Governance, Civic Participation, and Community Peacebuilding in Syria During the Transitional Period

A Multi-Site Comparative Study on Local Governance and Civic Participation and Community Peacebuilding in Syria

2026



Research Team

This study was carried out in partnership among three Syrian organizations working in the civic and community field: SYCAC, which led the research work in the governorates of Aleppo, Idlib, and Homs; Mouj, which covered the areas of Al-Nabek, Yabroud, and Qara in Rural Damascus; and Hayat, which covered the areas of Ashrafiyat Sahnaya and Ghouta in Rural Damascus.

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Executive Summary:

This study examines the state of local governance, civic participation, and social peace in Syria during the transitional period that followed the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime at the end of 2024 a period that is not limited to a political transition in the narrow sense, but also encompasses a redefinition of the relationship between the state and society, between the center and the localities, and between formal institutions and the community networks that accumulated, over years of conflict, extensive experience in adaptation, survival, and response. The study proceeds from a core premise: local governance in Syria today does not begin from a blank slate, nor does it simply revert to what existed before 2011; rather, it is taking shape within a complex space where the remnants of central rule intersect with the experiences of local administration in opposition-held areas, the legacy of the Salvation Government and the Interim Government, hybrid power arrangements, and the communal, religious, civic, and economic networks that filled the vacuum left by the state or compensated for the erosion of trust in it.

The study adopted a comparative qualitative methodology, drawing on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions across a number of selected sites within the governorates of Aleppo, Idlib, Homs, and Rural Damascus. These areas were purposively selected for the diversity they represent in social and demographic structure, their differing experiences of control and governance during the conflict years, and the variation in levels of destruction, return, resources, and local trust. The sites studied included major cities such as Aleppo and Homs; areas with a distinct governance legacy such as Idlib, Afrin, and Maarat al-Numan; rural or semi-urban areas such as Al-Shin, Wadi al-Nasara, Al-Nabek, Yabroud, and Qara; in addition to highly sensitive cases such as Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, and cases of return and local re-establishment such as Douma and Erbin.



The study does not claim to offer a definitive judgment on the realities of these areas; rather, it seeks to capture the main trends and analyze the local dynamics that reveal how localities are actually governed, who holds power and influence, where participation is made possible, and where patterns of exclusion, centralization, or informal influence are being reproduced.

The study's findings show that the local governance system in Syria during the transitional period is characterized by a multiplicity of models and an instability of institutional rules. In some areas, the "district administration" (idarat al-mintaqa) emerged as an intermediary layer between municipalities and governorates, but in several cases it effectively became a de facto center of gravity for decision-making, thereby weakening the autonomy of local authorities. In the major cities, new administrative layers did not necessarily emerge; rather, existing structures were reactivated, or intermediary mechanisms were created, such as the service blocs (kutal khidmiya) in Aleppo or the Neighborhood Committees Development Office in Homs. In other areas, such as Ashrafiyat Sahnaya and Wadi al-Nasara, governance cannot be understood through formal institutions alone, since religious authorities, notables, reconciliation councils, and communal actors play parallel roles that may at times support local authorities and at other times constrain or compete with them.

The study reveals that administrative decentralization in Syria remains suspended between the letter of the law, aspiration, and practice. Local Administration Law No. 107 of 2011[1] is present as a general legal reference, but it does not govern actual practice in a stable or clear manner. The interviews revealed a wide knowledge gap among local actors first and foremost among representatives of local authorities and staff within their administrative bodies regarding the law's content, the boundaries of authority, the decision-making cycle, and the relationship between the municipality, the district administration, the governorate, and the service directorates. Moreover, the future of decentralization will not be determined by the will of the central authority alone; it will also be shaped by each area's past and present experiences, the strength of local actors, the degree of demographic diversity, communities' capacity to negotiate with the central authority, the volume of available resources, and the level of trust between the population and institutions.

(1) Local Administration Law No. 107 of 2011 was issued by legislative decree in August 2011, amid the escalating protest movement against the Bashar al-Assad regime, and was regarded at the time, alongside other similar pieces of legislation, as one of the response measures the regime adopted to contain popular demands. The law included provisions aimed at strengthening administrative decentralization and expanding the powers of local units beyond their traditional service function, in addition to activating mechanisms for community participation. However, its actual implementation stalled as the armed conflict escalated and control over the country's territory fragmented, with distinct governance models emerging in each area. Following the regime's fall and the country's reunification, the transitional authority indicated the possibility of adapting this law to the requirements of the current phase, at a time when calls are also growing for the issuance of new legislation to govern municipal affairs.

In the field of community participation, the study shows that the fall of the Assad regime opened wider margins for expression, initiative, protest, and communal and civic action; however, in most locations this participation remains closer to response and implementation than to full institutional participation in planning, decision-making, and accountability. Social media has also played a growing role in conveying grievances, pressuring authorities, and accelerating response. Nevertheless, in fragile contexts it can turn into a space for defamation, accusations of betrayal, and hate speech, making it a double-edged tool that can either strengthen participation or deepen polarization.

As for civil society, the study confirms that it cannot be treated as a single, homogeneous bloc across Syrian geography. Civil society's capacity to exert influence varies according to city size, the prior governance context, the level of identity diversity, the nature of the relationship with local authorities, and the sensitivity of the issues at hand. The study indicates that civil society generally enjoys a higher level of trust than formal institutions, owing to its experience in direct response, its flexibility, and its mobility; however, this trust remains vulnerable whenever organizations or initiatives are viewed through the lens of political, sectarian, or regional affiliation.

At the level of inclusion and representation, the study concludes that the core problem lies not only in the absence of certain groups from the public sphere, but in the absence of fair, transparent mechanisms that allow for genuine and influential representation. Women's presence in decision-making positions remains limited. Youth are present to a greater degree, though this does not amount to comprehensive representation of the full diversity of Syrian youth. Returnees represent one of the most complex files, as the dynamics of their presence vary from one area to another — ranging from their being an influential bloc in local decision-making at the expense of residents, to social integration and the containment of tension, depending on the strength or fragility of host communities. The study also reveals that religious, sectarian, and ethnic identities do not function as lines of division on their own, but intersect with the memory of war, positions toward the former regime, experiences of displacement and return, representation, and access to resources.

On the axis of conflict dynamics and civil peace, the study shows that local conflicts in Syria cannot be reduced to sectarian or ethnic divisions; rather, they take multiple forms, including disputes over property and housing, services, appointments, resources, return, community security, the proliferation of weapons, hate speech, and classifications tied to binaries such as “revolutionaries/shabiha” or “returnees/residents.” Communities' capacity to respond to these conflicts varies according to their social capital.

the existence of trusted mediation channels, the presence of formal institutions, and the role of notables, religious figures, and reconciliation councils. The study confirms that shared service-related issues — such as water, electricity, sanitation, education, and health — constitute relatively safe entry points for dialogue and trust-building, whereas issues of memory, transitional justice, property, and identity-based representation require more gradual pathways, protection, and specialized mediation.

With regard to civic capacities and training needs, the study concludes that the fundamental gap lies not in the absence of actors or a lack of willingness to participate, but in the weak capacity to convert available community energy into organized, influential participation. There is a clear need for interconnected training pathways covering local governance and the Local Administration Law, the training of local facilitators and mediators, evidence-based participatory planning, representative community leadership for women and youth, and conflict-sensitive local media capable of countering rumors and hate speech. The added value of such training lies in its capacity to generate new local dynamics, not merely in the number of trainees.

In sum, the study confirms that local governance in Syria during the transitional period cannot be supported through a single model or generic prescriptions, but rather through context-sensitive local approaches that recognize the multiplicity of experiences and governance legacies, build on the experience communities have accumulated, and simultaneously work to institutionalize participation, clarify mandates, strengthen transparency, protect civic space, and develop mediation and dialogue mechanisms capable of preventing everyday conflicts from escalating into broader divisions. The transition required is not merely one from central authority to more devolved local administration, but from situational participation and social reaction to organized local practice; from personal trust to institutional rules; and from service delivery as urgent response to service delivery as an entry point for building trust, dialogue, and civil peace.



First: Introduction:

General Context

Syria today is living through a transitional period following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime at the end of 2024 a period whose definition extends well beyond the political transition the country is witnessing. This transition encompasses every detail through which the state and its political, social, and economic identity are being redefined, with all that this entails for the reconstruction of the system of governance in Syria and its formal and informal institutions.

Within this context, Syria's local governance system appears to be undergoing a uniquely unprecedented transitional experience one that has never been tested in this way across a century of the country's history, with all the upheavals, events, and changes of governing system it has witnessed, up to this present, decisive moment in Syria's history. The uniqueness of this experience lies in the fact that Syria's local governance system during this transitional period does not start from a complete void, nor does it simply revert to what it was before the outbreak of the revolution in the spring of 2011.

This system moves between two opposing perspectives: the first sees it as characterized by fragmentation and improvisation, as the sole mechanism for adapting to the complexity and differentiation of local contexts. The other perspective sees it as taking shape within a complex space made up of the divergent legacy of central rule, the experiences of governance in opposition-held areas, hybrid power arrangements, and the institutional structures emerging during the transitional period and likewise, between formal institutions attempting to reassert their presence, and local communities that have accumulated diverse experiences in adaptation and survival, alongside communal, religious, civic, and economic networks that, over recent years, have filled many of the vacuums left by the state's retreat or the collapse of trust in it.

On this basis, this study aims to provide a practical diagnosis of the state of local governance in a number of Syrian areas not as a procedural system focused on municipal working mechanisms and channels of decision-making and implementation, but rather by viewing local governance as a composite system "in the process of formation," shaped by the interplay of major political, social, economic, and security determinants that interact on unsettled geographic and demographic ground. Accordingly, the study attempts to focus on the emerging dynamics through which localities are governed, and the differentiation among these dynamics on one hand; and, on the other hand, how they are shaped by and in turn shape the framework

orientations being pursued by the Ministry of Local Administration, whether in terms of decisions and circulars related to expanding the scope of administrative decentralization in both form and substance, or extending to restructuring projects and the unification of local governance patterns, up to amending or replacing the law governing local administration in Syria, Law 107/2011, along with the consequent financial, urban-planning, service, and development legislative framework all with a view to establishing a local governance system that is more efficient, effective, and responsive to the challenges of the current phase and their repercussions.

Finally, through this study we seek to offer added value to the governmental and community efforts currently underway, by shedding light on the local experiences that have been captured and described, and by analyzing the context in which they arose, treating them as lessons learned that can be built upon or, at the very least, as a way of avoiding reinventing the wheel.

◆ Study Objective and Working Methodology:

This study falls within the framework of a comprehensive project that includes, alongside the completion of this study:

- Designing dialogue platforms
- Developing training pathways for civic actors
- Identifying capacity gaps among local actors
- Criteria for selecting small grants and civic initiatives
- Advocacy and communication strategies with local administrations



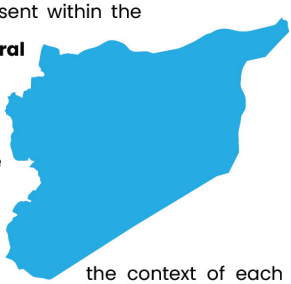
Accordingly, this study will provide a practical mapping of a set of interventions aimed at building governmental and civic institutional capacities, strengthening community participation, and supporting dialogue between local communities and local authorities, through:

- Governance mapping: identifying formal and informal actors in decision-making and mapping the relationships among them.
- Assessing existing mechanisms of civic participation and identifying the barriers that prevent effective engagement.
- Identifying the knowledge and skills gaps that training activities should address, involving both civic actors and local authorities.
- Understanding the challenges, priorities, and opportunities perceived by the community, which can form a basis for organized dialogue.
- Identifying entry points and realistic opportunities for civic initiatives, dialogue platforms, and small-grant interventions.

Accordingly, the study adopted a qualitative research approach in an attempt to understand how Syrians view issues of local governance, community participation, and dialogue, and how their perceptions of the relationship between state and society are being shaped amid the emerging social dynamics of the current phase including the shifting maps of actors, networks of influence and representation, and access to decision making and resources. This study did not seek to test pre-existing theoretical hypotheses or impose read made analytical models; rather, it worked to capture the general local mood through the language and narratives used and expressed by participants across all areas and the various activities conducted, in describing the political, social, service-related, and economic realities of their localities.

◆ Target Areas and Data Collection Tools:

The areas were purposively selected for the structural diversity they represent within the Syrian context, with a focus on four governorates **Aleppo, Idlib, Homs, and Rural Damascus** and within each governorate, a number of cities were targeted that differ in institutional and social structure, demographic composition, and the varying experiences of displacement and return that these areas have witnessed and continue to witness; as well as in the diversity of governance legacies and experiences with the different de facto authorities during the conflict years, down to the adaptation mechanisms being tested according to the context of each area during the transitional period. As follows:





Idlib Governorate

The city of Idlib Focus: the governance legacy of the Salvation Government, institutional remnants, adaptive practices

The city of Maarat al-Numan Focus: comparison with governance under the Assad era up to December 2024, dynamics of reintegration



Aleppo Governorate

The city of Aleppo Focus: multi-layered urban governance, municipal leadership, neighborhood committees, city coalitions, innovation attempts

The city of Afrin Focus: the transition from Turkish influence to Aleppo's governance, local autonomy, the renegotiation of authority



Rural Damascus Governorate

Nabek, Yabroud, and Qara – Focus: the most stable local governance, dynamics of reintegration

Ashrafiyat Sahnaya – Focus: governance in a mixed-identity context, negotiating power

Douma and Erbin – Focus: governance in a demographically homogeneous context during the transitional period.



Homs Governorate

The city of Homs Focus: urban governance compared to Aleppo, centralization versus delegation

Al-Shin and Wadi al-Nasara – Focus: governance in a mixed-identity context, stability management, informal mediation



Each of the target areas was treated as an independent governance system, shaped by its historical trajectory, administrative arrangements, social composition, and institutional developments in the post-collapse phase. Accordingly, a package of data-collection tools was adopted, focusing initially on two main methods Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in an attempt to capture the general local mood as expressed by participants, drawing on the individual and collective narratives collected, and going beyond what they expressed from their own perspective, toward analyzing the context and interpreting the dynamics they described during the sessions held with them.[2]

Governorate	City/Area	Number of Individual Interviews	Number of In-depth Sessions	Total Number of Participants
Aleppo	Aleppo	8	2	24
	Afrin	8	2	27
Idlib	Idlib	8	2	24
	Maarat al-Numan	8	2	25
Homs	Homs	8	2	24
	Al-Shin	7	2	24
	Wadi al-Nasara /Al-Hisn	7	2	32
Rural Damascus	Al-Nabek	7	2	27
	Yabroud	8	2	24
	Qara	8	2	18
	Douma/Erbin	11	2	29
	Ashrafiyat Sahnaya	5	2	33
Total Participants				311

A unified interview guide was developed, and the in-depth sessions were facilitated in an effort to focus the discussion around key determinants:

- Who holds actual power in each area, and how is it exercised?
- Who is able to participate and exert influence, and who remains outside the process, and why?
- What are the points of tension or institutional and social division?
- What issues can be safely channeled into cooperation, dialogue, and peacebuilding?

