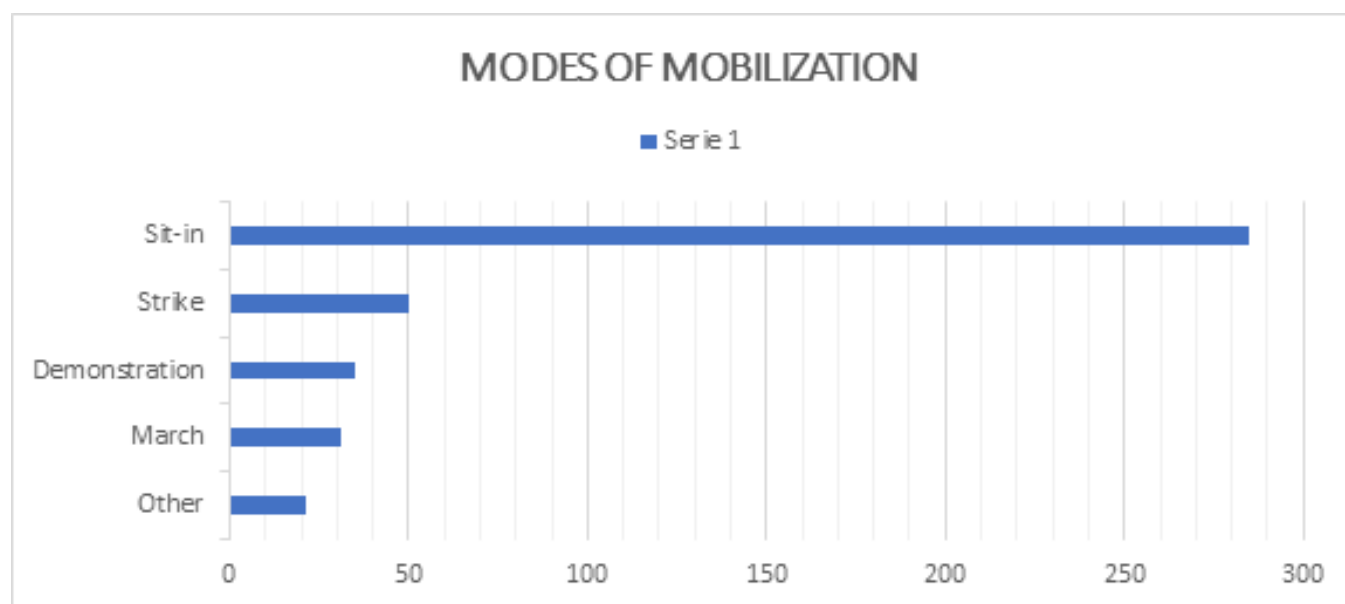
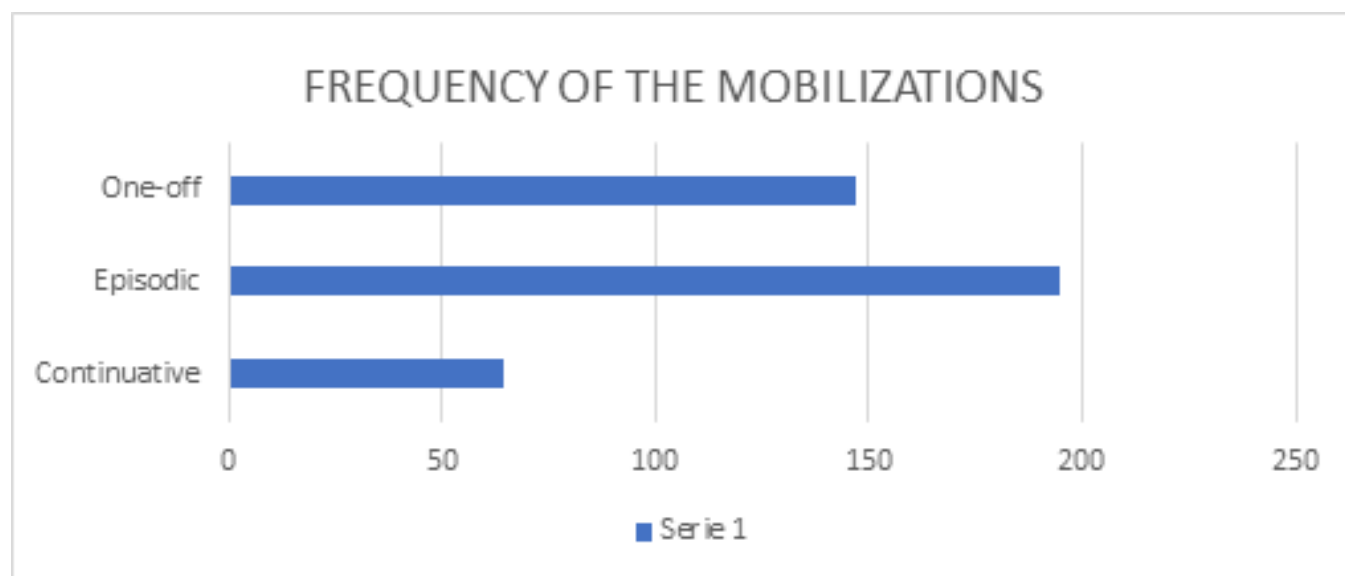
GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION PER GOVERNORATE

