

*“He who did wrong
should be accountable”*
Syrian Perspectives on
Transitional Justice

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Syria Justice and
Accountability Centre



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ABSTRACT

To better understand opinions and perceptions — and highlight Syrian voices — the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC) commissioned Charney Research to conduct in-depth interviews among a diverse group of Syrians, including Sunnis, Shia, Alawites, and Christians; regime supporters and opponents; and internally displaced persons and refugees. Researchers found that awareness of the potential transitional justice options is low, but interest in solutions that might stop the fighting, establish the rule of law, and offer accountability is quite strong. Syrians yearn to end their war and live together again as one community and nation. Charney concluded that efforts to increase awareness and promote discussion about transitional justice options have the potential to appeal to all Syrians, and may help bridge the enormous split between the government and opposition blocs — and toward resolution of the conflict.

140-CHARACTER SUMMARY

New research from #Syria highlights opinions about #justice and #accountability options. Via @SJAC_info.

KEYWORDS

accountability, conflict resolution, justice, Syria, transitional justice, reconciliation

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Introduction

The human toll of Syria's violent conflict is devastating, and national, regional, and international stakes in the conflict are high. As of this writing, of a pre-war population of 22.5 million, the war is estimated to have killed as many as 115,000, wounded tens of thousands more, displaced 6.5 million internally, and forced 2.2 million into exile. The conflict has also shattered the Syrian economy, heavily burdened the country's neighbours with refugees, and drawn in outside, regional, and global actors.

Yet all wars end — and when they do, it is increasingly common that there is a reckoning for abuses committed during the conflict. Indeed, in the event of a negotiated settlement, provisions for transitional justice may be a crucial aspect of the accords. Even if one side ultimately prevails, the suffering inflicted upon all sides tends to produce demands for accountability and compensation. In the case of Syria, the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC) seeks to generate discussion and increase awareness about transitional justice issues among legal specialists and the Syrian public. As a first step, SJAC seeks to help make heard Syrians voices on these issues.

Charney Research, in cooperation with SJAC, conducted qualitative research on issues related to transitional justice with average Syrians inside and outside of their country in August 2013. Through 46 in-depth interviews in Damascus, Aleppo, Raqqah, Hama, Homs, and al-Qamishli and in Turkey and Jordan, interviewers spoke with both regime supporters and opponents, as well as the internally displaced and refugees, about how Syria can begin to address the abuses and losses due to the conflict.

The suffering in all communities, even those not directly affected by conflict, is striking. Anger, fear, and despair came through in interviews. Most respondents seemed to speak freely and were keen to have an outlet for their opinions, though some requested that interviewers not to reveal their identities. Pessimism about the future was tinged with shock about how far the country has fallen so quickly and the fear of increasing sectarianism. As dire as the situation is for many internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, many expressed regret that others had suffered far more than they had.

The research revealed a surprising degree of consensus regarding transitional justice, despite the deep polarization in perceptions of leaders and actors in Syria's civil war. There was a strong desire for a negotiated settlement to end the violence, as well as for coexistence among people of different views and faiths and among refugees, IDPs, and those who remain in their home areas. There was a near-universal desire for accountability for abuses committed by both sides. Trials were the most popular form of accountability, while truth commissions, though unfamiliar, also received support. Compensation for wartime losses was seen as necessary on both sides as well — with considerable agreement on who should receive it.

Predictably, there is stark disagreement on the major political actors and forces, but also a degree of ambivalence among partisans on both sides (though more pronounced among opponents of the regime). There was also fear of Syria's "culture of revenge" in the aftermath of the war.

The findings underline that though the path to a transition in Syria will undoubtedly be hard, transitional justice mechanisms may play a role. It is not too early to encourage and assist Syrians themselves to begin to discuss them.

Craig Charney & Christine Quirk

Charney Research

December 2013

Executive Summary

Mood

Syrians interviewed are deeply negative about the country's situation and direction. The war has touched everyone, even those in relatively secure places.

Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are the most affected, while religious minorities feel under siege from radical Islamic forces, and Sunnis are anxious about sectarianism and violence.

Blame splits along political lines: regime supporters hold mercenaries and foreigners responsible for the war, opponents blame President Assad.

Both sides are shocked by the extent and degree of violence and social disintegration.

Freedom of expression generally depends on allegiances — government supporters feel free, opponents do not. However, regime opponents in opposition-run areas feel freer, if wary of Islamic radicals.

Neither side expects the conflict to end soon.

Settlement Prospects

Most respondents prefer a negotiated settlement as the only way to stop the killing, but there is skepticism about its possibility and mistrust among those on opposing sides.

Many regime opponents would accept exile for President Assad as part of a negotiated end to the violence. Those who rejected this insisted that he should be held accountable.

Regime supporters would not consider exile for Assad, even as part of a settlement.

Most said that after the conflict they would be willing to live with neighbours who had different political views or who had left their homes during the conflict.

But there were caveats: many said coexistence required that there be no violence or armed groups among them. Some also rejected coexistence outright or the presence of ex-members of armed groups.

Those displaced from their homes feared they may not have homes or livelihoods to return to.

Accountability

Accountability for abuses during the conflict is vital. Regime supporters and opponents and all sects agree. Many respondents were concerned about Syria's "culture of revenge," and saw institutionalized accountability as the alternative.

Most respondents, whether pro- or anti-regime, want those who committed abuses on either side to be held accountable, preferably by the justice system, as an alternative to revenge.

Very few respondents are willing to “forgive and forget.”

Transitional Justice Alternatives

Nearly all respondents on both sides agree that the rule of law should be paramount in post-war Syria — though there was disagreement between the opposing sides on whether the rule of law already exists.

There is also strong support for bringing rights violators before the courts and for the notion that those who committed abuses on both sides should be prosecuted. Of the options presented (trials, truth commissions, and compensation), trials are the most popular approach.

Pro- and anti-regime interviewees differed on whether the trials should occur in the existing courts or in new ones, but most in both camps favoured Syrian courts and rejected international participation.

Compensation for losses during the conflict was widely supported. Those who lost earners, property, jobs, or businesses were seen as the highest priorities for compensation.

Compensation was seen as a means of redressing economic damage, but accountability is required for losses, such as the deaths of family members, that cannot be undone by money.

Very few respondents had heard of truth commissions, however they were receptive to the idea — particularly to the evidence gathering and compensation components. That said, the suggestion of a truth commission offering amnesty for

confession, as in the case of South Africa, was unacceptable for many. Respondents felt that the prosecution of offenders was essential.

Views of Key Figures and Organizations

Views of Bashar al-Assad were extremely polarized, with supporters very favourable and opponents extremely negative.

The Syrian Army, formerly held in high esteem even by some regime opponents as the defender of the homeland, is now seen by anti-regime Syrians as serving only the regime. Regime supporters say it is still the protector of the country.

The Free Syrian Army receives mixed reviews from regime opponents: most say they are the strongest force taking on the regime, some offer unwavering support, but many worry about criminals hiding under its flag. Regime supporters view them as foreign-funded soldiers of fortune, incapable of governing a country.

The Syrian National Council (SNC) enjoyed little support from regime opponents or supporters, who mostly see it as ineffective and foreign-dominated. A few regime opponents were sympathetic to it.

The National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces is less well-known and opinions about it were softer than those of the SNC, but still largely negative, for similar reasons.

Jabhat al-Nusra evokes strong hostility among regime supporters, who see it as radical and fanatical. While regime opponents respect its effectiveness, many also worry about its radicalism, though some favour a temporary alliance of convenience.

Information Sources

Television is the most frequently mentioned source of information about the situation in Syria. Government supporters mentioned Al-Dunya, Al-Jadeeda, and Al-Ekhbariya Al-Suriyya. Opponents mentioned Shada Al Huriah and Deir-el-Zor, along with foreign stations (Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera, and Arabic versions of BBC, Sky News, France 24, and CNN).

There is strong discontent with most available information, seen as biased and partisan.

Syrians look to the internet for news that shows both sides or is objective, particularly Facebook, Twitter, and Al-Jazeera.net, as well as a site called Aleppo News, among Aleppo respondents.

Friends and family, especially for those displaced and refugees, were cited as the best source of objective information about what's happening in their local area.

Other media: Few listen to the radio, read print publications, or get SMS news.

Conclusions

Given the strong desire for an end to the fighting and to see accountability for abuses, this is an appropriate time to work with Syrians who wish to develop civic education efforts to inform their fellow citizens about transitional justice mechanisms, and to encourage discussion and debate about which mechanisms will be most likely to lay the foundation for reconciliation and peace in the Syria.