In addition, the project team relied on two important tools that reflected the effectiveness of their presence in the target areas:

- Field observation, as one of the tools that complements interviews and discussions by monitoring patterns of interaction, governance practices, and the performance of formal and informal institutional structures wherever possible.[3]

- Institutional mapping, as an important tool for documenting the structure of governance systems in each area,[4] including the identification of formal local institutions, civic actors, informal community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders, as well as mapping the relationships among them.[5]

Participants and Target Groups:[6]

The sample included identity-based and social diversity, extending even to positions vis-à-vis the transitional authority. The aim of this composition of attendance was not to achieve statistical representativeness of the population, but rather to allow for the intersection of multiple experiences relating to governmental, civic, and communal work; this diversity allows for theoretical saturation on the one hand, and, on the other, provides rich analytical material without falling into repetition or dispersion.

Also, given the study's context and its thematic axes, the project team sought to ensure a balanced presence of two key groups within the local landscape in the target cities and across Syrian areas generally: representatives of local authority (local council – mukhtar – neighborhood committee – administrative staff), and the other group being returnees to their areas.

(3) Field observation reports were completed in all target cities except Erbin, Douma, and Qara in Rural Damascus governorate.

(4) Institutional maps were completed for Aleppo, Afrin, Idlib, Maarat al-Numan, Homs, Al-Nabek, Yabroud, Qara, and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya; subsequently, during work on this study, institutional maps for the four target governorates were completed and will be included among the files attached to this study.

(5) It is worth noting the challenges that prevented the project team — across the various areas — from accessing decisions issued by local councils and other official documents; had this been possible, it would have provided added value alongside everything accomplished, in strengthening the findings reached and treating them as official reference sources in this regard.

(6) See Annex 2 for a more detailed analysis of the target groups covered in preparing this study.

Second: A Diagnosis of the State of Local Governance in Each Area:

Following the completion of the round of activities carried out in the target areas — interviews and focus group discussions — work was carried out, in coordination with SYCAC's partners, to produce diagnostic reports based on a composite reading of the interviews, focus group discussions, and the other data-collection tools, using a condensed style of writing that incorporates the most significant quotations within the footnotes. The conflict-analysis reports prepared by SYCAC were also drawn upon, serving as a complementary source to the field material.[7]

The project team acknowledges that these reports[8] do not offer a definitive judgment on the reality of any given city, so much as a focused qualitative reading of its most prominent trends; the quotations included from the interviews and sessions were treated as supporting illustrations, not as quantitative evidence or absolute general rulings. These reports also avoid issuing sweeping judgments about any religious or regional component, and the interviews were treated as local perceptions rooted in the narratives and terms through which participants tried to navigate between personal opinion and general mood, within a rapidly changing local context marked by the pressure of urgent service and livelihood needs, demographic shifts resulting from return and the redefinition of places of work and residence,[9] the present-day challenges of transitional justice, the proliferation of weapons, violence and hate speech, and the reconfiguration of state institutions, foremost among them local authorities.

Each of these reports was structured around key axes adopted to be common across all reports:

- The general local context.
- The state of local governance.
- Community participation and civic action.
- Civic capacities and training needs.
- Civic capacities and training needs.

(7) SYCAC Conflict Analysis (compressed) / Aleppo–Idlib /

(8) These reports, numbering 12 and covering the target cities and towns in the four governorates, can be viewed as attachments to this study.

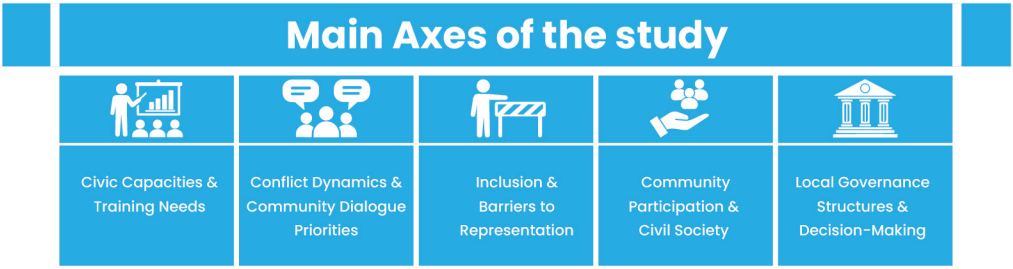
(9) This was mainly reflected in the responses and contributions during the dialogue sessions and in all the examples raised across the different areas.

The output of all activities in each target area was analyzed and condensed within these axes, with an analytical summary provided at the end of each report. It should also be acknowledged that the quality of outputs varied across areas, depending on the nature of participants, differences in the knowledge background and experience of the data-collection team, and the local context — which was decisive in determining the ease or difficulty of accessing key informants and the ability to interview them and expand the discussion with them. All of this was accordingly reflected in variation between the diagnostic reports of the target areas, and even between the main axes within each report.

◆ Third: Comparative Analysis:

This comparative analysis aims to move from describing each local case individually to understanding the shared patterns and fundamental differences among them. It does not seek to repeat what is contained in the detailed reports, nor as noted earlier to test pre-existing theoretical hypotheses or impose ready-made analytical models, but rather to draw out the broader implications relating to the local governance system, community participation, conflict dynamics and civil peace, and civic capacity gaps.

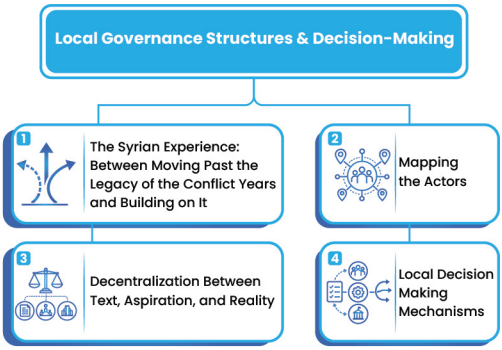
This comparative analysis proceeds from a basic assumption: the transitional period cannot produce a single local model; rather, it reveals a multiplicity of governance trajectories that vary according to institutional legacy, local actors, the degree of trust, and the sensitivity of conflicts in each area — such that the areas targeted by the project can be described as "mirrors" that reveal the differing paths, challenges, and future trajectories of local transition in Syria. Accordingly, this axis aims to identify what is common across areas and what is specific to each context, in a way that helps formulate practical conclusions and interventions better suited to supporting local governance and civic participation in the period ahead.
The analysis will proceed according to five main axes, leading to proposals that include advocacy and dialogue briefs, a grant-prioritization framework, and finally a policy and practice paper that will be translated into actionable recommendations.



Axis One: Local Governance Structures and Decision-Making:

The Syrian Experience: Between Moving Past the Legacy of the Conflict Years and Building on It

In reading the form and nature of local governance structures during the transitional period, it is important to start from the governance legacy of the conflict years in the target areas, on the premise that these areas did not experience a single governance model before the regime's fall, but rather a set of differentiated experiences that contributed to shaping their current reality.



The first model is found in areas that remained under the former regime's control throughout the conflict years. This model was characterized by severe administrative, political, and security centralization, despite the regime's attempts at the time to grant margins of maneuver to localities — as one form of response to the complexity of the security and political settlement process, or to sectarian and social sensitivities in certain areas and the complications this imposed on service and livelihood matters, as in the case of the Qalamoun towns, the city of Homs and its western countryside in Al-Shin and Wadi al-Nasara, and the case of Ashrafiyat Sahnaya among the areas covered by the study.

These areas experienced a wide spectrum of margins of movement — sometimes restricted, sometimes expanded yet they remained within the framework of the centralized model, which necessarily shaped how these areas and their communities understood local governance, its mechanisms of practice, and the relationship with the center in all its tensions.

The other model is the Salvation Government model in Idlib, particularly since 2017, expressed mainly in the city of Idlib, which retains a distinctive governance legacy reflecting the characteristics of this model. This produced a pattern of disciplined, technocratic governance in terms of service delivery and coordination with organizations; however, it remained, at its core, a centralized political model with a security character, marked by a high degree of restriction as a result of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham's control over the security, military, and political levers of decision-making in the area.

The third model is a composite one, experienced by more than one of the cities covered by the study, which had the opportunity to experience more than one governance pattern during the conflict years, resulting in an overlapping, multi-layered governance legacy. Within this model, the example of the city of Afrin stands out: it was directly under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) until 2018, enjoying during that period wide margins of autonomy, before transitioning following Operation Olive Branch into the sphere of direct Turkish influence via local councils affiliated with the Syrian Interim Government, a model that continued until the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime.[10]

Also falling within this model is the city of Maarat al-Numan, which was subject to the Salvation Government's governance model until 2020, but which experienced, from January 2020 until the fall of the former regime, an exceptional situation: the city became nearly devoid of residents and institutions, causing its transition from subjection to an existing governance system to a state that could be described as a "non-model," as a result of the absence of population, institutions, and services.

In the same context, one can speak of the experience of the cities of Erbin and Douma in Ghouta, which experienced a distinctive local administration model during the period in which Ghouta was outside the former regime's control. This model persisted until the conclusion of settlement agreements and the return of these areas to regime control, whereupon they once again became subject to its governance model.[11]
It is also worth noting the special case of the city of Aleppo, specifically the Ashrafieh and Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhoods, during the period between the end of 2016 and the regime's fall at the end of 2024, where the two neighborhoods continued to be governed under an exceptional arrangement whose administrative structure and management mechanisms were closer to the governance model adopted by the Syrian Democratic Forces (a civil council responsible for administrative and service-related decisions – committees specialized in services, relief, and dispute resolution – with a local police force, the "Asayish," handling policing and security functions...).

Following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime, Syria's governance landscape underwent a radical transformation that completely reshaped its structure: the Salvation Government model presented itself as the model "that prevailed," led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and the Salvation Government. Thus it shifted from a model that had emerged and developed in the context of northern Syria as a technocratic body created as a necessity-driven option to facilitate the administration of areas outside the former regime's control and to provide services there to finding itself responsible for governing an entire state with all its ministries,

(10) Based on this military operation carried out by Turkish forces with the participation of a number of Turkish-backed Syrian opposition factions, the operation led to the removal of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and full control over the Afrin area in March 2018.

(11) By the end of 2012, the armed opposition had taken control of the whole of Eastern Ghouta, including Erbin and Douma, and this remained the case until April 2018.

central and local institutions, an integrated legislative and legal framework, a vast geographic expanse, and administrative, developmental, and service needs far exceeding what it had previously experienced in Idlib and northern Syria, despite the complexity of that context. These shifts consequently made it necessary to reconcile the northern experience represented by the Salvation Government's experience with the different local contexts across the rest of Syria's regions, within a reality caught between the difficulty of a complete departure from the old model and the difficulty of quickly producing a new system; this opened the door to testing multiple experiences of institutional and administrative adaptation across Syrian geography.

Through the interviews, one can discern some of these experiences, which will contribute to developing a shared governmental–societal understanding of the nature of the model required to move beyond the transitional period and to establish a more firmly rooted and stable governance system, building on these experiences.

The first case involved the creation of the "district administration" (idarat al-mintaqa) as an intermediary administrative layer between the local authority and the governorate; however, it effectively became the most influential actor in local decision-making, as was clearly seen in the Qalamoun area, Al-Shin, Maarat al-Numan, and Afrin.[12]

The second case emerged in the major cities, such as the governorate-center cities of Aleppo and Homs, where the trajectory did not move toward creating a new administrative layer, but rather toward reactivating existing structures and institutions yet within the same logic of establishing an intermediary level between the citizen and local authorities. In the city of Aleppo, the city was re-divided into "blocs" (kutal) based on the previous service-based divisions, and each "bloc" acquired a dedicated technical office responsible for managing various files, while these blocs became directly linked to the governorate rather than to the city council which made them function as an intermediary layer in the relationship between the governorate and the city council.[13]

(7) Although district and sub-district administrations existed under Law 107/2011 — administrations that were active and performed the roles assigned to them under the law, mainly security-related roles falling under the Ministry of Interior — the new model gave district administrations broader supervisory, coordinating, and service-related powers, making them the main supervisor of the work of administrative units within their scope, with powers approaching those of the governor within their area of supervision, as shown in a proposed organizational structure for district administration in Homs governorate, which the project team was able to review without being able to confirm its accuracy or whether it had been adopted.

(8) Local Administration Law 107/2011 does not include such divisions, but this practice was in effect even before the outbreak of the revolution only in Damascus and Aleppo, given the wide administrative scope of both cities; they were divided into what were then called "service districts," a division that splits the city into geographic sectors each following a "service district," intended to allow flexible response in service matters (sanitation, maintenance, citizen service centers, submitting complaints and requests, etc.). After the regime's fall, the same divisions were maintained but under new names: in Aleppo it became known as the "bloc" (kutla), while in Damascus the term "municipality" (baladiya) is used — a term that was familiar to people even though it carries a different meaning under the Local Administration Law.

In the city of Homs, the "Neighborhood Committees Development Office" emerged as a new institutional innovation aimed at rebuilding the relationship between the governorate, the Homs city council, the neighborhood committees, and civil society. All neighborhood committees were reorganized and renamed based on Local Administration Law No. 107/2011, while being granted wider margins than those stipulated by the law, such that their roles were no longer confined to service-related aspects but extended to include community functions tied to the demands of the transitional period such as mediation, strengthening community security, designing local initiatives, liaising with civil society organizations, and other roles of a communal and developmental nature.

The third case was found in Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, and to a lesser degree in the Wadi al-Nasara area in western rural Homs, where the picture was not confined to the formal institutional track linked to local authorities; alongside it emerged pressuring social entities, such as the Reconciliation Council in the municipality of Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, in addition to the active presence of Muslim and Christian religious figures in the Wadi al-Nasara area, who through coordination and direct communication with the area's security bodies contributed to forming a parallel track to formal institutional work. In some cases, this track played a supportive role for the work of local authorities, while in other cases it turned into a negative factor obstructing their role and performance.

It thus becomes clear, by extrapolating across all the preceding models, that there is a distinct tendency toward weakening local authorities whether through the creation of supra-local structures that take charge of managing numerous files and decision-making, or through the creation of institutional structures at the local level that are primarily tied to the governorate rather than being subordinate to the existing local authority, in addition to the emergence, in some cases, of parallel tracks to formal institutional work, based on cooperation between community elites notables and religious figures in particular and security authorities, which makes these tracks, at times, play a role that constrains the scope of local authorities' work and the limits of their mandate.

Mapping the Actors:

The regional reports point to another factor influencing the reading of the governance landscape across Syrian geography, relating to the complexity and multiplicity of the map of actors in Syria. Against a structural change in the map of local-level actors compared to the former regime's era, a broad range of actors have retained their presence as active and influential in the local sphere among them community elites, notables, religious figures, businessmen, local media, and civic activists. This is in addition to individuals affiliated with the current transitional authority, who previously held leadership positions in northern Syria and were subsequently distributed to positions of work across localities in Syria, which made their presence more prominent within the local scene. Returnees are also a key party within the map of actors, though they do not carry the same qualitative weight in all areas, as the degree of their presence and influence differs from one area to another; for example, returnees in the town of Qara played a major role as an active and influential party in the local sphere, while returnees in other areas were part of the general scene, but without their presence reaching the same degree of influence.(14)

Accordingly, one cannot speak of a single, unified map of actors across Syrian geography; rather, a distinction can be drawn between two basic models. The first is the map of actors at the level of major cities, which is a broader and more diverse map in terms of the number of actors, the multiplicity of their roles, and the sources of their influence, while the second model is the map of actors at the level of smaller cities, which is characterized by a greater degree of concentration and homogeneity.