Amman Irbid National Karak Zarqa Aqaba Balqa
Ma'an Madaba Tafilah Ajloun Jerash Mafraq



The dominant forms of mobilization were sit-ins (70%), followed by strikes (12%), protests (9%) and marches (8%).

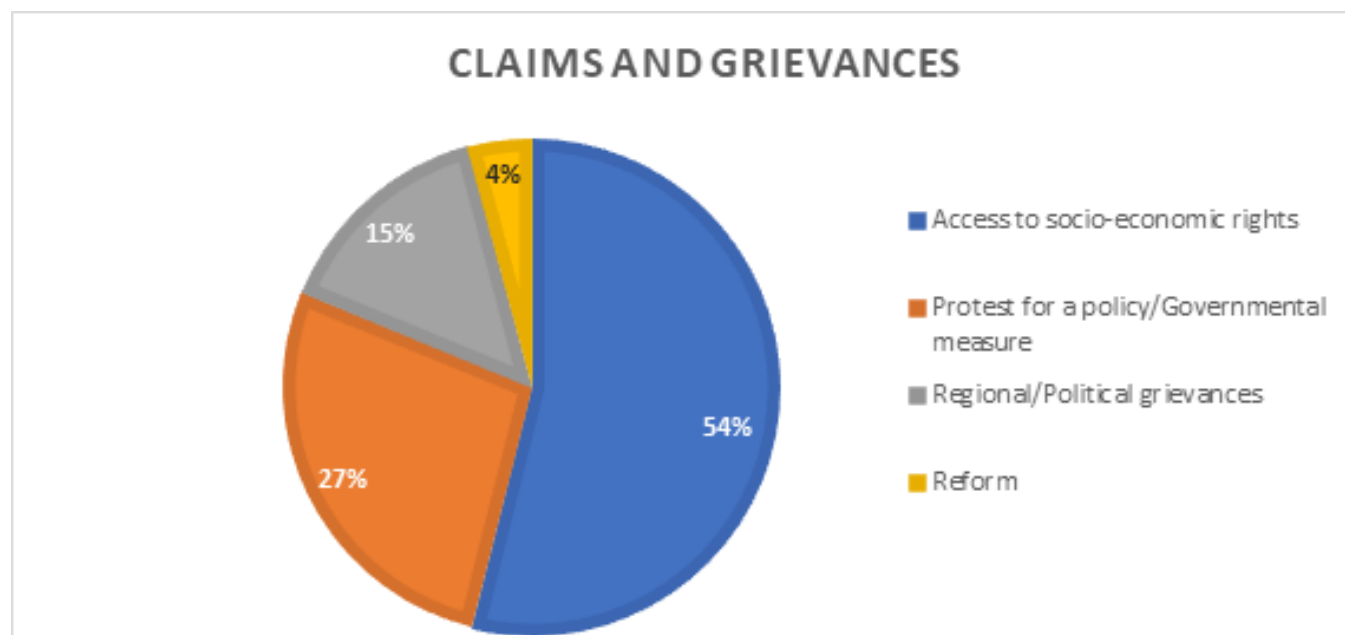
The triennium also witnessed a net predominance of continuative (16%) and episodic (48%) mobilizations over one-off events (36%), indicating the persistence of the triggers igniting collective action and the failure of the state to provide adequate responses. Furthermore, several continuative mobilizations (open-ended strikes and sit-ins) lasted for several weeks.