Mood: “What Syria is Going Through is Heartbreaking”

Regardless of their sect, ethnicity, or views of the regime, respondents agree on one thing: Syria is in a state of unprecedented crisis. No sector of society has escaped unscathed. The costs of the conflict — human and economic — and the divisions it has spawned have touched all. Many in the Sunni majority felt fury at the regime and its reprisals, religious minorities fear deepening sectarianism, and the displaced and refugees are despondent over their losses. There is little agreement on the causes of the violence or its solution. But many expressed deep dismay that the country has sunk so far, so fast.¹

Syrians Traumatized, Polarized

All the respondents in this study were very negative about the country’s dire situation and the direction in which it is headed. It is one of the things on which

¹ Methodology and demographic details on interviewees are available in the Appendices.

regime supporters and opponents agreed, though they differ regarding who is to blame.

There are families that have been completely destroyed and families who were divided between supporters and opponents. There are those who lost a son or a brother, widowed women and orphaned children. Could there be more destruction than this?

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 32, AL-QAMISHLI

Every Syrian has paid part of the price of what is happening. Some paid with their souls, some paid with their money, some with their houses, and others with their dignity.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 28, ALEPPO

The country is getting worse. I think there will be more death and destruction because of the random killing. God help us.

SUNNI WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 39, RAQQA

What Syria is going through is heartbreaking. The situation is really bad, there is destruction in every region and it has become a game for people to enjoy.

CHRISTIAN MAN (PRO-REGIME), 56, DAMASCUS

Even More Secure Areas Are Affected

Most respondents, even those in areas of Aleppo and Damsacus that have not been touched directly by violence, said conflict is close by, affecting their livelihoods,

endangering their security, and driving internally displaced people (IDPs) into their areas.

My area doesn't seem to be in Syria, compared to areas of clashes and the countryside. We thank God that now we have security. There are no disturbances. What disturbs us are the scenes of people who have left their homes and regions and moved to our area for security, safety, and help at the same time.

SUNNI WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), DAMASCUS

The situation is bad. Our bread is cut off. You're able to work only in specific areas. If an area is controlled by the Free [Syrian] Army and another by the regular [Syrian] Army, crossings are dangerous. If you pass, you may be shot. We've been besieged.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 38, ALEPPO

Refugees and IDPs Devastated by Losses

Refugees in Jordan and Turkey reported enormous loss, insecurity, and destruction. Some described near-complete destruction of the villages they left and massive displacement.

The current situation is extremely bad, woeful. Most of my village is destroyed. No one has visited it for six months. Its people are refugees in the surrounding villages.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 34, REFUGEE IN JORDAN

If you went to my village and saw it, you would say this is a ruin, not a village. My neighbourhood is in Homs. It is destroyed and it is like an place or building abandoned a hundred years ago.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 50, REFUGEE IN JORDAN

Nor did they feel that going into exile has guaranteed their security. A Sunni woman (anti-regime, 29), who took refuge in Turkey said, “People at the camp are afraid. They said that a desperate person may kill the world without caring what will happen because he is desperate. We are still here. There are no beatings or [war] planes, but people are afraid.”

Many IDPs recounted stories of loss similar to those told by refugees:

It is so demolished, no services, nothing is there. All the people left, nobody is there. All our neighbours' houses are destroyed.

SUNNI WOMAN, IDP (ANTI-REGIME), 48, DAMASCUS, FROM KABOUN

There is a huge and complete destruction of my neighbourhood, and I heard via the TV that it was bombarded with chemicals. It is a very difficult situation that cannot be described.

SUNNI WOMAN, IDP, (ANTI-REGIME), 38, DAMASCUS, FROM DAMASCUS

Christians and Alawites Feel Besieged by Radicals

Many Christians and Alawites felt under siege from radical Islamic forces — particularly Jabhat al-Nusra — that they said are threatening their towns and holy places and fostering sectarianism. The September 2013 attack on the Christian village of Maaloula, which occurred during the fieldwork, was particularly disturbing to them and was mentioned numerous times.

They spread extremism, criminality, and allow discrimination among people. It became okay for a Christian to be killed or a church destroyed. That was obvious in Maaloula when the so-called Jabhat al-Nusra, those extremist mercenaries, entered it. They destroyed property and attacked religious symbols.

CHRISTIAN MAN (PRO-REGIME), 56, DAMASCUS

Even the dogs [animals] who claim to be Muslims have reached our Christian brothers in Maaloula. What more destruction and damage do you want? They have destroyed every region in Syria, even the mosques, churches, and ruins. That is what the Arabs have done in the name of Islam, especially Jabhat al-Nusra.

ALAWITE MAN (PRO-REGIME), 42, TARTOUS

Sunnis Fear Increasing Division and Violence

Concern about rising sectarianism and deepening social splits was not limited to minorities. Sunni respondents also feared worsening divisions among the country's many factions will lead to more death and destruction. Both regime opponents and supporters feared more violence will follow the regime's fall.

Everything is a mess and you do not know who the right side is anymore. We have the Regular Army, national commissions, strict Islamic groups, Kurds, and others. If the regime falls today we will need ten years to get rid of the mess. There will still be fights, warlords, destruction, and killing.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 47, IDP IN RAQQAH

There are many sects in Syria. Assad combined all these sects. People were living together. We never heard that this is Alawite, this is Kurdish, this is Arab, and this

is Christian, and all these sectarian terms. If President Assad leaves, there would be a state of chaos.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 27, ALEPPO

Regime Supporters Blame Armed Militias and Outsiders, Opponents Blame Al-Assad

Not surprisingly, those on each side of the conflict tended to blame the other for the violence. The theme that foreigners — rather than Syrians — are responsible for the violence and fighting against the regime was particularly common in pro-regime responses throughout the interviews.

Things have been deteriorating, and we lost security since the Takfiris entered Syria from the Maghreb, Europe, and even the US to destroy our heritage and country.

CHRISTIAN MAN (PRO-REGIME), 42, HOMS

Isn't it wrong to destroy a country of peace and stability by mercenaries dealing with petroleum countries' and the Israelis' and Americans' plans to demolish our country? This is a big lie to destroy us more.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 48, RAQQA

Regime opponents put the blame for Syria's destruction squarely at the foot of the president:

May God burn Bashar. He didn't leave anyone alone, bombarding all the cities and streets. The city became a ghost town. It has only destroyed houses and buildings.

He tried all the weapons on his people. He might want to exterminate Syria, which he governs! Damn him.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 37, AL-QAMISHLI

Both sides should not be perceived in the same way. Assad's shabiha [thugs] are the ones who destroyed Syria and they mostly deserve to be punished.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 30, HAMA

Some opposed to the regime said both sides are responsible for the destruction, leaving ordinary people stuck between violent forces:

The regime is 100 percent bad and the opposition is not better. Everyone is fighting and the unarmed civilians pay the price. The Syrians who dreamt of freedom and better days are paying double price, because no side is having mercy on them.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 28, ALEPPO

How Did Things Get This Bad?

Pro- and anti-regime Syrians alike were bewildered at how things got so bad in their once stable, peaceful country. Some lamented that people who had lived peacefully together for years are now killing one another. Others struggled to understand how it reached this point.

Take a look around you and compare the Syria of yesterday to Syria today. We used to live a decent life, we had rights and we had duties. We would take care of our interests and have fun on our holidays and no one would impose on anyone. We

lived in peace with no discrimination between the sons of the country or between religions and beliefs.

CHRISTIAN MAN (PRO-REGIME), 56, DAMASCUS

I did not expect it to happen. I didn't expect the beating and fighting to reach this limit. I thought it was just a passing phase. I thought things would be resolved. Since the events took place in Daraa I thought they would be resolved.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 48, JORDAN

Freedom of Expression Depends on Political Leanings

Syrians' perceptions of their freedom of expression depended on which side of the regime they stand.² Supporters tended to claim that everyone is free to express their views. Some comments had a propagandistic feel to them.

Certainly, for sure, they feel free to speak and move after Mr. President gave confidence to all parties' freedom, not only to the Arab Baath Party. With the existence of the Army, this gives us the freedom of movement because the Army is with the people, not against them, as America and its Arab country followers claim.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 48, RAQQA

One pro-regime woman suggested that people were not free to speak in opposition-held areas.

² Respondents were classified as pro- or anti-regime by the interviewers from the research firm. Their comments were generally consistent with these classifications, and many explicitly called themselves pro- or anti-regime.

(We can speak) because the Syrian regime is everywhere in Tartous and protects it. There is no Free Syrian Army here. There are many areas where people cannot express their opinions, especially those where Takfiris are.

ALAWITE WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 35, TARTOUS

Those who oppose the regime and who live in regime-controlled areas said expressing their views is impossible, out of fear of arrest or worse.

In Syria we have a saying: walls have ears. It means you should be careful, anyone who may hear you may inform on you. Personally, I have some relatives who are with the regime. They work for them so it's impossible for me to say anything in front of this person.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 25, REFUGEE, TURKEY

I am against the regime. I live in an area that is under its control. Most people in it are supporters, so I can't talk freely, while supporters can express [their views] freely and aren't afraid of anyone.

