



COVID-19 AND PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S CURFEW MEASURES IN JORDAN

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Abstract : The spread of the COVID-19 virus affected countries all over the world and led them to impose different measures to combat the pandemic. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was one of the countries affected by the virus; hence, the Government of Jordan imposed strict curfew measures to fight the pandemic. Accordingly, this article intends to examine how much public support the Jordanian government's decisions and policies, particularly concerning the imposition or the suggestion of imposing strict curfew measures gained from the Jordanian citizens via invoking content analysis to examine citizens' comments extracted from an official Jordanian media channel. The results showed that at the beginning of the crisis, the majority of citizens demonstrated support for the government's strict curfew. However, this changed a year after, mainly for economic reasons.

INTRODUCTION

On December 31, 2019, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Wuhan, China (WHO n.d.). On March 11, 2020 WHO declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic (WHO 2020). Since then and until October 2021, the daily updated death toll reported that the virus took the lives of approximately five million individuals worldwide (Worldometer 2021a). Accordingly, this meant that this highly and rapidly contagious virus became an

imminent threat to countries' economic, social and healthcare structures and systems, which led their governments to put strict measures into force to contain the spread of the virus.

Since WHO declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was affected by the disease. The Jordanian Ministry of Health reported the first case of COVID-19 in early March 2020 and up until the time of writing this article, around 800 thousand

cases and 11 thousand deaths were reported (Gardaworld 2020; Worldometer 2021b). Consequently, the Jordanian government gradually but rapidly started taking action in March 2020 and declared a state of emergency in the country. This led to imposing strict nationwide curfew measures that obligated citizens and residents to stay at their homes and fined those who did not obey the rules (HRW 2020).

The imposition of curfew measures undoubtedly affected the residents of Jordan as it - most importantly - implied social, educational and economic alterations. The social alterations were related to the idea of banning social gatherings in all shapes and forms, maintaining distance from others at all times and the emergence of internal domestic issues (KFW 2020; France24 2020). Moreover, the educational changes were tangible in terms of switching to virtual teaching and suspending the normal face-to-face pedagogical approach. The aforementioned changes were imposed on all students from different age groups and education levels (Roya News 2020a). Furthermore, economic alterations were a result of switching to working from home, reducing salaries, enterprises changing their policies and a redundancy of employment to reduce their workforce and save operational costs. In addition, the economic effects were mostly tangible in relation to day laborers as they were not permitted to leave their homes to do their jobs (Aljazeera 2021).

Correspondingly, the introduction of the strict nationwide curfew touched and affected several important aspects of the lives of Jordanian citizens and residents. Therefore, it would be vital to examine the residents' opinions towards the government's policies to combat the pandemic. Accordingly, this article intends - in a modest way - to examine how much public support the Jordanian

government's decisions and policies, particularly concerning the imposition or the suggestion of imposing strict curfew measures gained from the Jordanian residents. Here, the concept of public support follows Easton's (1975) definition of the concept. Easton perceives public support as a tool that can serve to withdraw a linkage between actions and the attitudes they cause as a response (Easton 1975). Therefore, this article aims to tackle this matter by studying the residents' comments and reactions regarding the first introduction of the full lockdown measures, and the suggestions to impose another nationwide curfew a year after. Residents' stances towards this matter will be used as an indicator of the status of support they reflect.

Furthermore, this article follows a goal-oriented approach. Therefore, the following parts of the article shed light on the methodological approach invoked in the study to analyze and compare the residents' stances towards the government's introduction of curfew measures at the beginning of the pandemic and residents' reaction to the media's suggestion for another strict lockdown a year after. Finally, the article concludes and lists the major findings.