Nevertheless, one should also take into account the recent process of forming the People's Assembly, which has contributed to reshaping the map of actors both locally and nationally particularly with respect to individuals who were nominated on the basis of their presence and standing within their areas, as these individuals attempt to build on and leverage this new designation in order to strengthen their communal presence, allowing them to secure an active position within the map of actors and reproduce their roles within the current local landscape.

Decentralization Between Text, Aspiration, and Reality:

The reports on the target areas provide an opportunity to look ahead at the future of decentralization in Syria, since the characterization of decentralization in the context of the previous phase does not, in essence, depart from the nature of the experiences and the level of decentralization each area experienced during the conflict years.

(14) Here we are speaking of community groups; certainly, many elites, religious figures, businessmen, and media figures who were connected to the former regime and its institutions and individuals have entirely lost their presence within the new map, but this has opened the way for new individuals to rise within these same groups.

A key distinction can be observed among three basic levels: the first comprises the smaller towns — Qara, Al-Shin, Wadi al-Nasara, Maarat al-Numan, Ashrafiyat Sahnaya where the level of decentralization was very weak; this can be explained by the scale of the extensive interventions exercised by the governorate, regardless of which de facto authority was in place, as local authorities were continuously subject to interventions from higher administrative, security, and political levels, which limited their ability to exercise independent powers and to develop a genuine decentralization experience.

The second category consists of the governorate-center cities, where the interviews indicated that the level of decentralization was limited to moderate, linked to the margins and powers granted to center cities, the volume of resources available to them, as well as the margins they managed to secure as a result of the multiple challenges they faced during the conflict years, which forced them to develop mechanisms for dealing with these challenges and to make decisions that at times exceeded the traditional framework of powers granted to them. Here we are speaking mainly of the experiences of Aleppo and Homs, which experienced significant levels of decentralization, even though these levels remained governed by the nature of the general context and by the relationship with higher authorities.

The exception that emerged in the interviews is represented by the cities of Erbin and Douma, given that they drew on a very significant decentralization experience during the period in which they were outside the former regime's control, having experienced wide margins of decentralization in forming local councils, managing local resources, and the decision-making system — which allowed them to develop a relatively advanced local experience compared to many other areas. It can thus be assumed that, for this particular experience, the regime's fall represented the removal of the main obstacle that had disrupted this experience and prevented its continuation, which explains the momentum they currently display and their attempt to reclaim the experience and practices they had previously accumulated; Douma is considered one of the exceptional cities in Syria that produced an electoral process for naming city council members according to clear criteria of representation and specialization bearing in mind that this experience cannot be read in isolation from the power of the factions and the security authority that ran affairs in Ghouta, as well as the attempt of the sizeable returnee bloc in the city to consolidate its presence, not through creating entities parallel to the authority, but through consolidating the local authority itself, which represents them alongside the rest of the city's residents and is supported by them.

On this basis, any expansion in the powers of local authorities will be seen as an expansion in the powers of the local community itself, and in the expansion of its influence, reach, and presence within the local scene which makes the future of decentralization in these areas closely tied to the extent to which local authorities are able to consolidate their legitimacy, expand their powers, and rebuild their relationship with the local community and with the various levels of existing authority.(15)

Based on the foregoing, the future of centralization and decentralization in Syria can be characterized through a number of key points. First, Syria will likely experience varying levels and forms of decentralization from one area to another, and will need considerable time before arriving at a comprehensive, unified decentralization model applied to a comparable degree across different areas, given the wide variation in local experiences and contexts. Moreover, the level of decentralization will not be determined solely by administrative and institutional complexities and the nature of the relationship with the center; it will also be shaped by a broader set of factors, foremost among them the lived and tested experience of each area prior to the regime's fall, as well as the nature of the de facto authorities that were in place, the scale of their presence, influence, and capacity to exert impact, in addition to the local-level actors present and their ability to negotiate with the central authority to obtain margins or gains related to resource management, decision-making processes, and building a local governance model better suited to the area's context and actual needs, rather than being governed exclusively by the requirements of the general phase or by the dictates of central authorities.

Another important determinant is the degree of homogeneity or diversity of the demographic composition in each area, and the extent to which the local community is able to produce clear responses to any instance of sectional monopolization of local decision-making by a particular group whether returnees, individuals affiliated with the authority, notables, or religious figures since the nature of these social balances, and the capacity of the various components of the local community to exert influence, participate, and negotiate, will play a fundamental role in determining the level and form of decentralization, and in drawing the boundaries of the future relationship between local authorities and the center.

In sum, while there may be a tendency among the central authorities in Damascus toward granting wider margins of administrative decentralization, as these authorities have stated and as has appeared in their conduct, the level of decentralization in Syria will not be determined by the will of the center alone;

(15) The experience of forming the Douma city local council during the transitional period is considered one of the most notable Syrian attempts to move from a centralized administrative-appointment model to a semi-electoral local-representation model. Elections were held in November 2025, and the council consists of 41 members, chosen by an electoral body comprising 561 representatives of the local community. This composition ensured balanced representation between qualified technocrats and the representation of notables, dignitaries, and neighborhoods, while guaranteeing seats for women and youth at a rate of 10% each.

it will also be shaped by a set of factors present at the local level, foremost among them the prior experience each area has accumulated in administration and governance, the degree of demographic diversity or homogeneity within it, and the extent to which local actors and authorities are able to negotiate with the center to obtain wider margins and powers making the level of decentralization, ultimately, a product of the interaction between the center's will on one hand, and local capacities, contexts, and balances on the other.[16]

As for the currently applicable Local Administration Law No. 107/2011, it was present across the various target areas as a reference legal framework; however, participants' understanding of the nature of the law's presence and its level of application varied noticeably. Some considered the law to remain present only as a legal text or a slogan, without any actual application on the ground, to the point that some described it as "ink on paper," while others saw varying degrees of application and practice of the law. Nevertheless, the interviews do not so much reflect the law's actual effectiveness or its real level of implementation as they reveal a clear knowledge gap regarding the Local Administration Law particularly concerning the powers it grants, the form of the administrative and local divisions it stipulates, the legal status of these units, their powers and roles, in addition to numerous issues related to strengthening administrative decentralization and empowering local authorities in service, developmental, social, and economic terms. This explains why participants' contributions were not so much able to render a decisive judgment on the law or define the precise nature of the gap between text and implementation, as they revealed a deeper gap between the legal text and the actual practice of local authorities a gap that appeared mainly in major cities such as Aleppo and Homs, where some interviews showed a degree of familiarity with the law's content and operating mechanisms, indicating that these cities still retain a measure of institutional memory, especially since some interviews targeted individuals still in their positions, who had been present within local institutions during previous phases, which allowed for the continuation of a degree of knowledge and experience related to the legal framework of local administration. By contrast, the gap appears more pronounced in the smaller towns, given the change that occurred in the composition of the local authorities in place there, the majority of whom were newly appointed or had been part of the local authorities in northern Syria which was reflected in the limited nature of their knowledge and practice related to Law 107/2011, and which was clearly evident through their responses in the interviews, which reflected. the existence of a significant gap between knowledge of the legal text and the actual practice of its provisions, roles, and powers.

(15) For example, Delegation Decision No. 13 of 2026, which granted governors broad delegations and powers.

Local Decision-Making Mechanisms

The local-level decision-making process constitutes one of the fundamental manifestations of the local governance system in each area, and it also varies according to the nature of the decision itself — whether it concerns basic services, social projects, humanitarian aid and response, grievances related to housing and property, returnee issues, issues of violence or social marginalization, or issues of civil peace.

This differentiation can be observed at two basic levels: the first is the formal level, where many participants indicated that local decision-making still remains largely confiscated in favor of the center, with limited margins linked to decisions concerning the details of daily life and service-related matters with variation among areas even within this level of powers and available margins while, on issues that exceed these boundaries, the center retains the most prominent presence at the formal level.

At the informal level, the map of actors has a significant influence on the informal structures that participate in shaping the decision-making process; for example, neighborhood committees may play a central role in conveying needs and contributing, directly or indirectly, to shaping local decisions, while in other contexts the strength and influence of informal actors such as notables, businessmen, and charitable institutions, as in Al-Nabek and Yabroud emerges, where their influence at times exceeds formal positions and significantly affects the local decision-making process. The same overlap appears in Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, where religious and familial influence turns into something resembling a veto power parallel to formal authority, granting these parties the ability to influence decisions or obstruct them. In other areas, such as Afrin and Al-Shin, personal relationships emerge as a governing factor in the decision-making process, alongside how close the person benefiting from the decision is to the authority, and the nature of their personal relationships with influential individuals connected to it all of which plays a major role in determining the pathways of local decision-making and in determining who actually holds the capacity to influence it and to benefit from its outcomes.

Local-level decision-making mechanisms are also affected by the degree of cohesion or fragility of the local institutional structure, particularly with the emergence of new levels and structures, such as the district administration or the reorganized neighborhood administration, alongside reconciliation councils compounded by the gap in institutional capacities in terms of administrative and legal qualification, which reinforces the confusion between treating all existing practices as grounded in a legal basis, or assuming that all ongoing practices and decisions are made entirely outside any legal grounding. The working

mechanisms that were in place under the Salvation Government, or those that were in place under the Syrian Interim Government as in Afrin also overlap with the working mechanisms that were in effect under the former regime, resulting in an almost complete absence of a unified decision-making mechanism, which is evident even within a single city, where decision-making mechanisms differ according to the nature of the subject matter and sometimes even within the same service-related subjects, where the mechanism for handling the sanitation file, for example, differs from that adopted for another service issue.

Development-related matters likewise differ from service-related matters, and the nature of the relationship with certain parties does not necessarily follow the same mechanism that governs the relationship with other parties.

The overall effect of this institutional confusion or disarray is directly reflected on the local community, which suffers significantly from a lack of clarity regarding which body holds decision-making authority, which body is authorized to receive complaints and needs, and which body is responsible for responding to and meeting these needs — and consequently, a lack of clarity as to which body can be held accountable. Within the same context, this confusion serves as an entry point for central authorities to reproduce highly centralized practices, including monopolizing the issuance of decisions, in an attempt to unify working methodologies and decision-making mechanisms — which will necessarily weaken the capacity of local authorities to develop clear and stable practices, and will keep the relationship between the center and the localities governed by a state of institutional and legal ambiguity.

Axis Two: Community Participation and Civil Society:

Factors Shaping the Reality and Future of Community Participation

The reality of community participation is undergoing rapid transformations during the transitional period, as it cannot be denied that the fall of the Assad regime opened wide margins for testing more diverse and expansive forms of community participation across Syrian areas.



Although these forms of participation were marked by variation from one area to another, these new spaces emerged driven by the wave of optimism that accompanied the regime's fall, along with the growing discourse on rebuilding the state and the legitimate role of all Syrians in participating, turning the page on decades of marginalization, exclusion, and restriction, and addressing past mistakes. This was reinforced by the positive discourse put forward by the transitional authority, which found direct resonance among the audience of community activists and other social actors, as well as by international discourse that reinforced the general sense of an international will to support Syria in overcoming this transitional period with all its repercussions. All of this created the fertile environment that contributed to the growth and expansion of community participation.

The first of these manifestations was the steady increase in the number of licensed associations and organizations, ranging from newly established associations to associations that had previously operated abroad and opened offices within the country. The map of actors also saw a notable expansion with the growing presence of major social actors who had previously been unable to fully perform their roles under the dominance of the Baath Party and its authority, as wider spaces began to emerge for the work of notables, mukhtars, and businessmen spaces that had previously existed but had not taken their role due to security dominance. The scope of funding provided by these community actors to support a number of initiatives thus expanded, particularly through diaspora capital, which contributed to generating heightened dynamism in community participation; local communities continued to test multiple forms of participation during the transitional period, some of which had already been tested in previous years but have today become more entrenched and expansive, whether in terms of content or working mechanisms, and others which are newly emerging foremost among them the growing role of social media, whose tools have developed considerably, in addition to local platforms that have begun taking shape based on existing community initiatives, teams, and committees.[17]

Forms of community participation vary between governorate-center cities and the rest of the cities within the governorate. This is clearly evident in sit-ins and protest vigils, which focus on leveraging the symbolic weight of the governorate center and its capacity to attract media and community attention, and to pressure state institutions to meet the demands underlying these sit-ins, whereas this form diminishes in smaller cities, due to reliance on communal and social channels to convey protest or demands. Another factor affecting the differentiation of community participation across Syrian areas relates to the degree of identity diversity: it is observed that the higher the level of diversity (as in Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, Aleppo, Al-Shin, and Afrin), the more pronounced the sensitivities related to the issue of representation

(17) Based on statements by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor at the beginning of the current year, 2026, the total number of these licensed or registered organizations reached 1,407, distributed across the various Syrian governorates, with no updated data available covering the period after January 2026.

become, along with the extent to which initiatives are able to reach various parties or avoid excluding or marginalizing certain groups which can create significant sensitivities. Exempted from this pattern are cities or areas that enjoy demographic or social diversity but at the same time possess a long legacy of coexistence among components, such as the cities of Al-Shin, Yabroud, and Al-Nabek, where community participation is more capable of accommodating different groups. In cities suffering from sharp polarization, such as Homs, community participation tends to be less inclusive and representative, as a result of the continuing influence of social and identity-based divisions on the nature of community action and its organizing mechanisms.

The influence of identities is not limited to the sectarian dimension alone, but extends also to cultural and identity-based dimensions. In the city of Afrin, for example, an important aspect of community participation is tied to the question of Kurdish identity, just as in Ashrafiyat Sahnaya it is tied to Druze identity, which makes issues of representation and exclusion more prominent within the public sphere.

In the city of Al-Nabek, a clear influence of large extended families in shaping and directing the pathways of community participation is also observed. These considerations thus represent one of the factors that will affect the future dynamics of community participation in Syria, given that participation will not be limited to producing direct community responses, but will face varying challenges tied to the nature of local contexts. The return file remains one of the most important factors that will affect the future of community participation in Syria, amid the existing polarization built on the returnee/resident binary. In this context, the town of Qara represents an important case study, given what has been reported regarding attempts to confine or frame various community activities and direct them to serve the priorities and interests of one group, which leads to rising social tensions and sensitivities. In such cases, community participation may turn — instead of being a tool for collective representation and strengthening social cohesion into a tool for reproducing divisions in one form or another.



Such a pattern can be observed in the city of Homs, where neighborhoods that have seen the return of large numbers of residents appear more affected by the presence of returnees, as their voice becomes more prominent compared to those who remained in their areas during the former regime's era — which gives them a greater space to influence the trajectories of community participation, and makes its dynamics more responsive to their interests and wishes, as well as to the polarization they may generate within the local community.