ALAWITE WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 30, TARTOUS

Some regime opponents said there is a new-found freedom to express one's views in places that have escaped regime control. "Yes, there are areas where you can talk freely. Those are the areas that are under the control of rebels and the Free Army, and of course as they are liberated you can talk freely," said a Sunni man refugee in Jordan.

However, even in the liberated areas, some were wary of speaking out now because of the Islamic radicals. "No, there's not much [freedom] because they are afraid of the regime and the liberated areas are afraid of the Islamic groups," said one man, a Sunni IDP from Raqqah.

While most participants seemed to speak openly in the interview itself, several respondents implored interviewers to not reveal their names at the end of the interview, displaying an unusual degree of fear in the experience of the researchers.

No End in Sight

On both sides, there was also a sense that the conflict has become a stalemate that could endure for some time to come. There was a grim feeling among some that outside forces are in control and will not permit it to end.

According to what we see and hear, we have a long battle [ahead]. They have said, including the president, that it will last for years, and only a miracle from God will end this conflict.

SUNNI WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 58, DAMASCUS

I swear that it is tragic and I think it will last for a long time. I think that there is more than one country that manipulates us and all of them want to destroy Syria. No one cares about the Syrian people. All of them want their [own] benefits.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 24, DAMASCUS

Neither side expects to win any time soon. This is perhaps the grimmest aspect of all: Syrians see no glimmer of hope of an end.

Thus, Syrians on both sides of the complex conflict have suffered profoundly, whether remaining in secure areas or forced to flee for their lives, whether religious minorities or members of the majority. While each side tends to blame the other, they have some things in common. Both are divided and ambivalent, and they share shock and dismay at the way their country has disintegrated. They

cannot see how the conflict will come to a military resolution in the near future; all they foresee is war without end.

Shared suffering has produced other areas of consensus as well — including the desire for a negotiated settlement and accountability for abuses during the conflict. Of course, the intense polarization accompanying the conflict makes it difficult for many to envisage the compromises a negotiated settlement would demand. Others hope Syria's history of tolerance and co-existence will prevail and, once those who committed crimes are held accountable, permit the country to come together again after the conflict.

Settlement Prospects: “We have to stop the bloodshed”

The Syrian interviewees reflected the sentiment that they wanted the conflict devastating their homeland to end. For many, a negotiated settlement, even if flawed, was a satisfactory outcome. Some, however, still wanted the fighting to continue until their side won and its opponent was vanquished completely. Some in the opposition were willing to consider exile for President Assad if it meant an end to the fighting. Other respondents refused to consider it — either because they want him punished or because they view him as the country’s legitimate president.

Most respondents were open in principle to returning to the peaceful co-existence they enjoyed prior to the war. Regime supporters were more likely to say post-conflict co-existence is possible. But many on both sides added caveats, specifying the kinds of neighbours they could live among and those they could not. Some, on both sides of the conflict, insisted co-existence would be impossible or say they have nothing to return to.

Desire to Halt Killing Drives Settlement Wishes

Regime opponents and supporters alike were desperate for an end to the bloodshed. Many were open to the idea of a negotiated settlement if it would stop the killing and prevent the war from spreading. This view was found on both sides of the political fence.

Enough is enough. First we have to stop the bloodshed. Enough orphaned children, widows, and arrests. We cannot handle another day of killing. This is why I prefer settlement. I do not want another day of murder.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 28, IDP IN DAMASCUS

If the conflict continues, the war flames will grow and reach the entire region. The Syrian crisis is no longer a conflict. It became an international war that will eat whoever stands in its way. That is why I prefer a negotiated settlement to return love and peace to Syria and get rid of the terrorist mercenaries in our country.

CHRISTIAN MAN (PRO-REGIME), 56, DAMASCUS

However, some of those who favoured a negotiated settlement did so reluctantly, or skeptically, uncertain whether an accord is possible in the current environment. Both sides view other with deep distrust.

We hope for the first one [negotiated settlement and compromise] but it's impossible.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 31, REFUGEE IN TURKEY

Negotiation is better, because at least no one scores a victory and gains one hundred percent control. [But] if they negotiated, there will be some areas that are with and

others against. They will remain fighting whether we wanted this or not. That's why I don't think [a settlement is possible].

SUNNI WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 25, ALEPPO

One anti-regime Sunni man in Damascus argued rebel forces are outgunned by the regime and negotiation is the rebels' only exit strategy. "There are no equal forces, as the regime forces are stronger than the opposition. I think a military solution will be settled in favour of the regime, but the rebels will not accept this, so I think negotiation is the best solution for all, especially Syrians."

Displaced respondents, bitter over their sacrifices and skeptical about concessions, were more likely to advocate a fight to the end and less interested in a settlement. People in Raqqah, the only provincial capital under opposition control at the time of the study, also tended to want to fight until the regime is defeated.

For sure I prefer weapons. I lost my relatives and many of my beloved ones, so I don't think that understanding is possible.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 31, REFUGEE IN TURKEY

I prefer fighting. If the regime remained because [an accord with the] regime was negotiated and [it] returned, it will return to do more harm than what it did before.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 35, IDP IN ALEPPO

The country is destroyed because of Bashar. Decisive military victory is the best way to get rid of all [the] Assad's regime pollutants.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 34, RAQQAH

Some regime supporters also urged the Syrian Army to fight until the end. Since many insisted the war is a fight against foreign armies that have invaded Syria, they said fighting is the only reasonable option.

No, there should be a decisive victory for our army because these degraded mercenaries have to be eliminated. They do not want freedom for this country. They want to destroy it and implement foreign American projects.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 38, RAQQAH

There should be a decisive victory for the Syrian Arab Army. The other side are mercenaries from all areas on earth who have been sent by America to die in Syria and destroy the country at the same time.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 42, HAMA

Fighting could only be justified to some regime supporters if the opposition rejected talks:

If those who fight the government, I mean the opposition or terrorist groups, refuse peaceful solutions, discussions, and negotiation, or refuse to obey the people's desire, the government shall use the military solution because there isn't any other available solution for the country.

ALAWITE MAN (PRO-REGIME), 25, DAMASCUS

Opponents: Exile Assad if it Stops the Violence

Many regime opponents, even the displaced, saw exiling Bashar al-Assad as a possible solution to the problem of violence in Syria.

If he went into exile, in which killing, robbing, and stealing will disappear, then I will feel happy. I only want to feel relaxed and comfortable.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 34, RAQQAH

I told you it is the lesser of two evils to have him leave now and save lives and avoid more destruction than continue with war where more people die and then run away.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 41, IDP IN HAMA

Views on exile were linked to views on accountability. Supporters recognized exile would mean Assad would not be judged or held accountable, and were willing to pay this price to end the conflict.

Those who should go into exile are the ones who should be held accountable. But conversely, if this would stop the killing, stop the bloodshed, and stop the destruction of what remains of Syria, I think Syrians should accept this solution.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 38, DAMASCUS

I would be happy, of course, because we got rid of him. Honestly I think we achieve victory, even if we couldn't judge him on a trial, but at least we stopped or reduced the killing in this country, because in the time we are waiting to catch and judge Al-Assad he might kill another hundred thousand people.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 38, ALEPPO

Regime opponents who opposed exile — even if they supported a settlement — said they could not accept a scenario in which Assad was not held accountable for his crimes. (This factor re-emerged later in the conversations in connection with amnesty for confessions before a Truth Commission.)

It's true I am for stopping the war and reaching a settlement because we've suffered enough. But for Bashar to go out of the country to Iran or Russia and continue his life as if he had done nothing, this won't be acceptable. Bashar should be punished and be an example for everyone who thinks he can constrain his own people.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 37, AL-QAMISHLI

Indeed, some took a very hard line against exile and would only accept Assad's death.

I prefer the settlement and things to get back the way they were, but only with one condition: that Bashar gets killed, because there are people getting killed, slaughtered, and violated.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 40, HAMA

Supporters: Exiling Assad is Unthinkable

Pro-regime respondents would not consider exile for President Assad even as a possibility. They were unanimous on this point.

If there is a settlement, we will not accept the president and those closest to him to be exiled outside Syria. As the president has said, he is the son of Syria and he will live and die in Syria.

ALAWITE MAN (PRO-REGIME), 42, TARTOUS

I do not agree [with exile] because President Assad was elected by the people. He is affectionate, humane, young, and a symbol for the country.

SUNNI WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 39, HAMA

Some, on both sides, feared what would replace Assad. Regime supporters feared state collapse, opponents feared state fragmentation.

The departure of President Assad is the end of Syria. We won't ever feel stability or safety. I don't think that if this happened this could solve the crisis, but [it] will make it more complicated.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 27, ALEPPO

We were suffering from only one tyrant and when he leaves we shall have many tyrants.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 31, REFUGEE IN TURKEY

Christians, in particular, predicted violent chaos:

That would mean the total destruction of Syria. It will become like Libya and Iraq where murders are everywhere.