METHODOLOGY

The used approach to answer the question raised in the previous section follows a mixed methodological approach. First, the article intends to examine the residents' comments and reactions, as an indicator of the support they demonstrate for the government's nationwide curfew policies, on Facebook posts from Roya News, which is a well-known TV channel that covers and shares news through its Facebook page. This article examines residents' stances towards the issue at hand by analyzing their discourse - extracted from their comments - on two posts. On the one hand, it examines

the residents' comments on a post that was shared on March 21, 2020, a few days after the introduction of the nationwide curfew. The first post to be examined shows a video in which the Jordanian Army arrests violators of curfew orders (Roya News 2020b). On the other hand, the article studies the residents' comments on a Facebook page from the same media channel that was posted less than a year after. The second post asks the public about their opinion on whether they are for or against the introduction of another long-term nationwide strict curfew due to the increase in the number of COVID-19 cases and infections (Roya News 2021).

Accordingly, in order to extract the Jordanian citizens' support for the government's idea of a nationwide strict curfew as a tool to prevent the spread of the disease, there is a need for a comprehensive method. Thus, this article runs a content analysis (CA), to analyze the residents' comments that were extracted from the media. Moreover, because the article intends to perform qualitative research, which draws from written expressions on the media, CA is employed (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). Multiple definitions of content analysis exist throughout academic literature. For example, White and Marsh refer to content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (White & Marsh 2006, 23-27). Neuendorf and Kumar, for their part, define content analysis as "the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics" (Neuendorf & Kumar, 2015, 1). Furthermore, they provide insights on the fact that most content analysis academic endeavors include some manual or human coding (Neuendorf & Kumar, 2015, p. 1).

For this article, the optimum choice would be to use Hsieh and Shannon's definition for content analysis, which reflects the the simplest

and most appropriate for our purposes, and can be perceived as the most suitable tool for this written-text analysis. Hsieh and Shannon (2005, 1277) define content analysis as "[a tool] to interpret meaning from the content of text data". Moreover, the two authors present three approaches to CA, which differ in coding schemes, origins of codes, and threats to trustworthiness. First, the conventional content analysis where coding categories are derived directly from the text data. Second, the directed approach where a theory or relevant research findings are used as a guide for initial codes. Third, Hsieh and Shannon present the summative approach that depends on examining and comparing keywords and content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying meanings in a context (Hsieh & Shannon 2005).

This article follows the summative approach, since it aims at finding representative comments and reactions from the residents of Jordan, which signal their support for or opposition to the government's curfew measures. Accordingly, the residents' comments we extracted will be categorized as being either in support for the strict lockdown or opposed to it. Another category will include the comments that did not reflect a particular or clear position towards the government's policies. Therefore, by interpreting the residents' expressions, this article allocates the comments and reactions to the category, which it represents. Moreover, the article will also allocate whether the residents' standpoints stem from economic, social or education reasons.

Furthermore, while analyzing the data, the methodology of this article follows the guidelines postulated by White and Marsh (2006), whereby the researcher establishes a hypothesis and identifies appropriate data. Accordingly, the hypothesis of this article is that citizens and residents of Jordan demonstrated

support for the first strict lockdown measures since the disease was peculiar and international media constantly displayed its lethality, which led, as a result, to spreading fear among the people of either getting sick or infecting the elderly. However, they demonstrated opposition to the latter suggestion for a strict lockdown, mainly for economic reasons. Second, the researcher identifies and selects a source to collect the data. This includes the residents' comments on the two Facebook

posts published by Roya News. Third, the researcher analyses the data by establishing a coding scheme, followed by data analysis based on the contextual meaning of the samples. The overall number of the comments analysed was 100, which included 50 comments from the first post and 50 from the second. Finally, the researcher provides the results. The following table displays the coding scheme that was chosen for the purpose of this article.

CATEGORY	CODING RULE	EXAMPLES (retrieved from the Facebook posts and translated from Arabic to English)
Support for the curfew measures	The reactions and comments of the residents reflect a position that supports the curfew measures. The context of the discourse is taken into consideration as well as the usage of "positive" words in the context.	"If you love your country, stay at home." "Obey the rules. They were put to protect the citizens' interests." "For the first time, I agree with the government's measures. Such circumstances need such measures" "A long curfew is a vital necessity. If the daily number of infections keeps rising at this pace, we will not have available beds in the hospitals by next week"
Opposition to the curfew measures	The reactions and comments of the residents reflect a position that opposes the curfew measures. The context of the discourse is taken into consideration as well as the usage of "negative" words in the context.	"A long curfew cannot be the solution. It only destroys and brings with it negative implications" "Of course, no. We will die of hunger, not of COVID-19" "We became used to laziness. We are depressed. We will not die from COVID-19, but from our anguish that results from your decisions"
Unclear position	The reactions and comments of the residents do not clearly indicate support for or opposition to the curfew measures	"If you want to impose a long curfew, compensate the citizens, in particular, day laborers" "The government must take into consideration the needs of day laborers" "I am afraid that after the government lifts the curfew restrictions, citizens will gather in big groups. If this happens, the curfew's positive aspects in controlling the spread of the virus will go in vain"