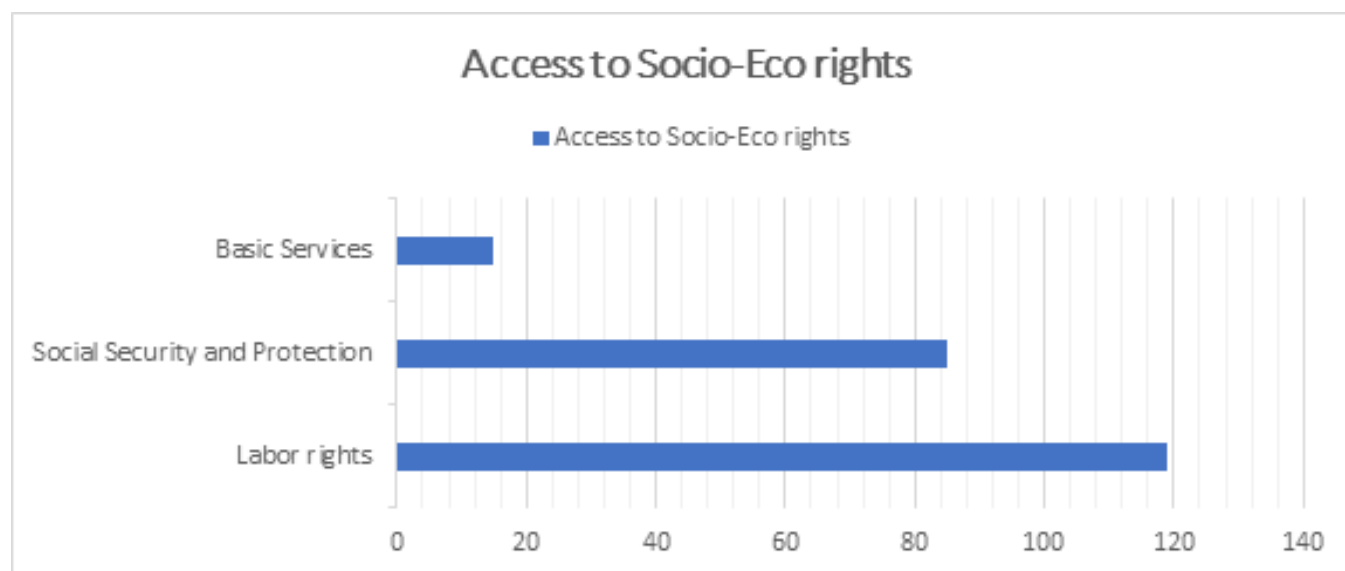
• Demands and Triggers of the Mobilizations

The net majority of the actions detected revolved around the demand for greater socio-economic rights,

followed by policy grievances which, likewise, were for the most part related to socio-economic issues.