CHRISTIAN WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 36, DAMASCUS

Postwar Co-Existence Favoured But Potentially Difficult

Most interviewees said that after the conflict they would be able to live with neighbours who held differing political views during the fighting.

If they are from my country I can live with them, because they don't impose anything on you from outside.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 38, ALEPPO.

Of course they have to [live together], because the country is for all of us. The country needs the unity of all the Syrian society's components and people. It needs each person to take his role in order to rebuild the country, especially [because] it will become a phase of building and reconstructing.

ALAWITE MAN (PRO-REGIME), 25, DAMASCUS

Likewise, most respondents agreed, in principle, that Syrians who had left their homes as displaced people or exiles would be welcome to return to live in peace after the war ends. Pro-regime respondents were more likely to say all would be forgiven.

All will return. Everybody I know is waiting for a glimmer of hope to return to Syria. Nobody is happy outside, ever.

SUNNI WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 25, ALEPPO

Of course they will be able to return. If the crisis ends and life gets back to normal everyone who left will come back.

CHRISTIAN MAN (PRO-REGIME), 56, DAMASCUS

No I don't care, each one is free to have his opinion. I have my own opinion and others do too. I don't care about this and I don't make them my enemies.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 48, IDP IN DAMASCUS

Many, however, made a distinction between neighbours and friends who held opposing views but were non-violent, with whom they could live, and those who had killed, with whom they would not.

I can live with them, there is no problem. If my friend was [a regime supporter] there would not be any problem; because at the end he is my friend. If the crisis ends and

he (was) one of Al-Shabiha or one of the regime's criminals, I will not be able to live with him.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 34, DAMASCUS

We the followers of Jesus will not disagree with his teachings and we will give a hand of forgiveness to rebuild Syria. Any difference is legitimate, but in peaceful democratic ways. We will not accept living with them if they wanted destruction, killing, and discrimination.

CHRISTIAN MAN (PRO-REGIME), 56, DAMASCUS

Some Reject Coexistence

Some Syrians thought co-existence would be impossible. Those who were pro-regime could not see living among those they considered mercenaries and traitors working for foreign interests.

How can we live with those mercenaries, traitors, who have been bought by the Gulf countries with money, while we are dying here? We will not leave our land and president. As he has said, we were born here in our country Syria and we will die here.

ALAWITE MAN (PRO-REGIME), 42, TARTOUS

Anti-regime skeptics about coexistence said they could not live among sectarian killers. IDPs and refugees tend to be more likely to hold these opinions.

We can't return and live with them and tell them that they are welcome, after what they have done.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 29, REFUGEE IN TURKEY

No. Because there are no houses nor security with killers. How could you feel safe with [someone] who is killing you today?

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 45, RAQQA

Refugees and IDPs: Nothing To Return To

Some, particularly refugees and displaced respondents, pointed out serious logistical challenges to returning. Many homes and job-providing businesses have been destroyed and their finances are depleted.

Why should they come back? Destroyed houses, no streets, no drainage, no water, no electricity, why should they come? It is impossible for them to come.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 35, IDP IN ALEPPO

I don't think there would be anything that prevents them [from returning home], whether they were of the regime loyalists or of the opposition. But the problem will be money. For example, if I return to my country, will I take my pocket money from my father?

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), REFUGEE IN TURKEY

The path back to a peaceful, tolerant Syria is fraught, but many Syrians still hope that the days when Sunni, Alawite, Christian, and Kurd could live together will return. The desire to stop the bloodshed makes most respondents open to a negotiated settlement in principle. But there is no clear path towards this process — issues such as exile for Bashar al-Assad as part of a political deal remain deeply divisive. Likewise most respondents want to see those who left their homes return and co-existence among differing views and faiths. Yet many voice reservations or demand conditions that might make such coexistence impossible.

Prime among the concerns for coexistence is a reluctance among many to live alongside those who have killed with impunity. This anxiety is closely linked to the desire for postwar accountability for abuses on both sides of the conflict. A perception that some sort of justice has been done appears essential if the pieces of Syrian society are to be put back together again.

Post-Conflict Accountability: “Whoever committed a crime should be accountable”

Accountability for war crimes and abuses was essential to most Syrians on both sides of the struggle. They found the idea of “forgive and forget” unacceptable. Regime opponents and supporters agreed that justice needs to be applied to both sides and may serve as a hedge against revenge killings and deter future crimes. While forgiving and forgetting will be very difficult for most, some said that with accountability, moving past the current violence might be possible.

Accountability is Key

Most respondents, whether pro- or anti-regime, insisted that those who committed abuses on both sides must be held accountable, and assumed this will be done by the justice system.

Any side, whoever committed a crime should be held accountable, no matter what. I am not saying that I am the one in charge of holding them accountable. It should be through the judiciary.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 50, REFUGEE IN JORDAN

He who did something wrong should be held accountable, but at the same time, there should be tolerance between them and us. The important thing is accountability because the people who were harmed had no fault in this.

SUNNI WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 58, DAMASCUS

Some respondents wanted official accountability as a hedge against otherwise-in-avoidable revenge killings. Many expressed concern about Syria's "culture of revenge."

Certainly there are some people who should be held accountable. If they are not held accountable by specialized [bodies] or by the country or from the authorized side, there would be revenge between people.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 38, DAMASCUS

There is judiciary of the rebels and judiciary of the government, and of course after the regime falls we have a judiciary and we will work with it. I am against taking revenge with my hands. I hate the shedding of blood.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 55, REFUGEE IN JORDAN

A few advocated accountability through revenge and violence, particularly in Hama, but respondents from both sides spoke in favour of it.

Everyone who stood with the despicable Bashar should be held accountable and punished. Their fate should be hanging to death or torture to death, because they violated our houses and dignity.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 40, HAMA

The child who was killed, the honour which was raped won't be compensated with money but with killing. We want revenge against them. We want to kill and slaughter those mercenaries.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 34 AL-QAMISHLI

Some saw accountability as a deterrent to the use of violence in the future, to “teach a lesson.” One cited the example of Syria’s recent history:

If Hafez al-Assad was held accountable for the Hama, Aleppo, Al Shoghor Bridge, and Tadmur massacres, would his son dare to do what he has done? I do not think so.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 47, IDP IN RAQQAH

“Forgive and Forget” Rejected

Very few said “forgive and forget” was a better approach.

What?! Forget the past? What are you talking about?! And leave them wandering among us? They should be held accountable for all their crimes, no matter what side they belong to, because what happened in Syria is very huge. Of course we will not forget the past, and we can't even if we want to.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 38, ALEPPO

The past cannot be forgotten. Anyone who committed a crime from both sides should be prosecuted to the fullest extent.

ALAWITE WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 35, TARTOUS

A few suggested that forgiving and forgetting is needed to patch Syria's tattered social fabric, but even they stressed that accountability for serious and intentional abuses would be necessary before it will be possible to put the past behind.

It will be better to forget the past so that the war ends and we live in peace and freedom. Accountability is only necessary for the ones responsible for war.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 40, HAMA

Of course those who committed abuses should be held accountable, and even if there were minor excesses from security officers they should be held accountable too, because we want to build a better Syria. At the same time, we should forget the past and tolerate because it is possible that some made mistakes against others without meaning to.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 33, ALEPPO

Despite the intense polarization among Syrians in this time of conflict, they are united in their desire for accountability for crimes and other atrocities committed during the war. The demand is the same among both regime opponents and supporters, and both agree that abuses by all parties should be included. Accountability is seen not only as justice but also as an alternative to revenge in a society steeped in it as well as a deterrent to future abuses. Most reject the idea of forgetting the past, and even those who embrace it feel that major and deliberate crimes cannot be ignored.

How to achieve accountability, beyond the assumption that court trials will form its basis, is another matter. The different alternatives for transitional justice, including not only trials but also compensation and truth commissions, have not received much discussion or thought among many Syrians to date.

Transitional Justice Alternatives: “We should all stay under the rule of law”

Nearly all respondents on both sides agreed that the rule of law and the justice system were the best mechanisms for bringing accountability and stability to Syria. Indeed, of the three options for justice presented during these interviews (trials, truth commissions, and compensation), trials were by far the most popular approach. The notion that “whoever governs Syria will need to establish rule of law” was the most popular idea discussed, with most respondents agreeing with it, many strongly. However, there were predictable divisions over whether the existing Syrian courts should preside over trials, and a more general hostility to an international component in transitional courts.

Compensation also was a popular mechanism for bringing justice to victims of the conflict. Many participants acknowledged that while some losses cannot be compensated, compensation is a good way to help people start to rebuild their lives. This, combined with court trials, was most respondents’ preferred approach to justice.

Most respondents were not familiar with truth commissions, though they were generally receptive to the concept after an explanation. However, the concept of amnesty in exchange for admissions of guilt was difficult for nearly all to accept. They did, however, respond positively to the idea of compensation and evidence collection aspects of the commission. Most, however, found it difficult to imagine a scenario in which a truth commission would be the only possible avenue of justice — where trials would not be part of a settlement process.