Table 1: Coding scheme and coding rules applied in this article

CURFEW IN JORDAN: BEGINNING OF THE CRISIS

This section of the article will present the overall analysis and the main findings that were extracted after examining the residents' reactions and comments on social media concerning the issue at hand. The following

chart presents the status of support that the comments of the residents of Jordan reflected concerning the first Facebook post, in which the army arrests the violators of the curfew measures. Here, the reactions of the residents to the video is reflected, which serves to identify the level of their support, or otherwise.

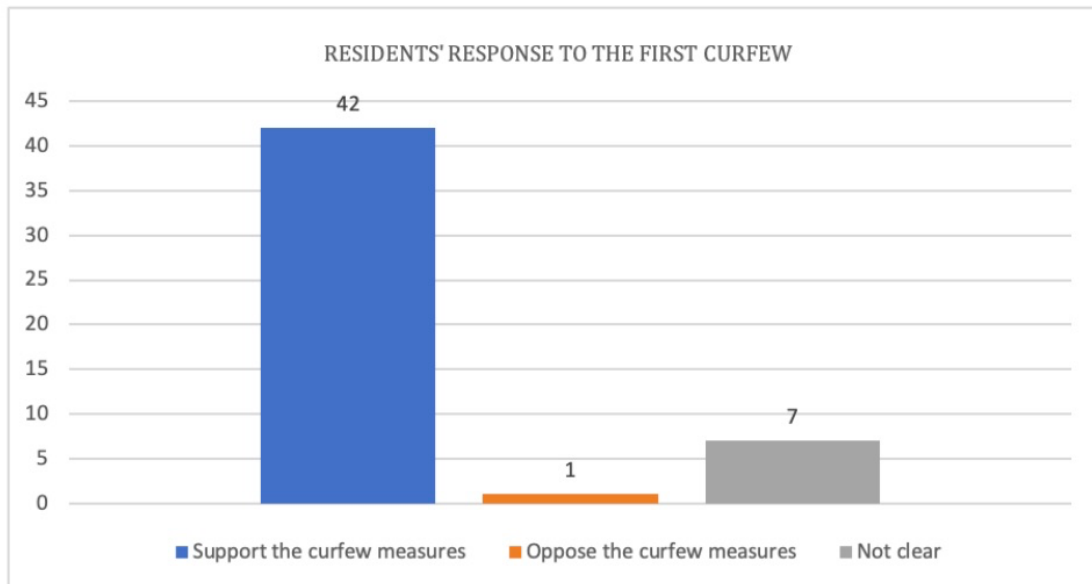


Figure 1: Residents of Jordan Response to the first curfew

Out of the 50 examined comments on Roya's first Facebook post, 42 residents demonstrated support for the government's curfew measures, while one comment voiced opposition to them. Furthermore, seven comments did not provide enough evidence or keywords to identify them as being for or against the curfew measures. Therefore, such comments were labeled as "not clear". The positive support stemmed from several reasons that the residents reflected in their comments. The first reason was related to how the government's curfew measures were perceived as a vital tool to contain the spread of the virus, protect the masses' health and preserve the working force of the medical staff at the hospitals. This reason, which reflected

support, was observed as the most typical and shared reason among the opinions extracted from the comments.