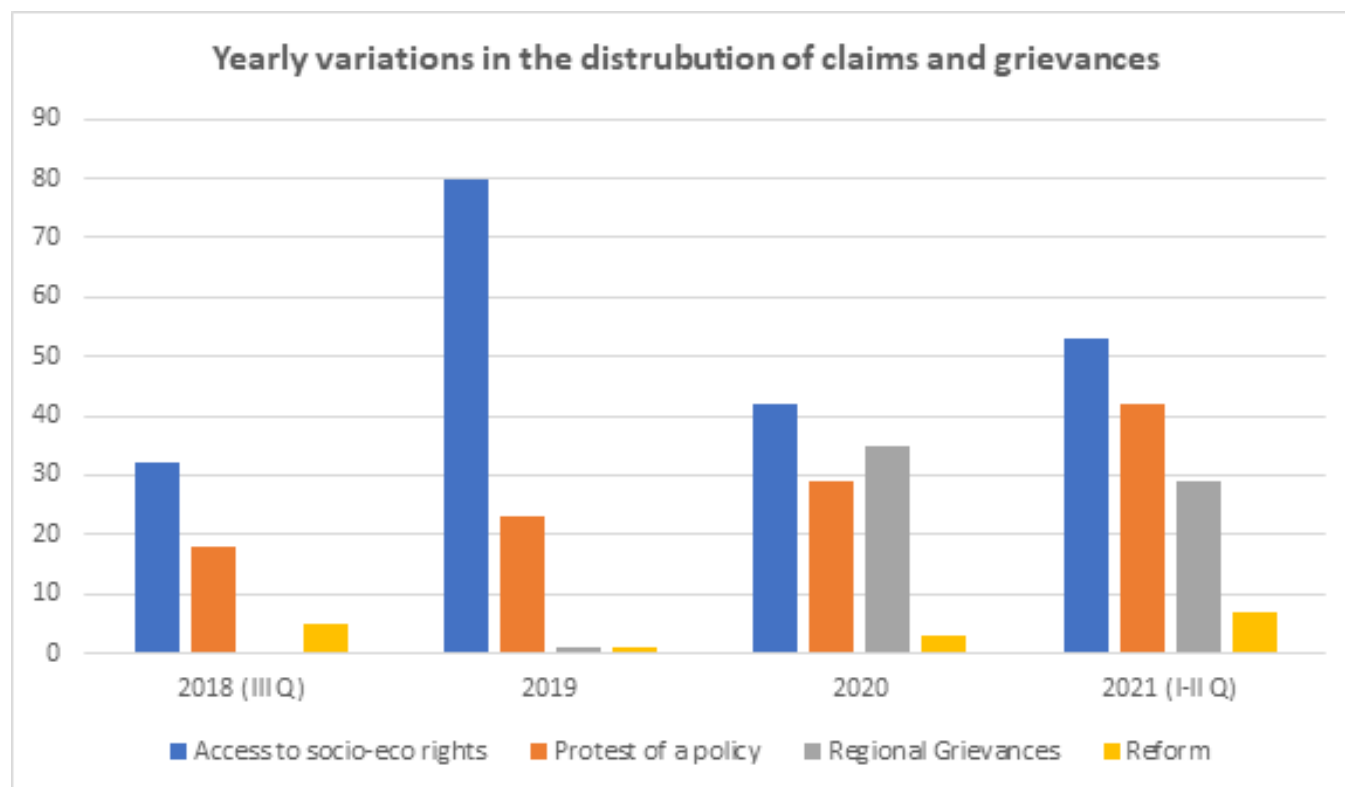


The predominance of these demands fully reflects the scope and the trajectories of the sharp decline in the average living conditions experienced by Jordan in the past three years, under the combined effect of stagnating growth, rising unemployment and cost of living, and the implementation of strict IMF-backed austerity policies including higher taxes, cuts in public expenditure for wages and social services, and the privatization of education and healthcare.



From the point of view of labor rights, most labor demands revolved around the quest for higher wages, permanent employment, and greater social security benefits and allowances. The struggle for the

payment of back wages also occupied an important share. In terms of social security and protection, the main demands included greater job opportunities, as well as compensations for the economic losses caused by the spread of COVID-19 and the containment strategies implemented by the government. This last demand also represented the main trigger for the steady increase in policy grievances detected in 2021.