Rule of Law Above All Else

Respondents broadly embraced the idea that a justice system that treats everyone the same and with laws that apply equally to everyone is the best way to deal with the crimes of the war. Some respondents said such a system will be critical for allowing Syria to move forward, post conflict, and prevent crimes from recurring.

Syria needs laws that are applied to everyone, especially war criminals, because the country is in a mess today and it cannot move forward. When people know there is a fair law to judge them, they will not do criminal or destructive acts.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 38, ALEPPO

The guilty should be held accountable to make sure crimes and violations will not be repeated. We should all stay under the rule of law.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 32, AL-QAMISHLI

I believe those who committed war crimes and human rights violations should be prosecuted. The best alternative is establishing the rule of law and state of citizens, and prosecuting criminals.

CHRISTIAN MAN (PRO-REGIME), 42, HOMS

The guilty should be held accountable to make sure these crimes will not be repeated, that is all to get Syria back on the forefront among the nations and lay down the rule of law of course.

CHRISTIAN MAN (PRO-REGIME), 46, DAMASCUS

There was some division between anti-regime respondents, who believed Syria's courts do not offer the rule of law now, and many regime supporters, who thought it already exists.

For decades we have suffered from the Syrian courts and their systems established by the perished father and followed by his bloodthirsty son because of their injustice, tyranny, and bias. We thus do not trust such systems.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 30, HAMAH

Syria does not need to establish the rule of law. Syria is capable of prosecuting criminals, and those who destroyed it should all be punished.

ALAWITE WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 43, TARTOUS

Strong Support for Prosecutions of Abusers

One of the most noteworthy findings of the research was the widespread support, on both sides of the political divide, for prosecuting in court those who abused human rights and committed war crimes during the conflict, whatever side they were on.

[For] any of the sides, whoever committed a crime should be held accountable. It should be through the judiciary. Anyone who committed a crime or knows they are guilty in this revolution should be held accountable through the judiciary. Everyone

is supposed to be held accountable for what they did — there are rebels who should be held accountable, as well as regime figures and civilians.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 50, REFUGEE, JORDAN

Anybody who committed war crimes during this conflict from any party should be prosecuted.

CHRISTIAN WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 45, DAMASCUS

Little Agreement Over Who Should Conduct Trials

As supportive as most respondents were regarding court trials, there was little consensus on who should conduct them. Most respondents — including regime supporters and many opponents — were adamant that post-conflict trials be conducted by Syrian courts and Syrian judges. They regarded international involvement in transitional courts as unwanted foreign meddling in Syrian affairs.

I am with the idea of judging those who committed crimes and destruction, but in Syrian courts and on Syrian land with no Western intervention, because only in this way is justice fulfilled.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 27, ALEPPO

We did not start the revolution to keep the judiciary of Hafez al-Assad, nor to bring a Western one. The revolution was to have free independent Syrian law.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 28, ALEPPO

However, some regime supporters specified that by “Syrian courts” they mean the current court system.

[The Syrian court system] is a proven system. It has always been worthy, responsible, professional, and fair.

ALAWITE MAN (PRO-REGIME), 25, DAMASCUS

Others — primarily anti-regime respondents — argued that the current Syrian system is too corrupt to be entrusted with securing justice. Nevertheless, they expect Syrians to control it:

There will be a judiciary, a new regime, and a respected judiciary that will be neutral and we will not need help from another country, of course.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 38, DAMASCUS

A few say international courts or neutral countries should take charge. “I don’t think there will be a power in the near future that can control the country and people. There should be international parties who would bring those guilty people [to trial] and judge them fairly,” said a Sunni man in Damascus. One IDP in Raqqah acknowledged the unpopularity of his view that international courts should be involved: “If I said international courts you would say that I am a traitor.” But he stuck to it.

A few advocated a hybrid approach with both Syrian and international involvement. “I prefer Syrians because they know their country. But it’s ok to have some well-known international persons because it is too difficult to find a trusted person as this country is full of corruption,” said a Sunni woman IDP in Damascus.

Compensation a Popular Response to Loss

Compensation for losses suffered in the conflict was a universally popular approach on both sides. For many respondents, this, along with court trials, would be a step towards bringing justice to Syrians who have suffered in the war, even if only a

partial one. Regime opponents and supporters tended to agree on this, though they differ somewhat on who deserves compensation.

Of course there should be compensations to victims; anyone who abused others should be held accountable and the ones who got abused should be compensated.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 40, HAMA

Compensation is a good idea, and it will achieve justice fairly.

ALAWITE MAN (PRO-REGIME), 25, DAMASCUS

Many respondents said those who had lost breadwinners, homes, or jobs should receive priority for compensation. Some suggested that employers who lost shops or factories also should have priority, to help rebuild the economy. Redressing economic losses was implicitly the purpose of compensation.

The most important ones to be compensated should be the orphans, families [where] the breadwinner has been killed and left a wife and children.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 25, REFUGEE IN TURKEY

If there are priorities, I wish those with the limited income whose only supporter is God be compensated first, and [also] there are people who had workshops that were damaged or lost them.

SUNNI WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 58, DAMASCUS

This category of people should be compensated: [those] who lost their houses, commercial shops, companies, and factories because of these battles, as these people are the ones who support the country's economy.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 45, RAQQAH

However, regime supporters strongly opposed compensating those who were involved in the fighting on the anti-government side, particularly those affiliated with Jabhat al-Nusra and foreign fighters:

Those who were the cause of chaos and supported terrorists such as Jabhat al-Nusra, foreigners and those who supported them shouldn't be compensated.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 32, HAMA

Remarkably, quite a few respondents, even refugees and IDPs, believed that others were far more deserving of compensation than they. “I cannot say that I do not deserve it because I have suffered from damages, but there are many affected and damaged people. They shall be considered, so compensation should be distributed fairly,” said a Sunni woman IDP in Damascus.

The sense that some losses — such as sons or husbands — cannot be compensated produces a deep sense of bitterness among some respondents. While economic damages can be compensated, money is not a replacement for the loss of loved ones. This was why respondents said accountability must accompany compensation. As an anti-regime Sunni woman, 37, in Qamishli put it, “Blood is not so cheap to be sold for some money! Compensation is necessary but the court and penalty are more important than all the world’s treasure. Syrian blood and souls are so expensive.”

Truth Commissions Little Known But Favourably Received

The idea of a non-judicial truth commission as a form of transitional justice was novel but attractive to most respondents. Very few had heard of truth commissions, though a few Christian respondents were familiar with the concept, and the interviewees had neither thought about nor previously discussed this possibility. Most on both sides of the conflict considered the pros and cons carefully and were

receptive, particularly to the evidence gathering and compensation components.

When all the facts are clarified it will solidify our faith in the country. And enhance the harmony of the Syrians, especially when it is clearer that some of what happened was caused by outside interference in Syria.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 33, ALEPPO

Having a truth commission would restore the rights that were extorted, and the compensations would help those who lost to move on with their lives and live with dignity.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 30, HAMAH

A few respondents confused truth commissions with prior discredited commissions:

If you want to bury something, form a commission around it. Bashar knows this game very well. Whatever happens, they form a commission for it: the Reconciliation Commission and the Daraa Events Investigation Commission.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 47, IDP IN RAQQA

No, because it's not credible. Every two days they have a commission and eventually they will deny it, ignore its reports, and forge whatever they want.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 32, HAMA

A few questioned a truth commission's value if "everyone already knows" who is responsible for crimes, with much of it documented on mobile phones or committed in small, tight-knit communities. "In Syria there are a lot of people who have mobile phones and they have photographed everything. The names of people are

known. Even the little kid knows who killed and stole, so I don't think we need that," said a Sunni man in Damascus

Amnesty for Truth Difficult to Accept

Offering amnesty in return for confessions of wrongdoing, as South Africa did with its Truth and Reconciliation Commission, was very difficult for most respondents to accept, whether pro- or anti-regime. They cannot imagine a scenario in which the guilty are not held to account. Many rejected outright a truth commission that would provide amnesty in exchange for admission of guilt.

And you are telling me it's a truth commission! Just because they confessed they are set free? How do you expect me to trust such a commission with a black history of releasing the unjust who destroyed the country just because they confessed with their crimes? This is totally unacceptable!

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 38, RAQQAH

You mean that those who confess will be released? This looks like it is to allow Bashar and his cronies to depart. Actually I do not agree. I do not accept that a confession is enough for those who killed hundreds of people. I insist that they must be punished.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 28, IDP IN DAMASCUS

Compensation Function Builds Truth Commission Support

Including the provision of compensation as part of the role of a truth commission is likely to increase its support, judging by the reactions of participants in the study. As noted above, compensation is seen as offering partial justice and easing

suffering, so affording it to victims via a truth commission which recognizes their suffering is an important positive.