Moreover, some of the reactions demonstrated support backed by religious references. This was evident in three of the 50 examined comments. On the first hand, a resident criticized the actions of violators of the curfew rules and addressed them by stating that stubbornness and defiance are two characteristics that "describe the people of Hell". On the second hand, another resident also criticized those who violate the curfew measures and backed his criticism on a verse from the Quran: "O you who believe, obey

God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. If you should quarrel about anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day; that is perhaps, better and more excellent in interpretation." (An-Nisa 4:59). Consequently, this sort of discourse emphasizes that obeying the rules set by the authorities - in this case, the Jordanian government's curfew measures - is an obligation, to which Muslims must obey.

Furthermore, the support for the curfew measures also stemmed from reasons related to citizenship in ways related to the supremacy of law and public interest, as well as the citizens' duty to obey such laws. Here, the comments emphasized the vitality of the citizens' and residents' collective action to follow the rules in order to ensure the health and safety of the whole of society. At the same time, some of the comments that reflected support from such perspectives also laid emphasis on and criticized how the violators of the curfew rules were treated by the army. Accordingly, this does not shed light on the citizens' duties in such unfortunate circumstances only, but also their right to be treated with manners and respect.

Examining the one comment that reflected opposition to the curfew measures, we find that the resident's comment on the Facebook post reflected opposition based on economic reasons. This was evident as the resident clearly hypothesized how poverty and lack of income might oblige people to break the law with the means of searching for any sort of income or economic support to provide for themselves and their families. Therefore, this comment gives insights into the opposition of the curfew measures, as they might be seen as an obstacle and tremendous a challenge to those whose income is dependent on daily labor work.

As for the seven comments that did not demonstrate a clear stance to define their authors' support, they primarily highlight gaps in how the curfew was imposed while emphasizing technical curfew implementation issues. This was clear in the residents' comments as they demonstrated some concerns that the future easement of curfew measures will lead to the overcrowding of citizens and residents in the shops and supermarkets, which as a result would lead the infection numbers to increase again. In addition, they also addressed concerns related to the short notice before the curfew entered into force, which did not give the citizens and residents enough time to purchase supplies. Finally, other comments demonstrated some sort of empathy with those who violated the curfew rules.

Furthermore, one important insight was revealed after examining the comments, which - to some extent - signals an issue that needs to be addressed. This issue is mainly linked to the language used in the comments section while criticizing the violators of the curfew rules. Here, an issue of communication is identified. The inclinations towards using offensive and harsh language to criticize and blame the violators demonstrate a harsh condemnation of their actions, which does not take into consideration some humanitarian reasons that might have led them to violate the rules. In addition, the language used - in some cases - does not demonstrate any sign of respect to the violators. Nonetheless, this does not mean that one has to sympathize with the violators, however, when criticizing, the comments should adhere to some rules that ensure constructive criticism and show respect to others.

In addition, another interesting insight is that very few comments reflected any concerns towards the economic, spiritual, psychological and physical impacts of the curfew. This can be

related to the fact that due to the novelty of the disease, residents' concerns were mainly geared at avoiding infection.

To sum up, this section has demonstrated that the majority of the examined comments displayed support for the government's curfew measures. This support was backed by health, religious and patriotic reasons. Accordingly, it would be important to inspect whether this support stayed stable when Roya news asked the citizens and residents for their opinions regarding a second strict curfew to control the spread of the virus. This will be covered in the subsequent section.

A YEAR AFTER: SUGGESTION FOR A LONG-TERM CURFEW

This section will display the results and main findings of the 50 comments that were examined to identify the residents' support for a suggestion for another strict curfew to contain the spread of the virus. The figure below presents the status of support that the comments of Jordanians and other residents reflected concerning the second Facebook post, in which Roya news asks the residents on their opinions regarding a suggestion for the implementation of another strict curfew in the country. Here, the comments reflected the reactions of the residents on a social media post, which serves with identifying the status of their support.