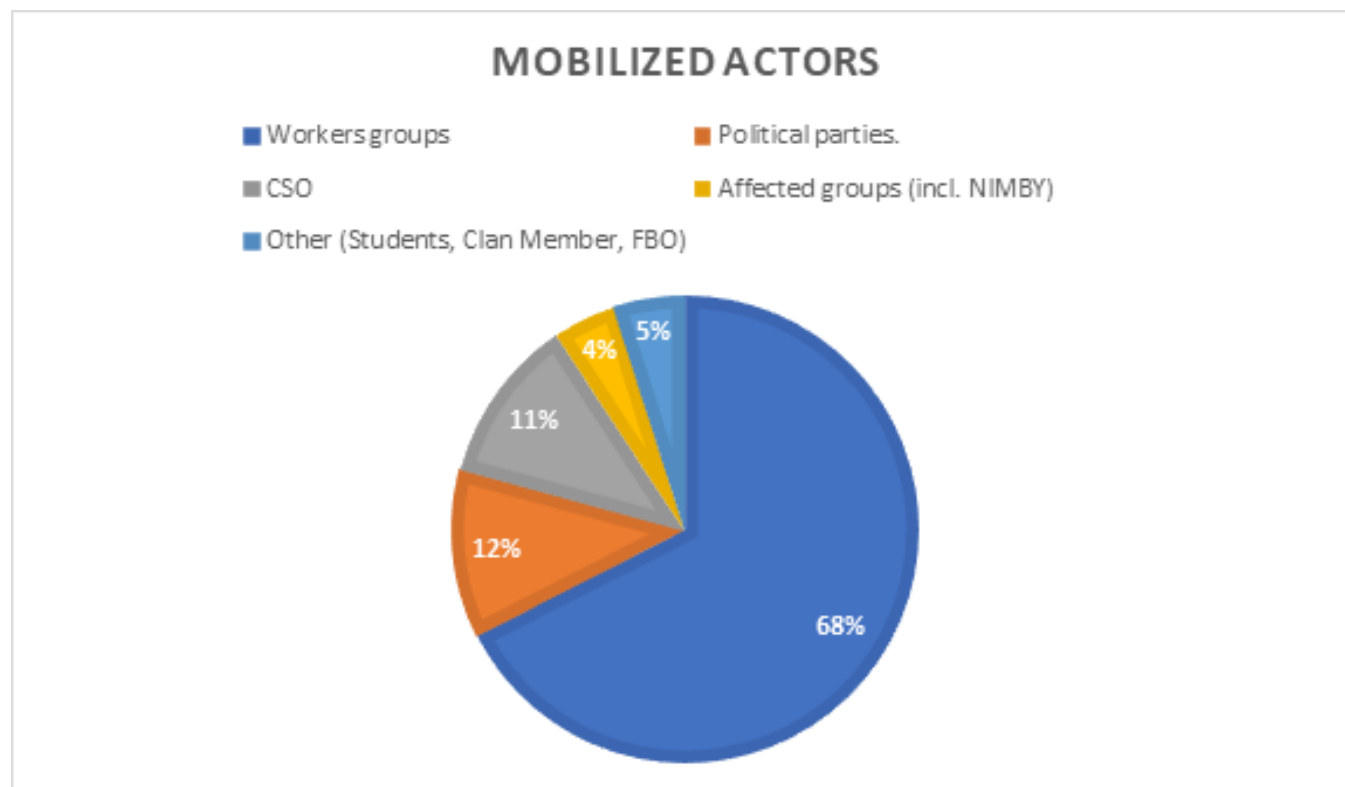


It should be noted that, despite the commonality of claims and structural triggers, the quest for socio-economic rights remains widely fragmented into a variety of insular sectoral or corporate disputes. Furthermore, despite the outrage in March 2021 over the death of seven COVID-19 patients due to oxygen shortages, which led to large-scale protests demanding the resignation of the government and a change in economic and security policies, this upsurge did not lead to the resurgence of a broad-based movement demanding systemic change.

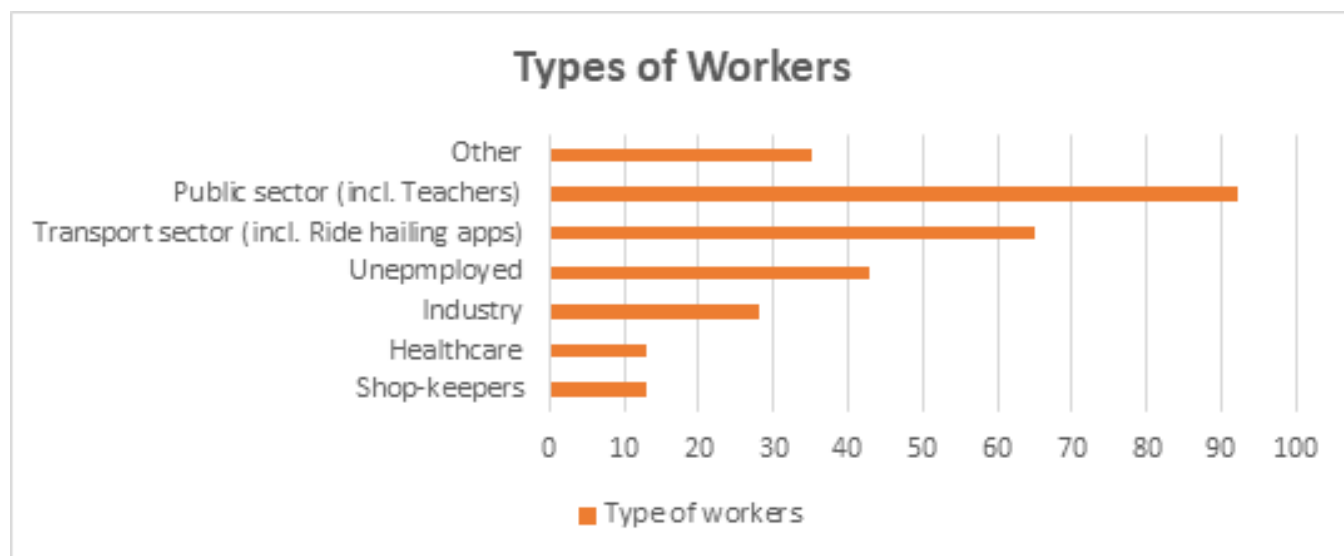
Finally, the sharp increase in regional grievances in 2020 and 2021 can be attributed to two important waves of protest in solidarity with Palestine, sparked respectively by Donald Trump's "Deal of the Century" (31 actions) and the resumption of large-scale violent confrontations in the Occupied Territories and Gaza simultaneously with the #SaveSheikhJarrah campaign in May 2021 (29 actions). This serves as a testament to the persisting centrality of the Palestinian question among Jordanians, despite the normalization policies pursued by the monarchy for decades. Another manifestation of this divergence was emerged in early January 2020, as the brokering of a gas deal between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom triggered a wave of protests on a national scale (4 actions).