In contrast, there are other areas that also experience polarization built on the returnee/resident binary, yet the local community possesses a greater capacity to contain and manage this situation either as a result of the limited number of returnees, as observed in Al-Shin and Wadi al-Nasara, or as a result of the city possessing a social and institutional capital that enables it to manage this file in a more balanced manner, as is the case in Yabroud and Al-Nabek. In these cases, the return file does not become a primary driver of community polarization; rather, the local community becomes more capable of developing responses that strengthen coexistence and integration between returnees and residents, such that community participation constitutes one of the most important tools contributing to achieving this goal.

On this basis, it will not be possible to build uniform responses for community participation across Syrian geography; rather, each case will require a distinct approach suited to its local characteristics, depending on the size of the city, its degree of demographic homogeneity or diversity, the nature of the mobilization it is witnessing, the level of resources available within it, in addition to the strength or fragility of the map of actors. Together, these factors constitute the fundamental determinants affecting the nature, forms, and levels of effectiveness of community participation.

Formal and Informal Mechanisms of Participation in Local Decision-Making:

Mechanisms of participation in local decision-making are distributed between formal and informal mechanisms, though the degree of effectiveness and influence clearly differs between the two. While formal mechanisms rely on the institutional channels made available by local authorities, informal mechanisms appear more present and widespread, given the weak institutional structure of the local governance system during the transitional period — which has pushed local communities to rely more heavily on alternative channels to influence the decision-making process and convey demands and needs.

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Formal mechanisms of participation begin with direct institutional channels, foremost among them complaints offices, whose existence was noted by interviews in most of the cities targeted by this study. They were mentioned particularly in the cities of Yabroud and Homs, where, in the city of Homs, reference was made to the Neighborhood Committees Development Office as one of the mechanisms aimed at developing the work of neighborhood committees and strengthening their role as direct communication channels between citizens and local authorities. Interviews also indicated that local authorities in some areas, such as Maarat al-Numan, Afrin, and Wadi al-Nasara, have organized consultative sessions with the local community. However, participants confirmed that these sessions, despite their importance as one of the existing spaces for dialogue — still often retain a formalistic character, without being clearly reflected in the decision-making process.

By contrast, informal mechanisms appear to be more present and more widely spread across the various target areas, and are expected to continue playing the most prominent role across Syria during the transitional period, given the structural weakness afflicting formal representation mechanisms as a result of the fragility of the local governance system. A number of informal actors have emerged who play the role of intermediary between the community and the authorities, foremost among them mukhtars, notables, and religious figures, alongside communal communication networks that have formed spontaneously within local communities.

Social media has also emerged as one of the most important tools of informal participation, particularly local Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups, which have become rapid channels for conveying complaints and needs and circulating information among citizens. Despite the problems noted in connection with these tools — such as weak privacy, and their occasional transformation into platforms for defamation or the exchange of accusations rather than channels for presenting problems objectively — they still represent one of the most important and most widely used mechanisms of informal participation in the current period; not only as a tool of community participation, but also as one of the influential channels in the local decision-making process.

They constitute the most widely used and fastest-spreading medium, and have proven, in a number of areas, their capacity to exert pressure and accelerate responses to certain public issues. This is clearly evident in the sanitation file in the city of Aleppo, where documenting the decline of public sanitation services in a number of neighborhoods via social media contributed to elevating the issue to a national scale beyond the city's boundaries, reaching the capital, which was reflected in the provision of support and funding to address this problem. This indicates that community pressure via digital platforms has, in some cases, become capable of influencing and accelerating official response priorities.

These platforms sometimes lead to the creation of inaccurate perceptions regarding the decision-making process; in one interview in Homs, it was noted that certain influencers attribute to their posts an influence over administrative decisions that had already been made in advance, which creates a misleading perception among citizens regarding the nature of influence over the decision-making process. In addition, limited digital access restricts the inclusiveness of participation, as these platforms do not reach all groups, particularly the elderly and persons with limited digital skills.

Consequently, social media cannot be considered a substitute for institutional participation channels; in areas that have effective formal channels, it plays a complementary role, whereas in areas where these channels and trust in them are weak, it may become the primary arena of expression — which broadens participation on one hand, but may also reinforce community polarization and division on the other.

Personal relationships also play an important role within the system of informal participation and decision-making, as access to decision-makers is affected by the degree of closeness to them, whether through personal acquaintance, prior residence in the same area, or previous or current work with the institutions of the existing authority. This makes networks of social relationships one of the decisive informal mechanisms influencing the process of conveying demands and responding to them, reflecting the continued importance of social capital in managing the relationship between the local community and the authorities during the transitional period.

Syrian Civil Society Between Local Responsiveness and National Presence

Based on the outputs from the target areas, one cannot speak of a homogeneous civil society across Syrian areas in terms of nature, institutional structure, and the scope of its community and governmental presence and influence, as a set of determinants significantly affect the nature of the roles it is able to play within the local public sphere.

A significant variation in civil society can be observed between governorate-center cities, where civic organizations enjoy greater institutional and organizational accumulation, with a higher capacity to access funding and implement programs, and tend to work according to a sectoral, specialized logic. In the smaller locations, such as Al-Shin, Al-Nabek, Yabroud, Wadi al-Nasara, and Qara, it is dominated more by communal or local church associations and volunteer youth teams with a limited geographic scope, coupled with weak sustainable funding, which limits their ability to move from local initiatives to more sustainable and expansive institutional work.

Identity diversity is also considered one of the important determinants of the nature of civil society's presence and its ability to operate within the public sphere. In highly diverse cities, such as Ashrafiyat Sahnaya and Aleppo, civil society faces an additional challenge in maintaining neutrality, as organizations and initiatives may be interpreted through the lens of the sectarian or regional affiliation of their founders or those running them, which limits their ability to operate in sensitive files, such as hate speech, transitional justice, and community representation. In Wadi al-Nasara, this challenge takes a different form, as roughly ten civic entities are historically tied to the church or to specific villages, which grants them greater trust within their local communities, but, in turn, limits their ability to expand their scope of work across sectarian and regional lines and to build civic roles that go beyond the boundaries of their local community. The existing polarization between returnees and residents is also one of the determinants that emerged during the transitional period and strongly affects the independence of civil society and the nature of its roles. In Qara, this polarization led to a decline in civil society's independence and confined its cooperation with the local authority to a formalistic framework, which limited its involvement in peacebuilding and community representation files, and confined it more to health and vocational training. In Homs, Aleppo, and Maarat al-Numan, civil society seeks to maintain neutrality between the two sides by focusing on general service projects, such as sanitation and school rehabilitation, which preserves its ability to reach various groups, but, in turn, limits its engagement in more sensitive files, such as strengthening community representation, peacebuilding, and addressing sources of division.

Finally, the significant impact of the legacy of the conflict years should not be neglected in our reading of the current reality of civil society. In the city of Idlib and the northern areas, for example, the accumulation of humanitarian work and its passage through the Salvation Government's “Organizations Office” led to the emergence of an institutional partnership with local authorities but this remained, for the most part, a service-delivery and implementation partnership rather than genuine participation in local decision-making and policy-making

In areas that were under the former regime's control, such as Al-Shin, Al-Nabek, Yabroud, Qara, Homs, and Aleppo, civil society inherited traditions of non-political charitable and voluntary work, concentrated in services and community assistance. This legacy has, at the same time, constituted a source of strength for civil society, as it contributed to building trust and direct relationships with the population, and made the level of trust in it, in many cases, higher than trust in formal institutions.

Accordingly, the presence of civil society in Syria during the transitional period cannot be understood as a homogeneous or similar phenomenon across different areas; rather, it takes shape according to a set of interlocking local determinants. The size of the city determines the level of institutional accumulation and organizational capacity; identity diversity affects the ability to maintain neutrality and broaden the scope of representation; polarization between returnees and residents determines the margin of movement in sensitive files; while the prior governance context leaves an influential legacy on the nature of the relationship between civil society, the authorities, and the local community. Understanding civil society's future roles therefore requires engaging with each local context according to its own characteristics, rather than assuming the existence of a uniform civil-society model that can be applied across Syrian geography.

On the other hand, comparing the different sites reveals that civil society's success and failure are not linked solely to the capacities of civic organizations and teams, but are also affected by the nature of the issue at hand, the extent of its political sensitivity, the availability of resources, and the level of local and official acceptance. A set of recurring areas of success emerge, appearing to varying degrees in most target areas, against a clear limitation in files that require institutional change or genuine participation in decision-making.

Emergency and relief response is among the most widely accepted areas of civil society work by local authorities, particularly in Idlib, Aleppo, and Homs. This is due to its being a direct service-oriented and humanitarian intervention, and less politically sensitive compared to files related to representation, accountability, rights, and policy-making. This area has therefore remained one of the spaces in which civil society can most readily operate and secure a higher degree of acceptance and cooperation. Direct, tangible services likewise represent one of the most recurrent areas of civil society success across different sites, including school rehabilitation, lighting, paving, and support for the health sector, among other interventions tied to clear, everyday needs of the local community.

These interventions show a greater capacity to achieve tangible results when three conditions — recurring across more than one report — are met: the existence of a specific, tangible issue around which there is community consensus regarding its importance; the availability of communal or local funding; and the absence of objection from the formal authority, even if its position does not rise to the level of actively supporting the initiative.

Community mediation has also emerged as one of the important areas of success for civil society and community actors, particularly in cases requiring the containment of local conflicts or the easing of tension between components. The study documented successful models of this role in Wadi al-Nasara through the "General Reconciliation Council," in Homs through reconciliation and tribal committees, and in Ashrafiyat Sahnaya through reconciliation initiatives between the people of Deir ez-Zor and the Druze. These experiences show that civil society and informal community actors possess a significant capacity to intervene in managing local tensions, drawing on networks of relationships, trust, and knowledge of the local context, even in cases where formal institutional channels have limited effectiveness.[18]

Conversely, the limits of success become more apparent the more civil society moves from providing services and responding to immediate needs toward files requiring policy influence, the exercise of oversight and accountability, or the strengthening of political and community representation. This reflects the existence of an unannounced ceiling on civil society's roles in a number of areas, whereby its role is accepted as a partner in service delivery, while its participation in reshaping the relationship between the community and the authority, or in influencing the decision-making process, remains more sensitive and subject to restriction.

Community Trust: How It Redefines the Relationship Among Different Parties

In sum, and in the coming phase, a shared view will persist across the different areas, proceeding from an approach to the Syrian context as a whole, namely that local communities hold a level of trust in communal and civic society that exceeds their level of trust in formal institutions, particularly local authorities. Three main levels of trust can be distinguished among local communities, varying according to the nature of the actor, its prior track record, and its capacity to respond to local needs.

(18) This is a community reconciliation committee made up of notables from the area, though it is most commonly referred to — based on the interviews — as the "General Reconciliation Council."

The first level of trust concerns communal initiatives and charitable institutions, as these entities enjoy a high level of community trust, owing primarily to the fact that local communities have witnessed the performance of these initiatives and institutions over decades, making them part of an accumulated social legacy inherited over time. In the view of local communities, charitable and communal institutions have proven their ability to be present at critical moments and to respond to many needs, particularly urgent service-related needs and needs involving forms of social safety nets and protection. The community therefore retains a high level of trust in these entities, viewing them as a local actor that has proven its capacity to respond in times of need.

The current pattern of polarization also reinforces this trend in some cases, as local communities even within a single area have become more inward-looking, which gradually reinforces the standing of their charitable and communal institutions with a religious identity, as entities belonging to the local community and enjoying its trust, and possessing a greater capacity to reach its members and respond to their needs.

The second level of trust concerns civil society in its broader sense, including organizations, initiatives, and volunteer teams. Local communities have accumulated a degree of trust in these actors as a result of their direct experience with them, particularly after finding in them entities that support them and work to implement numerous projects directed at serving the local community, alongside their advocacy on many issues related to local communities, including issues of displacement, migration, and violence, combating hate speech, meeting needs, and securing job opportunities.

Local communities continue to hold a positive image of the role played by civic organizations, particularly during the crises and horrific events Syria has witnessed, including the earthquake, fires, and the horrific events on the coast and in As-Suwayda. This presence has reinforced the belief that these organizations enjoy a high degree of flexibility and mobility, and are capable of generating rapid impact and responding in times of crisis. Local communities also view these organizations as relatively clearer and more transparent with respect to their programs, target groups, and mechanisms of intervention, which has contributed to accumulating trust in them and strengthening their communal legitimacy.

The third level of trust relates to formal local authorities and institutions, where local communities draw on a long legacy of absent trust toward government institutions, resulting from their historical sense that these institutions were distant from them and unable to respond adequately to their needs.

(18) Although the broader concept of civil society also includes unions and syndicates, the already low level of trust was reinforced as one of the legacies of the former regime, under which unions and syndicates were viewed as tools in the hands of the regime; the process of forming them under the supervision of the transitional authorities has reinforced and entrenched this perception.

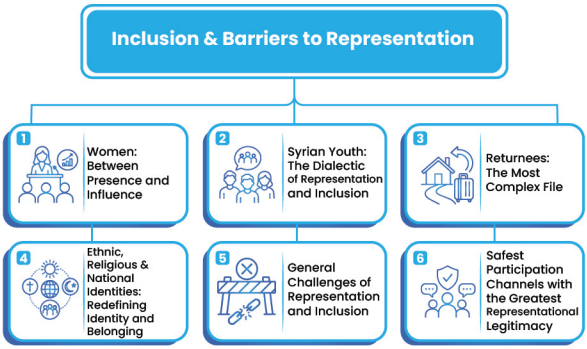
Although formal institutions have continued to provide services, this has been accompanied, across the different areas of control, by limited levels of transparency, which has affected the image of these institutions and the level of trust in them.

The lack of resources available to local authorities has also contributed to limiting their capacity for mobility and responsiveness, as their response has, in many cases, remained at a minimal level compared to what communal institutions and civil society organizations have been able to provide. Consequently, the gap in response capacity between local authorities on one hand, and communal institutions and civil society organizations on the other, has contributed to entrenching the disparity in levels of trust, such that local communities have become more inclined to rely on communal and civic actors to meet their needs, especially in emergencies and crises.

Accordingly, the level of trust in local institutions during the coming phase will not be determined solely by their capacity to deliver services, but will also be affected by other factors, such as the level of transparency, responsiveness, the ability to communicate with the community, the provision of genuine channels for participation, the ability to reach different groups equitably, in addition to the degree of independence of local decision-making from existing networks of interest and polarization.

Axis Three: Inclusion and Barriers to Representation:

The study of the target areas provides a deeper entry point for diagnosing the state of representation and inclusion during Syria's transitional period. Current data show that the absence of representation does not necessarily mean the absence of community inclusion, just as the presence of representation is not a sufficient condition for achieving genuine community inclusion. In this context, clear differences emerge among areas: some areas show a state of community inclusion proceeding at a good pace, yet this is not necessarily reflected at the level of representation, which in some cases remains polarized in favor of one group over another. Conversely, there are other cases where representation takes a partial or token form, which does not necessarily provide an accurate indicator of the actual level of community inclusion.