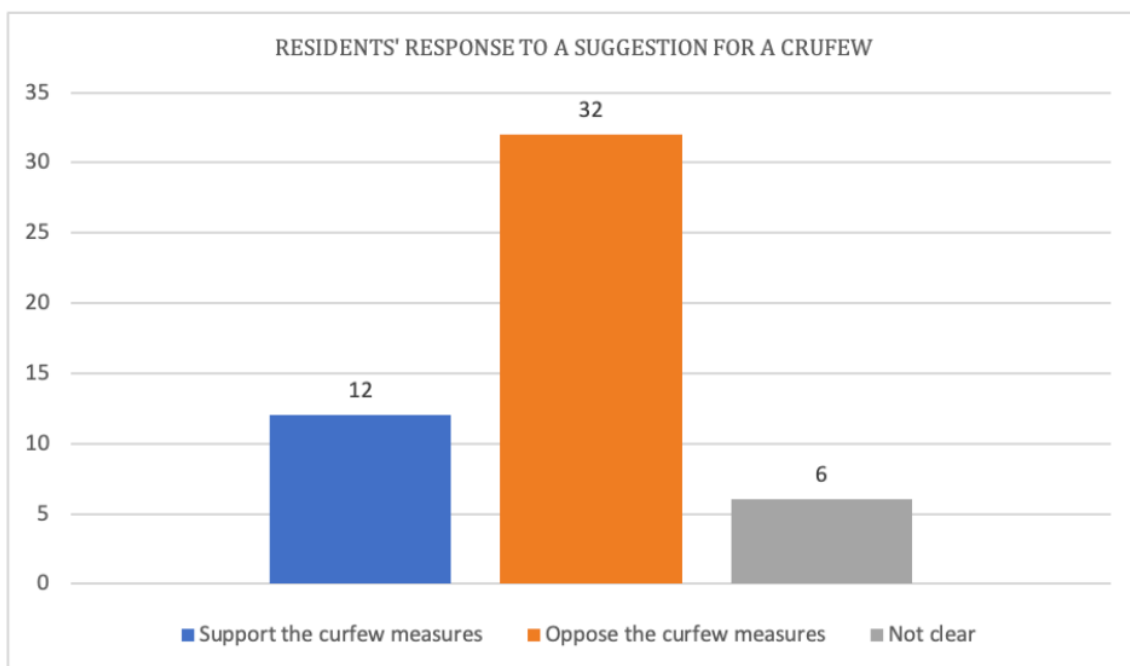


Figure 2: Residents of Jordan response to a suggestion for a curfew

Out of the 50 examined comments on Roya's second Facebook post, only 12 residents demonstrated support for the government's curfew measures, while 32 residents comments reflected opposition to them.

Furthermore, six comments did not provide enough evidence or keywords to perceive them as with or against the curfew measures. However, some of these comments gave

insights into when a curfew would be supported and when it would not.

Commencing with the reactions that displayed positive support for the idea of a second strict curfew, residents based this support on one main reason: health. A discourse analysis of the reactions showed that some of the residents agreed to commit to a strict curfew, as they believed in it as a tool to break the infections' chain, to decrease the number of COVID-19 patients and to ensure maintaining available capacities at the hospitals to deal with patients. Moreover, in one comment, a resident supported the idea of another curfew with the argument that the Jordanian government has already given the citizens and residents enough chances to comply and follow health protocols to which they did not conform. This suggests that if citizens and residents had complied with the rules previously, the number of infections would not have increased as it did. Furthermore, this point suggests a need for more solid citizenship and citizens' collective action in such times.

When it comes to the comments that reflected opposition to the idea for another strict curfew, we find that the majority of them expressed opposition based on economic reasons. This was evident in the reactions, as the residents voiced concerns relating to the worsening of their economic situations and the individuals who depend on daily labor as their sole source of income. Moreover, residents excelled in conveying the economic implications resulting from a curfew via employing metaphors that carry huge significance. For example, a comment included a metaphor where poverty was described as the most lethal and dangerous form of a virus.

In addition to that, a comment emphasized the psychological impacts resulting from the

curfew measures. Here, the stress was on how such measures lead to converting people into lazy individuals who suffer from depression. Consequently, this signals the people's general need for activity that can come in different forms, including sports, work and any other thing that require physical activity. In addition, it also signals the need and unfortunate lack of attention and sensitivity to the individuals' mental health. Furthermore, another reason for opposing the idea for a strict curfew was conveyed in the comment of a resident who displayed his dissatisfaction with the way the government was combatting the pandemic. Here, the concern was reflected by shedding light on the general worsening of the educational, agricultural, industrial and trade-related sectors, alongside other social dimensions.