It [compensation] won't grant them complete justice but something is better than nothing. In time, they may forgive and clear their hearts,, but regarding justice, they didn't get it.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 34, DAMASCUS

Excellent. It [compensation] eases the pain. However, it lets the offenders get away.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 47, IDP IN RAQQAH

However, the notion that a truth commission might offer a form of justice if trials prove impossible after a negotiated settlement was difficult for respondents to consider at this stage. Given their strong support for trials and the complete lack of substance regarding the terms of a possible settlement, respondents were not able even to consider the possibility that trials may not occur. Another finding in this research is the broad agreement among Syrians in the opposing camps of the need for the rule of law in their country after the war and their support for the prosecution of those who committed abuses, whatever their side. Of course, beneath this there is division over the legitimacy of the existing judicial system, but there is also a striking desire for a Syrian justice process and substantial rejection of external involvement in transitional courts on both sides. Compensation of victims also elicits a large consensus of support and sympathy on both sides, albeit one qualified by political differences. Truth commissions, too, though unfamiliar, are attractive because they offer the possibilities of impartial fact-finding and the dispensation of compensation. (The strong demand for accountability and punishment, however, would militate against the idea of offering amnesty in exchange for confessions to a truth commission.)

What all this underlines is that despite the intensity and brutality of the conflict, people on both sides see themselves as part of the same national community and are thinking in terms of the same moral universe.

Views of Key Figures and Organizations

The perceptions of key individuals and groups involved in the conflict conformed more to the image of Syria as a highly polarized country, but even here there were some important nuances. Views of key figures and organizations generally divided along pro-regime and anti-regime lines. However, there was some ambivalence among both regime supporters and opponents about some leaders and groups on their sides. When it came to the external opposition, both pro- and anti-regime respondents tended to share negative views.

Assad Praised by Pro-Regime Respondents, Condemned by Opponents

Pro-regime respondents were mostly positive, describing him as “loyal,” “honourable,” “putting the interests of the country first,” and a “pan-Arab leader.” The relationship is described in strikingly personal terms — the president is frequently referred to by his first name only. However a few said that though he may have made mistakes, his regime is legitimate, trying to reform, and better than the alternative.

Bashar is the president of honour and loyalty. He is the one chasing terrorists who violate the safety of this country.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 38, RAQQA

He is the best president ever. No president is like him. Sincerity, faith, [he] loves people, cares about his country, may God bless him and keep him for us.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 34, AL-QAMISHLI

[The president leads] a legitimate government, unlike what some outside parties try to promote. And by the way I may not agree with it in everything, but still it is a legitimate government in the country.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 33, ALEPPO

Bashar is indeed a statesman but those around him are a gang of thieves. Bashar al-Assad replaced many of his father's men and the situation now is better than before.

CHRISTIAN MAN, (PRO-REGIME), 42, HOMS

Regime opponents were intensely negative, relying on graphic language and animal analogies to describe the president. “Criminal,” “gangster,” and “traitorous” were common descriptors.

Whatever else comes to my mind, criminality overshadows everything. Criminality, criminality, criminality literally.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 50, REFUGEE IN JORDAN

A fetid, parasitic government. It is fed from others' efforts, a bloody government that drinks from Syrians' blood.

ALAWITE WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 30, TARTOUS

Syrian Army's Reputation Tarnished

The Syrian Army was once held in high esteem, even by many regime opponents, but is no longer. They say it was the protector of their homeland but is now protects only President Assad, his regime, and his sect.

Unfortunately, the Syrian Army that we were proud of killed its people for a person, for a regime. The Syrian Arab Army, it is the one that should defend the Syrian Arab Republic, not the Syrian regime. This is not the Syrian Army anymore. This is an occupying army.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 36, IDP IN ALEPPO

It was something and become another, opposite thing. It was the homeland's protector, but it turns out that their allegiance is not to their homeland, it's to a specific category that they belong to, thus they destroyed our land.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 28, IDP IN DAMASCUS

Since the time of Hafez al-Assad, the Syrian Army has been prepared to fight the people, not protect them. The scoundrel father was preparing for this moment, and that is why he installed commanding officers from the Alawites only while the troops are from the people and like them.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), IDP, 41, IN HAMA, FROM RIF HAMA

A few make distinctions between officers, whom they describe as “criminals” and “killers,” and ordinary conscripts, who are of the people. “Here I want to clarify that the regular soldiers are our children, they are powerless like the people. They are afraid to be killed in case they split from the army,” said a Sunni man IDP from Raqqah.

Regime supporters are consistently positive and view it as a defender and unifier of the nation from all types of external and internal threats.

The Syrian Arab Army is the most sacred national authority that protects its homeland borders. The army is doing its best to protect Syria from all threats, whether the Israeli threat or the Islamic armed groups as the opposition groups.

ALAWITE MAN (PRO-REGIME), 25, DAMASCUS

God protect the Syrian Arab Army, they provide peace and safety in the region. God willing they will take over the other regions that are not living in peace and relieve us from those armed militias.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 38, RAQQAH

A few, however, acknowledged that the Army has also been involved in abuses. Thus a pro-regime Sunni woman, 58, in Damascus said: “Everyone acknowledges the power and greatness of the Syrian Army. However, there have been some excesses by Army officials.”

Free Syrian Army Gets Mixed Reviews from Regime Opponents

Most regime opponents recognized the Free Syrian Army (FSA) as the strongest fighting force against Assad. Some offered unwavering support.

May God be with the free, brave, sacrificing army, who fight for freedom and dignity. It's the one that's going to return us back our rights and let us get rid of this slaughterer, so that Syria will return to its original people.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 34, RAQQAH

The protector of Syria and Syrians. Its youth are faith; they carried their souls to defend their brothers' dignity and to liberate the country from the brutal regime. May God protect them and give them victory.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 37, AL-QAMISHLI

However, many had deep reservations about the criminal elements that operate under its banner and threaten to hijack its activities.

In some areas it is really free, but in other areas it is neither an army nor free. In some areas they fight and protect people and in some areas they play the role of warlords.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 24, DAMASCUS

Today there are brigades that I cannot describe with words. There are abusive brigades and brigades who steal. There are brigades far worse than the regime of Al-Assad. At the same time, there are brigades that love the country and work for its best interest. I respect those brigades.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 28, ALEPPO

Regime supporters view the FSA as mercenaries funded from abroad who have no ability to run the country.

The Free Army is from outside Syria. It was paid to kill our children and youth with no mercy. The Syrian Free Army came from outside and is unqualified to run a

country or control a country. They even don't have a head or a leader to come out and talk on behalf of them.

SUNNI WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), ALEPPO

It's called an army while it is armed terrorist groups — not a free army because it follows money, America, and the West.

SUNNI MAN (PRO-REGIME), 32, HAMAH

Syrian National Council Receives Little Support

Regime opponents and supporters alike described the Syrian National Council (SNC) as an organization that has achieved nothing and has little support from ordinary Syrians. Refugee respondents were more likely to describe it as a “meeting organization” or a “hotel group” and note its internal discord.

It is a useless body whose members do nothing but eat, drink, and hold meetings.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 41, IDP IN HAMA

I do not know anyone in it and it does not matter to me. Every day they hire someone and they are in disagreement among themselves.

SHIA MAN (PRO-REGIME), 40, DAMASCUS

Some also accused it of being a puppet of foreign powers, primarily Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

They can do nothing and can't make a decision. In the National Council, two countries — Qatar and Saudi Arabia and Turkey comes after — each country moves whatever it needs.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 35, IDP IN ALEPPO

It is a Council formed outside Syria, as some of its members had never set a foot in Syria. This council hasn't any authority or power. All of its decisions are governed by foreign decisions and resolutions. I'm sure that this council does not represent the Syrian people.

ALAWITE MAN (PRO-REGIME), 25, DAMASCUS

A few anti-regime respondents were mildly positive about the SNC. “They stay up all night to find solutions to this crisis with the lowest possible losses. God give them strength. They deserve the term ‘faithfulness to the country,’” said a pro-regime Sunni man, 38, in Raqqah.

SNCROF Less Well-Known, Also Viewed Negatively

The Syrian National Coalition of Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SNCROF) was less well known than the SNC and opinions about it were softer, but still mostly negative. Anti-regime respondents criticize it for being ineffective and directionless.

They are thanked for their efforts but we have seen nothing, only speech. I advise them to make considered acts to be more effective and to have a role in ending the crisis.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 37, AL QAMISHLI

I do not think they are capable of doing anything for these poor people.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 38, ALEPPO

Pro-regime detractors complained about its foreign backing. “The Coalition leadership are a group hired by Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and oil groups. Those who want to lead a revolution should lead it in the country’s territory, and not from France, Qatar, and America,” said a Sunni man in Hama.

The Coalition did have some proponents, who said it is sacrificing to unite the country and is the link between the opposition inside and outside Syria. Raqqah respondents tended to be the most favourable toward it.