In general, the problem of representation in Syria does not lie in deliberate exclusion in the classical sense so much as in the absence of declared, equitable representational mechanisms that would allow different community groups to be present within the public sphere and to participate in local-level decision-making processes. Assessing the state of representation and inclusion therefore requires examining the nature of the mechanisms available for participation, the extent of their inclusiveness, and their capacity to provide equal opportunities for different groups to access the public sphere and influence the decision-making process. Nor can the process of representation and inclusion be reduced to the exclusion of one particular sect or group, since its implications are broader and vary according to the context of each area and the group on which the analysis in this subject focuses. Work in the target areas has shown that there are groups that can constitute more meaningful indicators for studying the state of representation and inclusion, not only in these areas, but also as indicators that can be relied upon in reading the Syrian reality as a whole. Within this framework, the analysis will focus mainly on women, youth, ethnic, religious, and national identities, and returnees, and these groups will be addressed in turn.

Women: Between Presence and Influence

The reality of women's participation during the transitional period can be characterized by the existence of a female presence, though one still limited in its actual influence within the public sphere and centers of decision-making. The level of this presence varies from one area to another, as do the obstacles and challenges that determine its degree, scope, and level of influence. This occurs within the context of a transitional period led by an authority with a conservative Islamic background that appears less enthusiastic toward women's participation and presence in the public sphere, particularly in centers of decision-making. This is further affected by the fact that this transitional authority emerged from an armed organization that is, by its nature, male-dominated in character. Consequently, upon assuming power, the process of distributing most administrative positions — particularly senior positions in decision-making centers, whether at the central level or the governorate level — tended to rely mainly on existing cadres, including security and administrative cadres, generally male in character, in addition to relying on a logic of endorsement and loyalty, which grants men a greater role in accessing decision-making positions.

On this basis, one cannot express a great deal of optimism regarding an expansion in women's presence or a rise in their degree of influence given this reality. Nevertheless, the current authority is attempting to respond to internal and external demands, and to the pressure exerted by civil society toward expanding the space for women's presence, which has brought this issue back to the fore, even though it remains at its minimum limits

At the governmental level, the Syrian government includes only one woman, while the recent appointments to the People's Assembly produced a rate of women's participation currently standing at 10.48%, with 22 women out of 210 members. On the other hand, the scope of women's participation varies from one area to another depending on the local context.[20]

In areas characterized by demographic diversity, a greater space for women's presence can be observed, although this presence is concentrated mainly in community and civic work and local initiatives. In these areas, the obstacles limiting women's participation appear to be mostly social in nature, though not openly or directly stated. This is unlike areas of demographic homogeneity, where the expression of these obstacles and positions rejecting women's participation may be more explicit.

In general, no open and direct discourse rejecting women's participation appears in the current phase; however, practice on the ground reflects the continued limitation of this participation, as it is concentrated mainly in government jobs, community and civic work, and local initiatives, without this necessarily being reflected in the level of women's presence and their actual influence in decision-making positions.

Syrian Youth: The Dialectic of Representation and Inclusion

Youth constitute a more complex issue than the case of women. Although there is a notable proportion of young people in decision-making centers, this does not necessarily mean that genuine and comprehensive representation of Syrian youth has been achieved. For example, the Syrian government can be considered a young government given the average age of its members, and young people also enjoy a good rate of representation in the People's Assembly.[21] However, the core issue is not related solely to the presence of youth in decision-making positions,[22] but to the nature of this representation and its capacity to express the diversity of Syrian youth groups.

(20) We were unable to obtain official statistics in the city of Homs, nor to review all the decisions forming the neighborhood committees; however, the presence of at least one woman in each neighborhood committee can be confirmed, and the number may rise to 2–3 women in each committee, which usually consists of 8–10 people.

(21) The average age of the members of the Syrian transitional government is approximately 46 years, according to available data on the ministers, with more than half of the government's 23 members falling within the thirty-something and forty-something age brackets, and three ministers born in 1990 or later (Administrative Development – Local Administration – Media).

(22) To date, there is no official published statistic specifying the proportion of youth in the new Syrian People's Assembly, although there are some unofficial statements suggesting the new People's Assembly includes a significant space for youth — something that cannot be confirmed, since the criterion defining the age of "youth" is unclear in this context.

One of the most notable issues is that a large proportion of these young people appear to be closer to a single demographic group, which raises a fundamental question about the nature of their representation: do these young people represent the various groups of Syrian youth, their interests and aspirations, or did their access to decision-making positions result, to a greater extent, from the context produced by the current authority's rise to power — meaning they represent the authority more than they represent their communities or Syrian youth in general? Hence, the mere presence of youth in decision-making positions is not sufficient as an indicator of achieving comprehensive youth representation, unless accompanied by genuine diversity in the backgrounds, regions, and groups that this representation expresses.

Nevertheless, the broadest space Syrian youth have experienced during the conflict years remains civic work and community initiatives, through which they accumulated important achievements and developed a significant presence within the public sphere. This space continues to play a major role in enabling youth participation, even though its nature, scale, and level of influence vary across areas, contexts, and the differences existing within the various Syrian contexts. Thus, youth presence in the civic and communal sphere represents one of the most prominent forms of participation through which they have been able to build their roles, given the limits of their capacity to directly influence official decision-making centers.

Returnees: The Most Complex File

The issue of return is one of the major files that has created, and will continue to create, multiple dynamics in the current Syrian context. The study of the target areas shows that this file remains among the fundamental issues that will govern the present phase and Syria's future. Accordingly, one cannot say this file will have the same degree of impact across different areas; rather, its effects vary according to a broad range of details and factors. It differs according to the momentum and waves of return each area is experiencing, and according to the degree of demographic diversity or homogeneity in the area, as well as according to the areas from which returnees are coming — whether from Lebanon, northern Syria and Turkey, Jordan, or areas that were under the former regime's control.

Likewise, the dynamics of return vary according to the degree of strength or fragility of local communities in the areas experiencing return, and the extent to which returnees are able to impose new balances of power, or the extent to which they integrate with the existing forces and are able to become part of the prevailing scene within each area.

Consequently, at the level of the returnee file, one cannot speak of a single situation governing the reality of all returnees, whether in terms of representation or community inclusion. Several cases can be observed based on the target areas, with the possibility of extrapolating them to the general Syrian reality.

The first case: monopolization in favor of returnees. This case appears, for example, in the town of Qara, where we find that a large proportion of returnees are affiliated with, or close to, the current authority, in addition to the fact that the town witnessed a large momentum of return, such that returnees have come to constitute a significant bloc within the town, giving rise to a state of complete monopolization of decision-making levers in their favor. This situation is further reinforced by victory discourse, narratives of grievance, and implicit or explicit accusation. The same issue can be observed in the city of Maarat al-Numan, although there is an important distinction between the two cases. Whereas no social ostracism was reported in Qara, some interviews in Maarat al-Numan reported the existence of actual ostracism reaching the point of threats to leave. This was linked to the use of the term "shabiha" to describe those who remained in Maarat al-Numan during the period of the former regime's control over the city. Demonstrations against those labeled with this description were also reported, along with the town's notables warning them to leave or to remain in the town at their own personal risk. At times, this accusation takes a veiled form that is not openly declared, but remains liable to erupt suddenly.

This type of tension can also be observed in Aleppo and Homs, where tension exists among different parties, though it is kept in check by a number of factors. In the context of major cities, the intensity of the state institutions' presence imposes a high level of dynamism, such that the discourse of state institutions prevails over the discourse of the returnee bloc, and multiple channels exist for absorbing tension. Likewise, the existence of demographic diversity constitutes a pressuring factor toward containment, since any disturbance could threaten the social cohesion that is already fragile in the city and affect the state's discourse and presence, particularly in terms of presenting itself as equidistant from all community components. Tension therefore remains latent, surfacing in some cases, but efforts are made to address it and prevent its escalation.

It is also worth noting the distinction between returnees from Lebanon, returnees from northern Syria, and returnees from areas under the former regime's control — a very important distinction for understanding the nature of these groups' presence and discourse. For example, it can be observed that the voice of returnees from northern Syria is louder, while returnees from Lebanon are able to draw on their narratives, grievances, and prior experiences, whereas returnees from areas under the former regime's control tend to accept the status quo and adapt silently.

Accordingly, the returnee bloc in Syria is not a homogeneous bloc, but rather encompasses numerous alliances and distinctions depending on the experiences of return and displacement that returnees and the displaced have undergone in different areas, and according to the memory that accompanied these experiences during the years of displacement.

Conversely, there are some areas characterized either by demographic diversity or by a wealth of social capital. Here one can point to cities such as Al-Shin and Wadi al-Nasara, which are characterized by demographic diversity, or to cities that enjoy a wealth of social capital, such as Yabroud and Al-Nabek. In these cities, returnees are unable to form a cohesive political bloc due to the high level of dynamism that prevents them from doing so. Returnees thus tend to become part of the general scene, and to constitute one active party alongside other active parties, such as notables, families, businessmen, expatriates, and religious figures. Consequently, even a discourse of exclusion or a discourse led by religious figures cannot dominate the scene in such cases, because the high level of community dynamism continuously works to address these crises and steers the discussion more toward issues of resources and services. Authorities in these areas also tend toward de-escalation and avoid strengthening one party at the expense of another, in order not to undermine social cohesion, which, despite everything, remains fragile amid the transitional period, with all it entails in terms of violence, hatred, the proliferation of weapons, and other factors that could threaten this cohesion.

The second case: returnees in areas that were strongholds of the revolution. Other cases appear in the Ghouta areas, which are special contexts that must be taken into account, as the displaced return carrying a discourse and narratives of victory; however, when they return to areas that were originally strongholds of the revolution and suffered under siege, they are unable to exercise dominance or level accusations against the residents of these areas. On the contrary, a kind of parity emerges at the level of narrative and at the level of the scope of presence and participation during the revolution years, which limits any party's ability to monopolize the narrative of the revolution or to monopolize the position of victim or victor.

Accordingly, tension in these areas shifts to other files related to service and everyday matters, with issues of housing, land, and property emerging as core issues, particularly in areas such as Erbin and Douma. This is linked to the fact that the absence of the displaced during the conflict years imposed a new reality that became settled at the level of housing and real-estate transactions, especially given the absence of genuine or complete documentation. Issues related to the sale of some houses whose owners were absent during the revolution years have also been reported, creating tensions and sensitivities between returnees and residents, or between current and former rights-holders. In the city of Erbin, for example, there is a reconciliation office affiliated with the local council that manages such sensitivities and addresses the issues associated with them, in an attempt to contain conflicts and deal with issues that may arise as a result of the property and housing complications left behind by the years of displacement. In the city of Douma, the situation is similar to Erbin in terms of the existence of silent tension and sensitivities based on service-related or everyday files, foremost among them issues of housing, land, and property; however, the city of Douma is also distinguished by ongoing security concerns linked to the possible existence of sleeper cells, stemming from the legacy of rivalry and armed conflict among factions during the conflict years. This legacy therefore remains an influential factor in the nature of local relations and in the level of trust and stability, adding a security dimension to the tensions associated with return, integration, and property.

Ethnic, Religious, and National Identities: How Identity and Belonging Are Being Redefined:

The intensity of this file varies, as do the forms of representation and exclusion associated with it, from one area to another. In some cities, the community historically draws on a long legacy of coexistence and social cohesion, as is the case in Al-Shin and Yabroud, where there are community channels and networks capable of absorbing and managing passing tensions. These networks were tested during the conflict years and proved their ability to deal with challenges, which today allows them to build on this legacy and on the experiences they have accumulated in managing diversity and handling communal tensions. In this context, reference is made to one of the adaptation mechanisms expressed as “social neutrality,” which can be explained by a set of factors, including the clear religious orientation of the currently governing authority, fear of becoming embroiled in tensions, or a desire for self-distancing as a form of protection from the religiously charged tensions the country has recently suffered.

In other areas, division is not confined to the sectarian or religious dimension alone, but is also linked to acts of violence, collective memory, and the opposing narratives regarding the war and the alignments formed during it. This can be observed in cases such as Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, Afrin, and Homs, where sectarian identity intersects with political identity and with the existing state of polarization. This appeared mainly among members of the Alawite sect in the city of Homs, while the situation in Ashrafiyat Sahnaya is affected by the authority's current stance, particularly with respect to the Druze component.
In the city of Afrin, the situation is affected by major issues linked to the negotiations currently underway between the SDF, as one of the representatives of the Kurdish component, and the various forms of Kurdish presence currently associated with the city, in addition to the displacement Afrin experienced, which affected the Kurdish population.

Accordingly, the Syrian reality reveals different forms of coexistence and diversity, and a great disparity in local communities' capacity to manage this diversity. Conversely, there are divisions that cannot be explained through the sectarian dimension alone, as this would represent an oversimplification of understanding or describing the Syrian reality; the divisions are substantial, layering religious and sectarian identities together with the positions taken by various parties during the revolution years, positions toward political and military actors, in addition to the memory left by the conflict years and the experiences, traumas, and opposing narratives associated with it.

General Challenges of Representation and Inclusion

Processes of representation and community inclusion face a set of major challenges at the national level, which can be discerned through analyzing the outputs of the target areas. One of the most prominent of these challenges is the absence of a clear framework regulating the process of representation and the selection of representatives, in addition to the absence of specific, declared criteria that can be relied upon in determining who is entitled to representation and how they are chosen. This legal and institutional vacuum leaves broad room for informal judgments and arrangements, limiting the possibility of building a more inclusive, clear, and stable representation process during the transitional period. There is therefore a need to adopt declared and clear criteria for selecting representatives, so that the representation process becomes understandable and subject to accountability by local communities, and so that individuals know on what basis a given person is chosen to represent a group or area, and why others are excluded — rather than continuing to rely on undeclared nomination and endorsement and on networks of relationships and social standing.

Related to this is the existence of a duality of standards used to determine the legitimacy of representation, as some parties view legitimacy as revolutionary legitimacy, while others see it as communal or administrative legitimacy. This divergence therefore calls for the criteria of representational legitimacy to be clearer and more specific, moving away from the use of loose terms that can be redefined each time according to the context of the phase, area, or circumstance being experienced.

Likewise, a gap emerges between representation in decision-making centers and representatives' actual capacity to influence their communities. Cases have been reported in which individuals placed in decision-making centers lack an effective community presence or genuine capacity for influence, as a result of a set of factors, including a lack of experience.

limited knowledge, or the absence of the qualitative communal weight that would allow them to be influential within their communities. Consequently, such representation may come to express the authority more than it expresses the community these individuals are supposed to represent in local-level decision-making centers, which constitutes one of the most prominent challenges facing the representation process.

In addition, there is the recurrence of the same individuals in processes of representation and community consultation, which narrows the base of participation and reproduces a limited circle of representatives, and limits opportunities for new groups and individuals to participate. This problem has been reported in a number of areas, including Maarat al-Numan, Afrin, and Wadi al-Nasara, where continued reliance on the same faces is seen as one of the factors that weakens trust in the usefulness of new consultation and participation processes, and limits their capacity to achieve more inclusive and diverse representation.

Safest Participation Channels with the Greatest Representational Legitimacy:

A set of participation channels can be identified that enjoy a higher degree of safety and representational legitimacy, noting the variation in their level of effectiveness and influence from one area to another; nevertheless, they constitute important entry points through which the future of community participation in Syria during the transitional period can be approached.