Another important reason that was extracted after analyzing the discourses was conveyed in a comment in which a resident stated that the first strict curfew measures were enforced when there was a relatively small number of infections and which eventually did not contain the spread of the virus. Thus, the resident's argument continued by stating that a curfew would not ease the situation, particularly since the infections reached even higher numbers. Accordingly, this reason is vital as it demonstrates opposition due to a negative experience. In addition, it emphasizes the notion that suggests that residents' support for governmental measures would improve over time as long as their experiences reflect positivity and fulfill the citizens' and residents' interests.

The six comments that displayed unclear positions towards the idea for another strict curfew measures had one thing in common: the need for governmental aid, subsidies and compensations to support the economic needs of the individuals who are negatively affected

due to curfew rules. Accordingly, such aid could be perceived as a prerequisite that the government should fulfill to obtain the citizens' and residents' support for their decisions and measures.

To sum up, this section has demonstrated that the majority of the examined comments and reactions displayed opposition to the suggestion of enforcing strict curfew measures a second time. This opposition stemmed from primarily economic reasons and their impact on individuals. In addition, this opposition was due to educational, industrial, agricultural and psychological motives. However, some comments displayed support for such an idea and it was mainly based on health-related reasons. Moreover, some comments were not clear in terms of their authors' stances. Nonetheless, they provide preconditions necessitated by the government to obtain residents' support.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed at figuring out how much public support the Jordanian government's decisions and policies, particularly concerning the imposition or the suggestion of imposing strict curfew measures, obtained from residents of Jordan. Accordingly, content analysis was employed as a tool to tackle this question. The data and comments were extracted from two posts from Roya News' Facebook page, which eventually led to studying 100 comments from the residents' comments. Fifty comments were studied from the first post, which was published at the beginning of the crisis. The same number of comments were analyzed from the second post, which was published a year after the first. Moreover, the coding of the comments was based on differentiating the content and splitting it into two groups: supporting or opposing curfew measures.

The results of the analysis of the first post demonstrated that the majority of the residents and citizens supported the government's curfew measures. This support mainly stemmed from health concerns. Therefore, the comments perceived curfew measures as an important tool to contain the spread of the virus and protect residents' health. On the other hand, the results of the analysis of the second post concluded that the majority of the residents were opposing the idea of imposing curfew measures. Here, the opposition mainly stemmed from economic concerns as the general financial situation of the residents was worsening, particularly those who depended on daily labor as the main source of their income. Accordingly, these two findings confirm the hypothesis of this article, which indicated that the residents were leaning towards supporting the first curfew for health-related reasons, while they were opposing the second one for economic motives.

Nonetheless, the article revealed other important motives behind supporting or opposing the curfew measures. On the first hand, support was garnered by generating a feeling of a religious obligation to obey the government's curfew measures, as well as a feeling for the importance of citizenship, residents' and citizens' collective action and their duties towards each other. On the other hand, the opposition also stemmed from reasons related to the psychological implications resulting from lack of activity and the constant feeling of worry due to the curfew measures. Moreover, the decrease in the trust in the government's way of dealing with the pandemic due to negative experiences led to opposing the suggestion for another strict curfew.

Additionally, the results of the content analysis for the comments provided suggestions from the residents on how the government can improve its curfew measures so that it could

obtain their support. The residents mainly referred to the government's responsibility to compensate those who suffer due to curfew measures via providing governmental aid, subsidies and economic help so that residents of Jordan can cope with the "side effects" of the curfew measures.

reflections or concerns regarding the effect of the curfew measures on education and switching into virtual learning. Therefore, future studies can investigate and research the residents' comments from other social media posts that focused on the government's measures in relation to education in Jordan.

Finally, the comments on the two posts examined in this study did not demonstrate any

NOTES

*Some articles are originally written in Arabic and the author translated their content to English.

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*The comments examined in this study were retrieved from the following Facebook posts. The titles are originally written in Arabic and the author translated them to English.

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