I think it is the golden gate to connect the outside opposition presented by the Coalition with the inside opposition, by joining the Coalition.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 47, IDP IN RAQQAH

The National Coalition for Syria are the free people of Syria who are doing their best to let the world hear our suffering that we are living in, may God strengthen them.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 34, RAQQAH

Jabhat al-Nusra is Polarizing

Regime supporters characterized Jabhat al-Nusra as fanatical, mercenary terrorist organization intent on imposing sharia and increasing sectarianism. It was seen as posing a major threat to Syrians’ unity.

Jabhat al-Nusra is a radical terrorist authority which uses religion as an excuse to kill and to win Syrians’ sympathy, as well as to fight against the country by bringing groups and individuals from distant countries who have the same radical doctrinal

thinking based on religion. This authority is seeking to establish an Islamic emirate in Syria.

ALAWITE MAN (PRO-REGIME), 25, DAMASCUS

May God curse them, the worst in the world. They are retarded, bloody, and fanatic. They should not exist in any part of the world. If there would be many of them, then they should go to Saudi Arabia.

SUNNI WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 25, ALEPPO

Among regime opponents, many also worried about its radicalism. Some respondents say they would accept Jabhat al-Nusra's help now and worry about fighting it later.

It's like the principle of "I like your talk but I see your actions and I wonder." When they got stronger, they became like the regime. It's either you are with them or you get killed, exiled, or vanished.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 47, IDP IN RAQQAH

(It's) bad if it intends to impose on us its bad ideas. We will fight it after Bashar Assad if it wants to impose on us. But if it came to remove Bashar Assad, I am with Jabhat al-Nusra and with Al-Qaeda too, not only Jabhat al-Nusra.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 25, REFUGEE IN TURKEY

Jabhat al-Nusra does have a number of supporters among anti-regime respondents, particularly in Hama and Aleppo, where views of it are generally favourable. Respondents appreciate the help provided to rebel forces and consider its fighters brave and effective.

Jabhat al-Nusra are courageous. They don't have personal goals, only to protect people and end injustice upon them. You always see these people on the front line.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 36, IDP IN ALEPPO

Jabhat al-Nusra is the most effective group in Syria, the one which gains the most results and victories for sure.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 31, REFUGEE IN TURKEY

Some credit Jabhat al-Nusra for being an effective fighting force while acknowledging its negatives. “Jabhat al-Nusra is a radical group. It adopts fanatical thoughts and fights injustice. Many of its ideas may be wrong but those people believe in a certain thing and fight for it,” said an anti-regime Sunni man, 38, in Damascus.

Thus, views of many of the central figures and groups in the conflict — such as President Assad, the Syrian Army, and the Free Syrian Army — split along pro/anti-regime lines. Yet there are noteworthy cross-currents of opinion within anti-regime respondents’ views on the FSA, SNCROF, and Jabhat al-Nusra, some of which suffer from as many mixed or negative views as positive. Support for the SNC and NCSOF is strikingly weak even among regime opponents. Likewise there is some acknowledgement among regime supporters of errors and abuses on the part of their leadership and army. While the divisions run deep, these differences also suggest that the pro- and anti-government blocs may not be totally monolithic, and perhaps can seek common ground.

Information Sources: “I follow all the channels”

Syrians struggle to obtain objective and accurate information about the situation in their country. Most rely on television. Both regime supporters and opponents said they tended to stay tuned to their preferred channel, though some respondents from both groups paid attention to media run by the other side in order to hear what they say or obtain some approximation of the truth. Conflict, displacement, and infrastructure damage (lack of electricity and internet) prevent some from accessing news sources, forcing them to rely on word of mouth. A perceived lack of independent sources — from the perspective of both regime opponents and supporters — lead some to trust information only from people they know personally, or to seek information on the internet.

Television Most Important Source of Information

Regime supporters and opponents alike depended on television for their national news but relied on different stations. Regime supporters watched local stations such as Al-Dunya, Al-Jadeeda, and Al-Ekhbariya Al-Suriyya. Regime

opponents tended to tune into stations based abroad, such as Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera, and Arabic versions of BBC, Sky News, France 24, and CNN, as well as local stations such as Shada Al Huriah, and Deir-el-Zor.

Some respondents checked in with government or opposition outlets to hear what was being reported about the other side. Some tried to triangulate to the real story by viewing both.

I follow all the channels and form an independent point of view. I do not 100 percent adopt the regime point of view, and I do not 100 percent adopt the opposition point of view, because both sides tend to exaggerate and invest in media for personal purposes.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 28, ALEPPO

Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, and sometimes we watch Al-Dunya Channel. We can call people to know what is happening, and go back to watch Al Dunya Channel and we notice that news is fabricated.

SUNNI WOMAN (ANTI-REGIME), 29, REFUGEE, TURKEY

Both pro- and anti-regime respondents also relied on word of mouth transmitted electronically. They use mobile and internet messaging sources (SMS, What's App, Skype) and the phone.

Respondents Struggle to Obtain Objective Information

Pro- and anti-regime respondents alike complained about the difficulty of finding objective information about the situation in the country.

The problem is that there is no transparency on television. If there was an eye-witness who narrates a certain story it would be more reliable for me as it may have happened with him or someone who saw it in front of him.

SUNNI WOMAN (PRO-REGIME), 25, ALEPPO

Actually we become confused and do not know who to believe, but I think that channels like Al-Jazeera broadcast sort of credible news.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 38, ALEPPO

Internet Provides Independent Information

Many respondents craved independent sources of information and looked mostly to the internet for it, particularly Twitter, Facebook, Al-Jazeera, and among Aleppo respondents, a site called Aleppo News, which provides localized information with minimal propaganda.

Facebook mostly. Group pages like the Raqqah Youth Group, Revolution Sana, and Al Tabaqqa Youth Revolution.

SUNNI MAN, (ANTI-REGIME), 47, IDP IN RAQQAH

Through the internet I can follow all proposals and opinions extensively and quickly. I can also check the forums without only listening to the voice of the regime.

CHRISTIAN MAN (ANTI-REGIME), 50, IDP IN HOMS

The Displaced Rely on Internet, Informal Networks

For the displaced and refugees, informal networks of friends and family were the best source of accurate information about events in their home areas, provided there are people left in their villages or neighbourhoods to give them the news. They also rely on TV and the internet.

My town is close to Qalaat al-Madiq, so whenever I hear any news about Qalaat al-Madiq I call my townspeople to check on them. They too call me whenever anything important takes place.

SUNNI MAN, 41, IDP IN HAMA

I mainly depend on neighbours who didn't emigrate. Secondly I use online and TV. I have good relations with my neighbours, and they are on the spot. What they say will be closer to accurate.

SUNNI MAN (ANTI-REGIME), IDP IN ALEPPO

Few Listen to Radio, Read Print, or Get SMS News

Only those sitting in shops or cars all day, or who have no electricity, tend to listen to radio news. Some questioned the objectivity of these sources. “Because of my work I listen to it [radio] a lot, but I do not consider it as a news source. It is just like newspapers, not accurate and it only cheers for the regime,” said an anti-regime Sunni man from Aleppo. One IDP man from Aleppo said, since the regime had withdrawn from the area he is in, there are limited radio broadcasts called Aleppo Now and Syria Breezes.

Lack of electricity is a problem in some areas, so sometimes participants rely on battery-powered radio if they can't watch television. “I prefer the radio because it

works whether there is electricity or not,” said an anti-regime Sunni man from Hama.

Few, if any, on either side of the regime divide rely on print. “I do not have time to sit and read a newspaper, [and] even if I wanted to all the newspapers in the country are under the surveillance of the regime and only write what the regime wants,” said an anti-regime Sunni man from al-Qamishli.

The Syrian revolution is being televised and each side has their own TV stations which are the primary news sources for their supporters, as well as the international Arabic broadcasters. The internet is the second most important source. Phone calls and other electronic messages from friends and family are critical for IDPs and exiles seeking news from their home areas. Radio and print are relatively minor news sources.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Interest in Solutions and Broad Agreement on Key Issues is High, But Awareness of Options is Low

The time is ripe for conversation among Syrians about post-conflict transitional justice issues. Awareness of the potential options among the citizenry is low, but interest in solutions that might stop the fighting, establish the rule of law, and offer accountability for wrongdoers on both sides is quite strong. Efforts to increase awareness and promote discussion about these issues have the potential to appeal to partisans on both sides of the regime divide, and may help Syrians move past the enormous split between the government and opposition blocs and toward resolution of the conflict.

The extent of agreement among Syrians on several key themes related to transitional justice, including the desirability of negotiation, coexistence, accountability, the rule of law, trials, compensation, and (after explanation) truth commissions is remarkably broad, despite differences on important details.

The Resilient Syrian National Identity and Desire for Rule of Law

Ironically this appears to be a result of broadly shared suffering that has touched nearly all Syrians in various ways, as well as the resilience of a national identity which seems to have endured despite the chaos. It may be that Syria, like other societies that have suffered intense conflict, has come to cherish the ideal of justice through law, instead of retribution through acts of revenge. Effective transitional justice mechanisms could help to heal the wounds and sense of injustice burning from the conflict, ease the process of political change, and base a new polity on a sounder, shared footing.