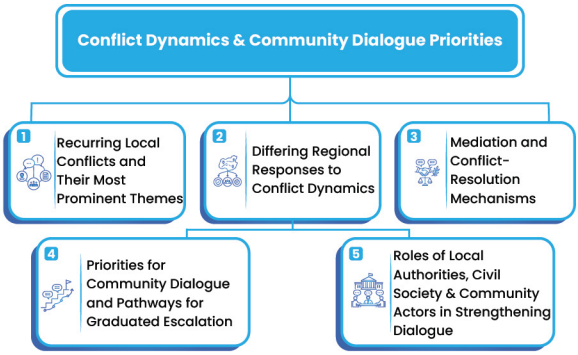
Foremost among these are the informal channels relying on notables, religious figures, and actors of communal standing, which are expected to continue playing an important role during the coming phase, given that they draw on a prior social legacy and on the experience these actors have accumulated in managing relationships within their local communities. However, the effectiveness of these channels remains conditional on their ability to take into account the existing balances of power in each area, and on not becoming tools for favoring one group at the expense of another, or a means of marginalizing any social component — since a loss of balance and relative neutrality would lead to a decline in their legitimacy and influence as channels of mediation and participation.

Neighborhood committees are also considered one of the very important channels for the coming phase, given their capacity to strengthen the scope of community representation at the local level, since the local community has a greater ability to read the details of the social map at its smallest communal unit — the neighborhood — with all the social relationships, internal balances, and local particularities it contains. These committees also have a greater capacity to reach individuals and represent them, and to contribute to easing tensions and grievances before they turn into wider crises.

Hence the need to engage with two complementary levels of participation and mediation: the first is the narrow local level, particularly the neighborhood level, where tensions and grievances can be addressed by drawing on existing social and family relationships and informal channels, as these are closest to the everyday details of local communities' lives. The second level is the broader local framework, where the importance of reconciliation committees and civil-peace committees emerges, as essential channels that can play a role in organizing dialogue, supporting mediation efforts, and strengthening community stability.

Accordingly, combining grassroots communal channels, such as neighborhood committees, with broader local channels, such as reconciliation committees and local authorities, provides an integrated pathway that can strengthen the legitimacy of participation and increase local communities' capacity to manage tensions and build safer spaces for dialogue.

Axis Four: Conflict Dynamics and Priorities for Community Dialogue:



The comparative analysis of the target areas shows that local conflict dynamics are not a separate given, disconnected from the general context addressed earlier, whether with respect to the diagnosis of the state of governance, the map of actors, or the existing community dynamics and the challenges facing local communities. Local conflict dynamics thus form an integral part of this general context and cannot be analyzed in isolation from the other factors that determine the nature of local communities and their interactions.

It is clearly evident that most lines of local division, tension, and conflict are not necessarily sectarian or ethnic lines, but are deeper and more complex, as tension may take a political or administrative character, or may be linked to opposing narratives about the war and the conflict.

A reading of the areas' outputs reveals binaries and lines of division cutting across communities, deeper than sectarian or ethnic divisions, taking different forms depending on the context of each area. Among the most prominent are the sensitivities existing between returnees and residents, and the sensitivities linked to Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) issues, which can arise among returnees themselves, among residents themselves, or between returnees and residents together.

Classifications based on the "revolutionaries versus shabiha" binary also appear, as do classifications on a sectarian basis, or on the basis of prior work with the state, given that some of those who worked with it are viewed as having collaborated with the former regime. In many cases, these divisions are connected to the memory of the war, as in Wadi al-Nasara and Al-Hisn, or to national/ethnic affiliations, as in Aleppo and Afrin.

It appears clear that these lines of division will persist into the future and will both feed on, and feed into, the various dynamics through which local communities interact.

In this context, local conflict dynamics are affected not so much by the size of a city or its degree of sectarian diversity as by three fundamental, interlocking factors. The first factor is the state of return, and the extent to which returnees are able to form a cohesive and clear political or communal bloc. The second factor is whether the area has previously experienced documented sectarian violence, and whether the memory of the war is shared reciprocally among the different parties. The third factor consists of the particularities present in the area in terms of ethnic, sectarian, and demographic diversity, which may coexist and intersect with one another. It is therefore not a matter of a single isolated factor, but of a set of interlocking factors that determine the shape of the conflict, its degree of intensity, and the mechanisms for dealing with it.

Recurring Local Conflicts and Their Most Prominent Themes:

Analysis of the outputs of the target areas reveals a number of conclusions that can be generalized to the broader Syrian context, namely the existence of recurring local conflicts that, in some cases, go beyond the opposing narratives linked to the war and division. Some of these conflicts may be more violent, though they do not necessarily recur on a daily basis, while other conflicts are tied to the details of everyday life and to residents' direct interests.

Property and real-estate disputes are among the most widespread forms of conflict, continuously representing one of the most prominent sources of conflict, particularly with the increase in waves of return and the accompanying rearrangement of relationships around housing, land, and property. These conflicts are further aggravated in cases where there is a perception of favoritism toward returnees or toward individuals affiliated with the authorities, many of whom belong to the returnee population.

Likewise, conflicts related to basic services such as water, electricity, health, education, sanitation, and others emerge as everyday conflicts directly connected to local living conditions. Their intensity increases in areas experiencing return or larger waves of population settlement. For example, the town of Ashrafiyat Sahnaya does not witness waves of return of its own original residents so much as it attracts large numbers of people coming to settle and reside there — from previous areas of displacement who were not originally its residents, which leads to increased pressure on resources and services. The same issue can be observed in Homs and Aleppo, where the increase in population numbers or changes in settlement patterns leads to increased pressure on local resources and services.

Conflicts related to employment and appointments also emerge, intersecting with an important file, namely occupational dismissal or suspension from work, which creates high levels of tension within work environments. These conflicts may take multiple forms, including exclusion on a sectarian basis, or exclusion on the basis of association with the former regime across sectarian lines, in addition to problems related to the manner of appointments, some of which rely on endorsement and loyalty, as has been reported. This issue therefore represents one of the recurring patterns of conflict across different areas, and could turn into an issue with implications extending across the country as a whole.

Conflicts related to community security also emerge, including cycles of violence, the proliferation of loose weapons, and cases of individual revenge reported across different areas. This issue constitutes one of the existing patterns of local conflict, given its direct impact on the sense of security and on communities' ability to manage disputes through peaceful means.

Finally, social media stands out as a factor that reinforces discourses of violence, hatred, classification, accusations of betrayal, revenge, and collective stigmatization. These dynamics take on a recurring character due to the nature of social media, given the constant mobilization it enables — whether for the purpose of boycotting or rallying at a particular moment, or exploiting specific occasions to recall many details linked to the memory of the war and past divisions. Social media thus reinforces numerous instances of community tension that take similar forms across different areas.

In this context, different actors can be observed on social media: on one hand, there are social-media figures who try to reinforce, exploit, and feed off the state of social tension; on the other hand, there are individuals who try to calm things down, though their voice is often less present and less influential. The discourse on social media here is not confined to being cross-regional, but is cross-regional, cross-sectarian, and even crosses national borders, extending beyond Syrian geography, as the virtual space witnesses an intense presence of numerous networks of activists or ordinary individuals located outside Syria, who nonetheless are considered the loudest in terms of discourses of betrayal-accusation and hatred coming from all sides.

Differing Regional Responses to Conflict Dynamics:

Alongside the various tension factors, a clear difference emerges in the nature of the responses shown by the areas studied, which provides an indicator of the forms of response that may govern Syrian local communities across Syrian geography, while recognizing that there are significant variations that the study may not have covered.

In general, a number of response mechanisms can be observed. Some rely on a legacy of historical coexistence and the interweaving of kinship and marriage relations across sects, as in the town of Al-Shin, in addition to cross-sectarian coexistence relationships, as can be observed mainly in Erbin, Yabroud, and Al-Shin. These relationships provide a social network that can help contain tensions and limit their escalation into open conflicts.

In some cases, formal or semi-formal channels emerge as one of the response mechanisms, as in Ashrafiyat Sahnaya through its Reconciliation Council, or in Erbin, where local mechanisms for dealing with certain conflicts and sensitivities can be observed. Responses also vary according to the presence of the authority, which is more evident in major cities, as well as according to the legacy each area has accumulated and the nature of the relationship among its community components, whether this relationship is based on sectarian or religious grounds, on positions toward the former regime, or on the memory of the war held by each party.

Mediation and Conflict-Resolution Mechanisms:

Against the backdrop of various tension and division factors, a set of mediation and conflict-resolution mechanisms emerge that can be relied upon in dealing with these dynamics. Actors also differ between those who hold community legitimacy without possessing clear formal powers, and other actors who hold formal powers that authorize them to play a mediation role and lend it official legitimacy, but who do not enjoy the same degree of community trust.

The first category consists of civil society organizations, councils of elders, notables, mukhtars, religious figures, and expatriate/diaspora capital. Many of these actors hold legitimacy stemming from their presence and standing within the local community, without having clear formal powers or specific legal mandates in the field of mediation. Nevertheless, they are able to exert significant influence in managing disputes and containing tensions, drawing on their social relationships, local networks, and the degree of acceptance they enjoy.

However, the absence of formal powers makes the mediation process they carry out heavily conditional on the consent and acceptance of the conflicting parties, and makes the outcomes of this mediation more vulnerable to being overturned or disregarded should the parties' positions change or the balances on which the mediation was based shift.

Conversely, there is another category of actors who hold formal powers that enable them to play a mediation role and grant it official legitimacy, but who do not enjoy the same degree of community trust. District administrations, local council members, and executive offices can play this role, as in Al-Nabek, Qara, Maarat al-Numan, and other areas. These actors hold decision-making legitimacy by virtue of their official capacity, but their appointment, in some cases, occurred in the absence of a clear representative status or without adequate consultation with the local community, which makes the level of community trust in them incomplete. Accordingly, in some cases the local community views these actors and the mediation channels operating through them with suspicion, particularly when the issue subject to mediation is linked to political, sectarian, or social sensitivities. Sometimes there are also hints of favoritism, alignment, or evasion of responsibility, particularly when the issue is linked to sectarian division or to the returnee/resident binary, as these channels may be seen as tending to favor individuals closer to the authority. This significantly affects the level of trust in the mediation process and its capacity to achieve outcomes acceptable and sustainable for the various conflicting parties.

Priorities for Community Dialogue and Pathways for Graduated Escalation of the Issues Raised:

Based on the foregoing, a set of issues can be identified that constitute suitable entry points for community dialogue, which intersect across the different areas covered by the study, and are likely to represent, to varying degrees, points of intersection with the various Syrian areas. Foremost among these issues are shared basic services, including water, electricity, sanitation, roads, education, and health, as these sectors enjoy broad consensus regarding their importance, and their service-oriented nature makes them less connected to the exclusion of any particular community group, being universal services from which everyone is presumed to benefit.

This intersects with another line of reasoning, namely the assumption that state institutions should be equidistant from all citizens and components, which makes service-related issues capable of constituting suitable dialogue spaces and an initial entry point for community dialogue, being among the less sensitive issues compared to issues linked to identity or political representation.

Community initiatives can also constitute an important entry point for dialogue, ranging from simple community initiatives to initiatives more closely tied to the context and particularities of each area, particularly initiatives related to community security, such as the voluntary weapons handover witnessed in the town of Al-Shin. The importance of this type of initiative is linked mainly to the community's capacity to recognize the seriousness of the challenge it faces, and to unite collectively to secure shared responses to it, which reinforces a sense of shared responsibility and allows for building initial spaces of cooperation and dialogue.

At the medium level in terms of degree of sensitivity, spaces for community dialogue linked to dialogue with local authorities emerge. This issue represents a more advanced step, given that local communities do not necessarily currently possess the skills and tools needed to manage dialogue and discussion with local authorities, which may, in some cases, cause the dialogue to proceed in one direction only. This dialogue may also turn into a state of tension linked to accusation rather than critique, or into an attempt to find fault; conversely, it may turn into an attempt to defend any behavior or decision without examining the mistakes made. Developing tools and skills for dialogue with local authorities therefore represents an important issue in its own right, particularly to ensure that dialogue shifts from confrontation or the exchange of accusations to a discussion based on identifying problems, holding performance accountable, and seeking shared solutions.

At this level as well, issues related to the distribution of powers and roles between formal and informal institutional structures can constitute important spaces for dialogue, alongside issues linked to representation, inclusiveness, and community inclusion of different groups — beginning with women's and youth issues as initial entry points through which questions of representation and inclusion can be raised, up to more sensitive issues, such as direct political representation and the associated representation of various community, sectarian, religious, and ethnic groups, in addition to the cultural rights of different components.

These latter discussions are marked by a high degree of complexity and sensitivity and therefore cannot

be initiated amid existing tension or in an environment lacking a minimum level of trust among parties; rather, they should be built gradually, based on the trust pathways being developed. The same applies to files of community reintegration, whether concerning returnees, or making room for the host community to be part of the scene and an active participant in it, particularly in areas witnessing greater dominance or presence of the returnee bloc.

These files also include the reintegration of former weapons-bearers from all conflicting parties who have no record of crimes or human-rights violations against them, including members of the former army forces and internal security forces, alongside files of transitional justice and accountability for violations, hate speech and accusations of betrayal, and issues of political transition as all of these issues represent advanced, highly sensitive files for community dialogue, and cannot be approached directly or in isolation from the context; rather, addressing them should be built within a cumulative, graduated pathway that draws on trust previously built, and on the shared experiences and capacity to manage disagreement achieved through less sensitive dialogue spaces.

Roles of Local Authorities, Civil Society, and Community Actors in Strengthening Dialogue:

◆ Identifying Shared Priorities:

The clearest lesson drawn across the different sites is that genuine shared priorities are not the ones formally announced, but are discovered through issues that bring together actors from opposing backgrounds around a single, concrete, shared goal. Several examples emerged in this context, including the "General Reconciliation Council" initiative in Wadi al-Nasara, which brought together civil society, religious authority, and general security; the reconciliation initiative between the notables of Deir ez-Zor and the Druze in Ashrafiyat Sahnaya; in addition to the cooperation of communal and civic actors with security authorities to secure safe passage for exam students in As-Suwayda. Accordingly, the role required of local authorities is to consciously identify these "unifying" files and invest in them as starting points for community dialogue and cooperation, rather than leaving their emergence to chance which would allow issues of shared concern to be converted into practical spaces for building trust and strengthening cooperation among the various actors.

Easing the Intensity of Tension and Community Division:

Two effective models recur across the sites studied for easing the intensity of tension and community division. The first consists of trusted personal mediation carried out by notables and religious figures, particularly at the initial stage of any emerging tension and before it reaches more escalated levels. The second model consists of institutionalizing rapid-response channels for receiving complaints and reports, allowing grievances to be absorbed before they turn into public discourse, as with the complaints office in Yabroud and the emergency and security-incident reporting office in Homs governorate.

The interviews conducted reveal a converging tendency among participants across different areas that tension escalates specifically when a response is delayed or an explanation is absent, not necessarily because of the severity of the issue itself, as a rapid response and the provision of clear information and explanations can limit the transformation of limited issues into broader sources of tension and division.