• Actors and Mobilizing Structures

As is characteristic of demand and grievance movements, most of the collective actions detected during the examined triennium were performed by workers' groups.



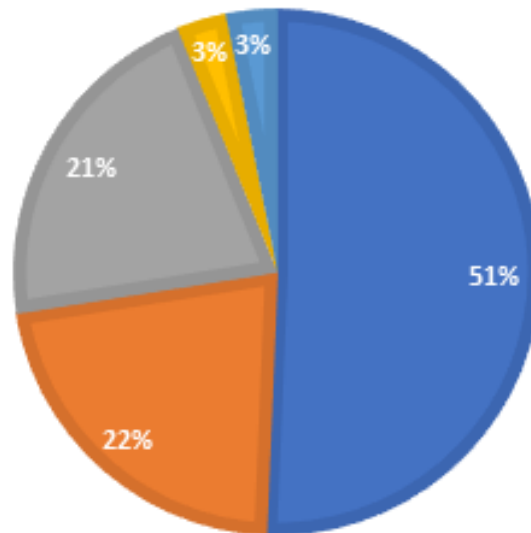
The most combative fronts included workers in the public sector, the unemployed youth, and workers in the transport sector, which mobilized almost uninterruptedly throughout the examined period. One-off mobilizations were performed predominantly by affected groups and other productive categories, most notably shopkeepers.



The predominant position of the public sector is strictly related to the austerity policies applied by Jordanian governments in recent years, which had a severe impact on wages, benefits, and labor stability. Teachers occupy a leading position among public sector workers, as they have been at the center of a relentless confrontation with the state to demand both labor and union rights for the past three years. As for the protests of the unemployed youth, they have mainly been staged by urban/educated and rural/unskilled youth groups alike, indicating both the pervasiveness of the phenomenon and the widespread conception among the youth of the state as being a 'care' institution. Finally, drivers of ride-hailing apps, most notably Uber and Careem, are occupying an ever-larger share among the workers in the transport sector and have been mobilizing to voice corporate grievances and to demand greater labor representation.

MOBILIZING STRUCTURES

■ Collective/Informal group ■ Political Party ■ CSO ■ FBO ■ Clan



With the exception of school teachers, most of these mobilizations developed within the framework of informal mobilizing structures. On the other hand, CSOs, FBOs, and political parties were predominant in the mobilizations related to the quest for reform and regional grievances.

In conclusion, despite the lack of media coverage, Jordanian society is currently witnessing a multitude of pervasive and increasing tensions nested in the shadow of the country's economic downturn and the austerity policies adopted by the state. Albeit these tensions are failing to translate themselves into broad-based movements demanding systemic change, it is worth mentioning that a consistent portion of the most deeply-rooted ones (particularly the public sector and rural/peripheral governorates) has been developing within the historical monarchical socio-geographical constituencies. This is a testament to the difficulties faced by the Hashemite monarchy in fully implementing the neoliberal upgrading of the authoritarian bargain with its target constituencies which, in the past ten years, has already been conducive to several transgressive contentious cycles.