Inform, Encourage Discussion, and Forge Consensus

However, building consensus in Syria around transitional justice will not be easy. There are substantial divisions about the terms of a possible negotiated settlement, the use of the Syrian courts, and the political actors and forces, as well as understandable fears that violent actors could upset postwar coexistence. Moreover, awareness of the options for transitional justice and how they might be implemented is quite low and a great deal of civic education will be necessary to make them politically viable. By its nature, this type of education must be impartial, available, and acceptable to partisans of both sides. Therefore such efforts should aim at facilitating and encouraging discussion, the gathering of information, and the forging of consensus *by Syrians themselves* — not imposing answers or policies determined in advance.

Syrians Yearn to Live Together Again As one Nation

Syria's tragedy has been catastrophic for the citizens living it and heart-breaking for those outside the country watching it for the past three years. From every perspective, the costs have been immense: in lives lost, injuries, and property

destroyed, as well as the massive financial burdens imposed on Syria and its neighbours. Yet we have learned that despite their all-too-real divisions, Syrians yearn to end their war and live together again as one community and nation. They want accountability to be part of the resolution of the conflict and the rule of law to be part of its legacy. They are open to learning about, and using, the tools of transitional justice in this reckoning. This makes it a responsibility of those outside who care about the outcome to help them in this quest, in order to strengthen the possibility of a postwar Syria at peace with itself, remote though it may seem at the moment.

Appendix

Methodology

Charney Research conducted 46 in-depth individual interviews on transitional justice issues in Syria between August 12 and September 18, 2013. They were done by a local Syrian market research organization's experienced and trained professional Syrian interviewers. All interviews were with adult Syrian citizens.

The interviews were conducted in the following areas: six interviews in Aleppo, Raqqah, and Hama each, seven in Damascus, three in both al-Qamishli and Tartous, and one in Homs. Eight were conducted among internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Syria, and six with refugees, three in Jordan and three in Turkey. The pool included 34 Sunnis, four Alawites, four Christians, three Kurds, and one Shiite. They also included 32 men and 14 women. In educational terms, five had only primary education, 25 some or complete secondary education, and 16 some or complete tertiary education.

Such a sample is not statistically representative of the Syrian population, nor is that a requisite for qualitative research of this type. Rather, the objective was to

ensure that all the main demographic and confessional groups and people in various government- and opposition-held locales, including in the two largest cities, were included in the study. We did this in order to be able to explore similarities and differences in their opinions and probe and contrast their reactions to ideas and possibilities. Charney Research staff conducted field training of the research firm's field supervisors in August 2013. During this training the discussion guide was refined, strategies for obtaining cooperation were explained, potential obstacles and solutions were discussed, and practice interviews were conducted to ensure correct administration of the questionnaire. The field supervisors in turn trained and briefed local staff for the study. Charney Research was impressed by and deeply grateful for their commitment and courage, without which they could not have conducted this research.

Quotas were set for each region as well as the demographics expected to be fulfilled. Sampling was done on the basis of a modified snowball sampling technique.

The interviews were roughly half an hour in length, in Arabic, and were recorded live. They were transcribed in Arabic, then translated into English by the research firm.

This report, along with the discussion guide for the interviews, was written by Craig Charney and Christine Quirk. The research project was managed by Shehzad Qazi. Research assistance was provided by Justine Woods, Nick Chandler, and Erika Schaefer.

Interviewee Details

	LOCATION	GENDER	REFUGEE OR IDP?	AGE	CONFESSION	EDUCATION COMPLETED	OCCUPATION	REGIME STANCE
1	Turkey	Male	Refugee	31	Sunni	University Student	Student	Anti
2	Turkey	Woman	Refugee	29	Sunni	Secondary School	Housewife	Anti
3	Turkey	Male	Refugee	25	Sunni	University Graduate	Pharmacist	Anti
4	Jordan	Male	Refugee	34	Sunni	Elementary School	Laborer	Anti
5	Jordan	Male	Refugee	50	Sunni	Elementary School	Trader	Anti
6	Jordan	Woman	Refugee	48	Sunni	Elementary School	Housewife	Anti
7	Damascus	Male	-	24	Sunni	University Graduate	Unemployed	Anti
8	Damascus	Male	-	34	Sunni	Elementary School	In the field of dyes	Anti
9	Damascus	Male	-	25	Alawite	University Graduate	Sales manager	Pro
10	Damascus	Male	-	38	Sunni	Secondary School	Clothing manufacture and trade	Anti
11	Damascus	Male	-	40	Shiite	University Graduate	Engineer	Pro
12	Damascus	Woman	-	58	Sunni	Preparatory School	Housewife	Pro
13	Damascus	Woman	IDP	28	Sunni	University Graduate	Unemployed teacher	Anti
14	Damascus	Woman	IDP	48	Sunni	Secondary School	Housewife	Anti
15	Aleppo	Woman	-	25	Sunni	Secondary School	Marketing	Pro

SYRIA JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY CENTRE

	LOCATION	GENDER	REFUGEE OR IDP?	AGE	CONFESSION	EDUCATION COMPLETED	OCCUPATION	REGIME STANCE
16	Aleppo	Male	-	27	Sunni	Secondary School	Clothing store	Pro
17	Aleppo	Male	-	38	Sunni	Preparatory School	Taxi driver	Anti
18	Aleppo	Male	-	33	Sunni	Secondary School	Shop owner	Pro
19	Aleppo	Male	-	38	Sunni	Preparatory School	Laborer	Anti
20	Aleppo	Male	IDP	36	Sunni	University Graduate	Engineer	Anti
21	Aleppo	Male	IDP	35	Sunni	Secondary School	Contractor	Anti
22	Aleppo	Male	-	28	Sunni	Post-Graduate Student	Student	Anti
23	Hama	Male	-	32	Sunni	Secondary School	Blacksmith	Pro
24	Raqqah	Male	-	45	Sunni	Secondary School	Barber	Anti
25	Hama	Male	-	42	Sunni	Grade 8	Taxi driver	Pro
26	Hama	Woman	-	39	Sunni	Grade 7	Housewife	Pro
27	Hama	Male	-	30	Sunni	College Graduate	Merchant	Anti
28	Raqqah	Male	-	48	Sunni	Secondary School	Mechanic	Pro
29	Raqqah	Male	IDP	47	Sunni	University Graduate	Collection Officer for the Water Authority	Anti
30	Raqqah	Male	-	34	Sunni	Secondary School	Painter	Anti
31	Hama	Woman	-	40	Sunni	Secondary School	Housewife	Anti

SYRIA JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY CENTRE

	LOCATION	GENDER	REFUGEE OR IDP?	AGE	CONFESSION	EDUCATION COMPLETED	OCCUPATION	REGIME STANCE
32	Raqqah	Male	-	38	Sunni	Secondary School	Baker	Pro
33	Hama	Male	-	40	Sunni	Grade 8	Trader	Anti
34	Raqqah	Woman	-	39	Sunni	Grade 7	Housewife	Pro
35	Raqqah	Woman	-	34	Sunni	Secondary School	Unemployed	Anti
36	Hama	Male	IDP	41	Sunni	Preparatory School	Sometimes butcher	Anti
37	al-Qamishli	Male	-	32	Kurdish	Technical Institute	Nurse	Anti
38	al-Qamishli	Woman	-	37	Kurdish	Grade 8	Housewife	Anti
39	Tartous	Male	IDP	50	Christian	Secondary School	Trader	Anti
40	al-Qamishli	Male	-	34	Kurdish	University Degree	Clothes dealer	Pro
41	Tartous	Male	-	42	Alawite	Grade 7	Fruits and vegetables trader	Pro
42	Tartous	Woman	-	30	Alawite	University Degree: Arabic Literature	Teacher	Anti
43	Tartous	Woman	-	35	Alawite	Secondary School	Housewife	Pro
44	Homs	Male	-	42	Christian	Bachelor's Degree	Trader	Pro
45	Damascus	Woman	-	36	Christian	University Graduate	Decor Engineer	Pro
46	Damascus	Male	-	56	Christian	Graduate of Business Admin Institute	Trading and selling food	Pro

Syria Justice and Accountability Centre

The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC) is a Syrian-led and multilaterally-supported nonprofit that envisions a Syria where people live in a state defined by justice, respect for human rights, and rule of law. SJAC collects, analyzes, and preserves human rights law violations by all parties in the conflict—creating a central repository to strengthen accountability and support transitional justice and peace-building efforts. SJAC also conducts research to better understand Syrian opinions and perspectives, provides expertise and resources, conducts awareness-raising activities, and contributes to the development of locally appropriate transitional justice and accountability mechanisms. Learn more at www.syriaaccountability.org.