Combating Hate Speech:

A number of promising practices documented in the target areas emerge for confronting hate speech. Among the most prominent are the role of mosque preachers and sheikhs in Erbin in raising awareness and rejecting hate speech; the explicit demand in Ashrafiyat Sahnaya to criminalize hate speech as one of the priorities; in addition to the repeated calls in Aleppo and Homs to link any official information to a trusted, quickly self-correcting source, cutting off the path for rumors before they spread and turn into a source of community tension.

In this context, the role required of civil society in particular is to design awareness campaigns specifically targeting the language used to describe individual incidents, not only major events, since a large part of hate speech is generated through the politicization of small, everyday incidents and their re-framing within broader narratives of tension and division.

Awareness-raising efforts should therefore focus not only on rejecting hate speech in general, but also on deconstructing the patterns of language and terminology that contribute to reproducing it in everyday life.

◆ Combating Sectarian Discourse, Accusation, and Betrayal Rhetoric:

One of the most recurrent practices, and one that deserves to be generalized, is separating "action" from "identity" in public and media language, such that an act and the person responsible for it are described without linking this to their sectarian, religious, or geographic identity. This role falls directly on local media and social media, requiring organized effort on the part of local opinion leaders notables, activists, and local journalists rather than relying merely on formal instructions issued by the authority. Informal accountability channels, foremost among them social media, also need to be complemented by rapid, responsive formal channels, which would remove people's need to use accusations of betrayal as an alternative pressure tool in the absence of an institutional response.

Curbing sectarian discourse and betrayal-accusation therefore requires not only regulating the language used in the public sphere, but also providing genuine institutional alternatives for expression, complaint, and accountability, so that social media platforms do not become the only space available to individuals for expressing grievances or pressuring for a response to them.

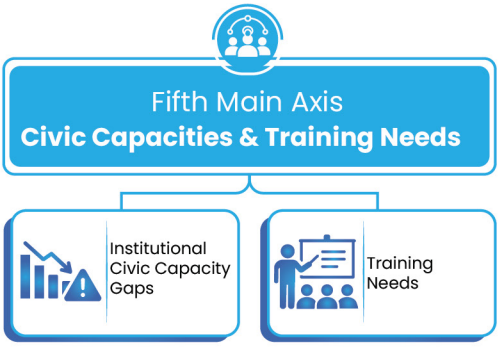
This is the most sensitive file, as any dialogue around opposing narratives and the memory of the war requires three basic conditions that have not yet been sufficiently met at any site. The first condition is providing a safe and neutral space that is not viewed as a tool in the hands of any particular party. The second condition is the presence of facilitators trained to manage a discussion that preserves the dignity of all parties, without the dialogue turning into an arena for exchanging accusations, since, as stated in one field testimony from Homs, "it is not enough to gather people in one room and call that dialogue."

The third condition is the existence of clear, official acknowledgment that the suffering of "those who stayed," "those who were displaced," "those who were detained," and "those who lost their jobs" is all real suffering that deserves recognition without this implying a moral equivalence between perpetrator and victim, but rather implying, at the same time, an acknowledgment of the existence of perpetrators and victims among the various parties, and of the different experiences and suffering that communities and individuals endured during the conflict years.

At this level, the most important role falls on a clear national transitional-justice process, which would provide the local level with a reference framework it can rely on in addressing these deep files linked to the memory of the war and opposing narratives.

Axis Five: Civic Capacities and Training Needs:

Analysis of the diagnostic reports for the target areas reveals an important reading of the state of civic and institutional capacities and the nature of the training needs required, a reading that extends beyond the boundaries of the target areas within a more comprehensive approach through which this reality can be characterized across Syrian geography.



The gap does not lie in the absence of local actors or a weak willingness to participate, so much as it can be characterized as a gap in the capacity to convert available community experience and potential into organized and influential participation within the local governance system. In most of the target areas, civil society organizations, local initiatives, community committees, notables, and mukhtars have accumulated important experience in responding to service needs, volunteer work, and implementing community initiatives; however, this stock of experience has not been converted to the same extent into firmly established capacities in the fields of participatory planning, decision-making, accountability, advocacy, and managing dialogue with local institutions.

In most of the cities covered by the study, civic capacities are invested more in implementation and response than in full participation in planning and accountability, and are sometimes confined to the limits of humanitarian or service-related response.

In cities such as Al-Nabek and Yabroud, there is relatively high social and civic capital, with the challenge lying mainly in institutionalizing it and converting it into a governance partnership.

In Idlib, there is accumulated organizational and coordination experience stemming from humanitarian work and the Salvation Government's experience, but it needs to be reconciled with the new legal and institutional frameworks and to strengthen pluralism and accountability. In Afrin, the capacity gap is linked to a complex institutional transition process in which questions of identity, return, integration, and mandates intersect. In Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, Homs, Al-Shin, and Wadi al-Nasara, the importance of managing diversity, memory, conflict, and community mediation increases, alongside governance and administrative knowledge.

The capacity gap also takes on a clear institutional dimension amid the current transitional period, as the local governance system in a number of areas is characterized by ambiguous mandates, overlapping roles between formal institutions and informal actors, and weak, regular channels for consultation and accountability. This means the need is not limited to raising theoretical knowledge of governance and local-administration concepts, but extends to developing shared, practical capacities among civic actors, community leaders, and local cadres that enable them to understand the local decision-making cycle, engage with it, and convert community needs into priorities that are negotiable and can be followed up on.

Institutional–Civic Capacity Gaps:

In general, one can proceed from the analysis of the diagnostic reports to characterize the most important civic gaps in terms of knowledge and institutional capacities relevant to the various local governmental and community actors, in a way that can be generalized to different areas of Syria based on the cities covered by the study.

- **The Gap in Understanding of the Local Governance System, Its Structure, and the Distribution of Powers:**

There is a need to move from theoretical knowledge of the Local Administration Law and the concept of decentralization to a practical understanding of the local decision-making cycle: where does a decision originate? What are the powers of each body? What are the limits of delegation? And how can a citizen, an organization, or a neighborhood committee engage with it? There is overlap among councils or executive offices, district administrations, governorates, service directorates, mukhtars, neighborhood committees, and security bodies. In some cases, this ambiguity is not confined to citizens, but extends to staff within the institutions themselves.

◆ The Gap of Weak Evidence-Based Participatory Planning:

A wide gap appears in tools for local data collection, stakeholder analysis, needs mapping, priority-setting, problem analysis, intervention design, cost estimation, developing monitoring indicators, tracking response, and measuring results.
This leads community work to often remain within a pattern of reacting to the problem rather than managing it.

◆ Weak Transparency, Accountability, and Resource Management

It is not enough to demand transparency without possessing the practical tools to achieve it. Accordingly, there is a need for skills and tools related to: publishing decisions, simplifying budgets, disclosing revenues and expenditures, managing donations, setting criteria for selecting projects and beneficiaries, establishing oversight committees, and developing systems for complaints, follow-up, and feedback.

◆ The Gap in Dialogue, Mediation, and Negotiation Skills:

The importance of this gap increases because today's local dialogue topics are not confined to services, but extend to issues related to displacement and return, the relationship between residents and returnees, transitional justice, housing and property rights, representation and inclusion, weapons control and community security, hate speech, identity, memory, and opposing narratives, etc. In all these issues, dialogue remains tied to individuals and notables and their ability to create dialogue spaces, more than it is tied to institutionalized, sustainable pathways — which requires advanced skills in dialogue, negotiation, and mediation mechanisms, in addition to the need for local facilitators who possess listening skills, anger management, dealing with painful memory, and preventing sectarian generalization.

◆ The Gap in Managing Diversity and Conflict Sensitivity:

It is clearly apparent that it is not possible to treat local communities in any area, whether large or small — as a homogeneous population bloc, since diversity takes different forms: identity-based (sectarian, national/ethnic, regional), groups linked to previous governance experiences, residents/returnees, host community/newcomers, etc. This diversity carries within it multiple lines of tension, compounded by the resulting effects of competition over presence, influence, jobs, aid, services, property, and other resources.

◆ Weak Effective Representation of Women and Youth:

Women are present in the fields of education and communal work within associations and community initiatives, and youth likewise enjoy a broader presence in fields of communal and civic work, with a more visible presence than women in local authority bodies and local platforms such as reconciliation committees and peace and mediation committees, in addition to a clear presence in state institutions. But the problem is not their quantitative presence or lack thereof, but their absence from pathways of influence and decision-making. This absence is a natural result of the absence of clear pathways for empowerment and capacity-building, and of linking these to an actual pathway toward influence.

Training Needs:

Training needs should be viewed as part of a broader pathway for building local capacity for participation and influence, not merely as a set of separate courses. This requires combining legal and institutional knowledge, dialogue, negotiation, and mediation skills, participatory planning and community accountability tools, and managing diversity and conflict sensitivity, while linking training to actual opportunities for application within local governance mechanisms, dialogue platforms, and existing or planned community committees, through five interconnected training pathways.

- **Local Governance**

The concept of decentralization and local governance – the legislative environment for local administration – the institutional structure and decision-making cycle – local resources and local budgets – transparency and governmental/community oversight mechanisms.

- **A Network of Local Facilitators and Mediators:**

Selecting and training a group of local facilitators from diverse backgrounds to support community dialogues in the target areas. This includes facilitation and dialogue-management skills, active listening, asking questions, managing disagreement, designing dialogues, anger management, dealing with conflicting narratives, building consensus, documenting outputs and converting them into actionable recommendations, and legal referral when a conflict exceeds the capacity of community mediation.

- **Evidence-Based Participatory Planning:**

Includes data collection, stakeholder mapping, needs assessment, community surveys, simplified data analysis, priority-setting, preparing position papers, demands and advocacy, and monitoring government response.

- **Representative Community Leadership:**

Through designing a set of programs related to empowering women, youth, and less-represented groups with community-leadership tools, and linking this to a practical pathway to strengthen the scope of their presence and, later, their community influence. It is important to work on giving them clear roles related to community accountability, and to design community dialogue sessions that bring together various community actors alongside representatives of official decision-making bodies, according to the context of each area.

- **Local Media:**

Training local media, page administrators, and activists on verification, covering governance issues, combating rumors and hate speech, and converting complaints from confrontational content on social media into public issues that can be followed up on.

The added value of any of these training pathways in the future lies not in the number of people trained, but in the local dynamics that these pathways create or reinforce, and their capacity to bring together governmental, civic, and community actors around real issues and problems. In other words, it lies in how the design and implementation of these training pathways contributes to shifting local communities individuals and groups from the role of recipient, beneficiary, or implementer, to the role of an active partner in setting priorities and in local decision-making and its follow-up.

Third: Recommendations and Proposals:

These recommendations proceed from the overall comparative analysis of the target areas, and from the dialogues and interviews conducted with representatives of local authorities, civic actors, notables, mukhtars, members of neighborhood committees, women, youth, returnees, and community actors in the governorates of Aleppo, Idlib, Homs, and Rural Damascus. These recommendations are not presented as a uniform prescription applicable in the same way across all areas, but as a flexible, practical framework based on the common denominator among local experiences, while at the same time taking into account the different contexts among major cities, small towns, identity-mixed areas, return areas, and areas that have accumulated different governance experiences during the conflict years.

A. Recommendations at the Local Level

Recommendations for Local Authorities

Clarify mandates and the local decision-making cycle for local communities, by preparing a simplified service guide explaining the process for transactions, complaints, and basic services, publishing it in print and digital form, and explaining it in open local meetings or through neighborhood committees, mukhtars, and local pages.

Move from receiving complaints via social media and personal relationships to a clearer system, adopting simple, realistic modeling suited to the capacities of the staff working in each administrative unit.

Give significant attention to the formation of neighborhood committees, by adopting clear, declared criteria for selecting committee members that take into account competence, community reputation, social diversity, representation, and the presence of women and youth; and by institutionalizing their work and defining their powers, roles, and communication mechanisms with both the government and the community.

Focus on community meetings as one of the most important spaces for meeting, dialogue, exchanging ideas, and raising needs and solutions, and convert them into a regular mechanism with a clear agenda, a documented record, and actionable recommendations.

Strengthen transparency in decisions and their mechanisms of adoption and implementation, and adopt clarity as a consistent approach in disclosing implemented projects, sources of funding, and the criteria for selecting beneficiaries and implementing bodies, while being mindful of local conflict sensitivities, so that a service or project does not become a source of tension or conflict.

Treat local civil society and community initiatives as a genuine partner in planning, not merely a service provider, through clear cooperation protocols that define areas of work, coordination mechanisms, data-sharing, implementation follow-up, and impact evaluation.

Adopt a more serious approach toward the representation of women and youth, moving away from symbolic presence toward granting them clear roles in local decision-making centers, neighborhood committees, dialogue platforms, follow-up committees, and other platforms.

Recommendations for Community Actors — Activists, Organizations, and Initiatives

Develop tools for communication and engagement with local authorities, so as to move from a logic of complaint and criticism to formulating practical proposals that include a description of the problem and proposed solutions wherever possible.

Move from a culture of individual action to a culture of solidarity and building coalitions that cross community alignments, encompassing diverse actors, which increases the chances of response at both the local and national levels.

Move from a reactive response culture to a participatory culture based on dialogue, planning, accountability, and trust-building.

Develop local monitoring and documentation capacities, by working on preparing community-needs maps, designing surveys on specific issues, documenting recurring complaints that went unanswered, following up on governmental–community responses, and documenting success stories and lessons learned.

Design special programs to build the capacities of women and youth and link them to actual roles within the local community, such as facilitating dialogue sessions, collecting data, leading initiatives, representing the neighborhood or group in local meetings, or participating in various local committees and platforms.

Design and deliver specialized training programs to prepare conflict-sensitive local mediators and facilitators and equip them with tools for managing safe dialogues related to return, property, memory, and identity, and other politically, economically, and socially sensitive issues, in addition to documenting the outputs of these dialogues.

B. Recommendations at the National Level

Recommendations for Central Authorities

Clarify the national vision for decentralization and local administration, including defining the form of the relationship between the center, the governorates, local councils, district administrations, and service directorates, the roles assigned to the local community across its various community actors, and the spaces available for presence, work, and influence.

Develop a clear transitional framework, based on Law 107/2011 as a general reference, in a participatory manner that includes local authorities, civil society, legal experts, governorate representatives, and representatives of areas with particular identity-based or governance characteristics, leading to the issuance of a temporary transitional framework that clarifies what is currently applied, what is deferred, what powers are actually available to local authorities, and how current governance experiences can be reconciled with this framework pending the production of a new legislative system for local administration.

Strengthen local authorities at the level of administrative units and their councils, by building an organizational structure that clarifies coordination and communication channels, and the boundaries of roles and powers among the various levels — particularly the newly created ones.

Support municipalities and local councils with resources and qualified personnel, support the digital-transformation pathway, citizen-service centers, simplification of procedures, more transparent local financial systems, and building the capacities of institutional cadres.

Work on a national framework that regulates the formation of neighborhood committees and the various local platforms committees, councils, and other communal channels that play important roles in mediation, easing tensions, and problem-solving such that this framework includes the main criteria for formation and work management, based on flexible foundations adaptable to local conditions, alongside a unified code of conduct regulating the work of these platforms across their various tasks and roles.

Protect civic space and ensure a safe environment for communal and civic work, through a legal and procedural system that regulates the various spaces of community work and supports them, free from any restriction or politicization.

Develop a national framework for transitional justice, accountability, and redress, so as to provide a clear reference point for the local level, and prevent these files from turning into communal conflicts, acts of revenge, or unfair mediations.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations at the National Level

Build a national civic agenda for local governance, including clear demands regarding decentralization, transparency, participation, protection of civic space, representation of women and youth, and the institutionalization of neighborhood committees and dialogue platforms.

Produce evidence-based knowledge drawing on local experiences, and work to disseminate this knowledge in a way that enriches public debate on local governance issues and reading the various local experiences with a view to developing new approaches to local administration that are more responsive to the challenges of this transitional period and lay the groundwork for what comes after it.

Support the formation of local networks for advocacy and dialogue, made up of activists, facilitators, women, youth, and key individuals within their communities, so that these networks can lead small-scale advocacy efforts around issues directly related to local service, community, institutional, and developmental contexts, and later raise shared issues to the national level.

Develop an inclusive, conflict-sensitive civic discourse that avoids accusations of betrayal and sectarian or regional generalization, and links rights with civil peace, justice with the avoidance of revenge, and participation with stability ensuring that the discussion on local governance does not turn into a conflict of identities or a settling of scores.

Build unified training tools on: local administration, community participation, mobilization and advocacy, mediation, transparency and community accountability, conflict-sensitive media, and the empowerment of women and youth such that these tools are locally adaptable, according to context, the map of actors, and the sensitivity of the issues.

C. Recommendations at the International Level

Recommendations for Donors and International Organizations

Support local governance as a pathway for building trust and civil peace, and link programs supporting service delivery and capacity-building for local councils with programs and interventions related to strengthening participation mechanisms, transparency, and the representation of different community groups.

Move away from ready-made, imported models in approaching the Syrian reality, or designing programs according to an intervention logic that treats the differentiation among Syrian areas with a single lens, and adopt a differentiated approach in designing programs and projects based on an understanding of the local Syrian context and the real community and governmental needs and challenges.

Support long-term local dialogue platforms, by building projects in a way that ensures their sustainability and preserves the results achieved after the project and funding end; it is important that such programs and projects be designed in a way that strengthens community ownership, with all that this entails in terms of securing the elements needed for their continuity and sustainability.

Adopt new pathways for training and capacity-building projects based on investing in joint work between local authorities, activists, and representatives of the local community, contributing to building a shared language of thinking and action among these parties as an entry point for bridging the trust gap and maximizing the impact achieved.

Avoid rushing quickly into community dialogues on highly complex and sensitive files without in-depth analysis of conflict sensitivities and without building the capacities of the teams working in this field, and focus on designing programs that ensure a gradual progression in the issues raised, in parallel with specialized capacity-building for designing and managing sensitive and complex dialogues.

Support specialized programs for empowering local media and conflict-sensitive media, including training local media professionals, page administrators, and digital activists on verifying information, covering service-related issues, protecting privacy, avoiding generalization, and combating hate speech.

Protect civic space, move away from linking funding to humanitarian response and services, and treat the risks of restriction, exclusion, and accusation practiced against some civil society organizations as genuine challenges and threats facing civic space as a whole, requiring procedural, protective, and empowering frameworks in particular.

Conclusion

This study concludes that local governance in Syria during the transitional period cannot be understood merely as an administrative or service-related matter, but rather as one of the fundamental entry points for rebuilding the relationship between the state and society after long years of conflict and division, the multiplicity of de facto authorities, and the erosion of trust in public institutions. The transformation Syrian localities are experiencing does not begin from a vacuum, nor does it simply restore the pre-2011 model; rather, it moves within a complex space where the remnants of the old central administration intersect with the governance experiences that emerged in opposition-held areas, and with the communal, religious, civic, and economic networks that, over recent years, have filled many of the vacuums left by the state's absence or weakness.

The comparison among the target areas has shown that the transitional period does not produce a single local model, but rather reveals a wide multiplicity of governance trajectories, depending on institutional legacy, the nature of local actors, the degree of destruction and return, the level of social and identity-based diversity, the volume of available resources, and each area's position within the new map of power.

The study also reveals that civil peace in Syria cannot be separated from local governance. The conflicts documented by the study are not confined to sectarian or ethnic divisions, but include files of services, property, housing, return, appointments, resources, representation, hate speech, and the contested memory of the war. Managing services during the transitional period is therefore not a neutral technical matter, but part of managing trust and building civil peace.

Accordingly, supporting local governance in Syria over the coming phase requires a flexible, context-sensitive approach, not a uniform model imposed on all areas. What a large city like Aleppo or Homs needs differs from what a town like Al-Shin, Qara, or Yabroud needs, and what works in Idlib does not necessarily apply to Afrin, Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, or Eastern Ghouta. However, this variation does not negate the existence of shared priorities, foremost among them: clarifying mandates, institutionalizing participation channels, protecting civic space, developing complaints systems, strengthening transparency, supporting neighborhood committees, empowering women and youth, and building safe dialogue pathways around sensitive issues.

In sum, this study does not propose a return to the old centralization, nor a leap into an uninstitutionalized decentralization; rather, it calls for building a transitional local governance capable of learning from reality, opening up to society, and organizing the relationship between the formal and the informal, between service and trust, and between participation and civil peace.

Finally, the success of local governance in this phase will not be measured only by local authorities' capacity to deliver services, but by their capacity to convert service delivery into an entry point for building trust, to convert complaints into a pathway of accountability, to convert community initiative into partnership, and to convert dialogue from a passing event into a sustainable local practice.

Hence, the future of local governance in Syria will be built gradually through the capacity of communities and local authorities together to move from a logic of temporary adaptation to a logic of institutionalization, from personal relationships to clear rules, from crisis management to joint planning, and from fear and suspicion to mutual trust.

This is the most important wager of the transitional period:
That localities become a genuine space for rebuilding the state from the ground up — not merely a passing administrative extension of a new authority trying to hold on to the center and seeing nothing beyond it.

Annexes

Annex 1: Advocacy and Dialogue Strategies — From Understanding the Context to Building Safe, Negotiable Pathways of Influence:

This annex proceeds from the overall findings reached by the study in diagnosing the state of local governance, civic participation, and civil peace in the target areas, and from the accumulated understanding of the map of actors, decision-making mechanisms, levels of trust, and legal, institutional, and civic capacity gaps. Advocacy is not presented here as a pressuring activity or a confrontation with local administrations, but as an organized and safe pathway for influencing local policies and practices and building clearer channels of negotiation and communication between civil society, local communities, and existing authorities. Given that the research plan linked the study's outputs to the design of dialogue platforms, training pathways, small-grant criteria, and advocacy and communication strategies with local administrations, this axis seeks to translate the analytical findings into practical entry points for advocacy and dialogue that take into account the particularities of each local context, are evidence-based, and avoid reproducing existing tensions or divisions.

Accordingly, we are not proposing a uniform advocacy strategy for all areas, but a flexible framework that sets out shared principles, possible entry points, levels of sensitivity, and types of messages and coalitions that can be adapted according to the different local structures, actors, and conflict dynamics in each of the target areas, and beyond that, adapted to similar or divergent contexts across Syrian geography.

This flexible framework rests on a basic idea: any advocacy strategy in the context of the transitional period must be built on an accurate reading of the local context, the nature of the actors, the level of trust, the degree of sensitivity of the issues raised, and the limits of local administrations' openness to dialogue and cooperation.

Advocacy in a major city such as Aleppo or Homs differs from advocacy in a small city such as Al-Shin, Qara, or Yabroud, just as dialogue with a city council that possesses institutional and administrative memory differs from dialogue with a nascent local administration, a transitional committee, or a local authority counterbalanced by strong religious, tribal, or communal influence.

Accordingly, advocacy strategies are tasked with answering the questions that precede any intervention in this context, regarding the realistic and safe space for influence in each context, and the form of activities suited to this space and to the nature of the actors at the local level, since a reading of the outputs of the target areas clearly shows how some local administrations show willingness to cooperate on service-related files, but are reserved regarding files of accountability or representation. Some communities also possess strong communal channels capable of conveying demands but lack institutional tools to ensure follow-up and transparency. In other areas, there are conflict dynamics that make any service-related demand liable to turn into tension if linked to return, property, appointments, or identity-based representation.

The flexible framework therefore proposes that advocacy and dialogue strategies be built according to five interlinked determinants:

- **First – The Degree of Sensitivity of the Issue Raised**

Not all advocacy issues are equal in their sensitivity. Some issues can be taken up immediately because they are unifying and less polarizing, such as service-related topics (sanitation, water, lighting, roads, schools, health, transport, simplifying procedures, and improving complaints channels). Such topics touch on shared everyday needs and are not directly linked to identity, conflict memory, or political alignment and are thus suitable as initial entry points for building trust between the community and the local administration. By contrast, there are moderately sensitive issues, such as financial transparency, criteria for selecting beneficiaries, employment mechanisms, the representation of women and youth, activating neighborhood committees, and organizing the relationship between civil society and local councils. These issues require greater preparation, precise messaging, and broader local coalitions, because they may sometimes be read as a direct accountability challenge to the local administration or as questioning its legitimacy.

As for highly sensitive issues such as property and housing, return, transitional justice, hate speech, weapons, politically motivated appointments, and sectarian or ethnic representation these should not be an initial entry point for open advocacy. They require more protected and gradual pathways, and possibly closed dialogues, trusted mediators, safety guarantees, and a discourse that distinguishes between individual rights and collective generalization.

- **Second – The Map of Actors and Sources of Influence**

The framework is built on the premise that the decision-maker is not always the influence-holder, and that the formal body is not always the one most capable of mobilizing or calming the community. In some areas, the governorate or the district administration plays the decisive role. In other areas, the municipality or city council is the daily interface but does not hold the final decision. In yet other contexts, notables, religious figures, businessmen, or expatriates hold significant capacity to influence, fund, or obstruct a decision. Any advocacy strategy should therefore begin by drawing a simplified map of actors:

- The formal decision-holder.
- The informal influence-holder.
- The party capable of obstructing the decision.
- The party capable of funding the solution.
- The party capable of calming or mobilizing the community.
- The party that holds the community's trust but lacks legal authority.
- The party that holds legal authority but lacks sufficient community trust.

The absence of this map may cause advocacy to address the wrong body, collide with an invisible but influential actor, or reinforce the influence of one local party at the expense of another.

- **Third – The Level of Trust Between the Community and the Local Administration**

The form advocacy takes changes according to the existing level of trust. In areas where an acceptable relationship exists between the community and the local administration, advocacy can take the form of direct dialogue, position papers, consultation sessions, or joint initiatives. In areas where suspicion or polarization prevails, advocacy should begin with small, achievable issues, since practical success on a limited file can open the door to larger files.

In this sense, advocacy is measured not only by its capacity to raise a major demand, but by its capacity to create a gradual trust-building pathway. Establishing a clear complaints mechanism, publishing a monthly progress report, or holding a regular meeting between the local authority and the local community with neighborhood committees present may have a greater medium-term impact than a broad campaign on a sensitive issue for which there is not yet a safe channel for discussion.

- **Fourth – The Main Forms of Advocacy**

Within this flexible framework, four main forms of advocacy can be distinguished:
Quiet advocacy: conducted through closed meetings, mediation, dialogue sessions, or limited discussions with decision-makers. It is suited to sensitive issues or to environments where public pressure could close dialogue channels.

Dialogical advocacy: conducted through consultation sessions, working tables, local forums, or dialogue platforms bringing together civil society, the local administration, and community actors. It is suited to issues that require building shared understanding rather than simply raising a demand.

Institutional advocacy: focuses on improving a mechanism or procedure, such as the complaints system, publishing information, organizing neighborhood committees, or developing a cooperation protocol between the local council and civil society. This form is among the most important, because it moves advocacy from a situational demand to sustainable change.

Media or digital advocacy: used when the issue is public, understood, and enjoys broad acceptance, provided it is managed with precise, non-inflammatory language. This channel must not turn into defamation or emotional pressure, but should serve as a means of highlighting the problem, presenting evidence, and opening the door to a response.

- **Fifth – The Capacity to Convert a Demand into an Implementable Solution**

Advocacy is not complete merely by identifying the problem. The local administration, especially at this stage, may face a shortage of resources, powers, and personnel, and so general demands may fail to produce impact unless accompanied by practical proposals.

For example, it is not enough to say that “complaints channels are weak”; rather, a simplified complaints form, a referral mechanism, a response timeframe, and a method for publishing general indicators should be proposed. It is not enough to say that “women and youth are unrepresented”; rather, a specific quota, selection mechanism, or designated seats on neighborhood committees or dialogue platforms should be proposed. It is not enough to say that “decisions lack transparency”; rather, a brief monthly publication of decisions, projects, resolved complaints, and completion rates can be proposed.

A general outline can be set out for three interlinked levels of advocacy within the flexible advocacy-strategy framework:

Level One: Advocacy Around Services and Everyday Trust

This level targets the least sensitive files that are most capable of bringing people together, such as sanitation, water, lighting, health, education, transport, or organizing complaints. Its purpose is not only to improve the service, but to build a successful experience of cooperation between the community and the local administration. This level is suitable as a starting point in most areas, particularly those where the relationship between the community and the local authority remains unstable or governed by caution.

Level Two: Advocacy Around Transparency and Participation

This level moves from the service or need to the institutional structures that provide the service or meet the need. Here, advocacy becomes more institutionalized, focusing on mechanisms such as publishing information, neighborhood committees, local planning sessions, progress reports, citizen charters, and criteria for selecting beneficiaries.

Level Three: Advocacy Around Sensitive Files

This level is only opened after a minimum degree of trust and safe channels has been built. It includes files of property, return, transitional justice, hate speech, identity-based representation, appointments, and weapons. At this level, advocacy is not necessarily a public campaign, but may be a long dialogical, legal, or mediatory pathway, requiring the protection of participants, the training of facilitators, careful language, and linking the local to broader national pathways, especially on issues of justice and rights.

Finally, the flexible framework for advocacy and dialogue strategies is a way of thinking and a set of working mechanisms, calling for reading the context in which we operate before choosing the message, analyzing the map of actors before determining the channel of influence, gauging the sensitivity of the issue before launching the campaign, and converting demands into implementable solutions. It also links advocacy to dialogue, dialogue to trust, and trust to the institutionalization of participation and transparency channels. On this basis, it is important to review a set of guiding principles that should govern the design of any advocacy intervention, whatever its level or form.

Guiding Principles for Designing Any Advocacy Effort



- Start from what is possible, not from the ideal. Successful advocacy in the transitional period is advocacy that seizes the available space of openness and builds on it, not advocacy that begins with maximalist demands that could close dialogue channels
- Turn the complaint into a proposal. A complaint expresses the problem, but a proposal opens the door to negotiation.
- Do not use language that increases division. Discourse that classifies people as returnees versus residents, revolutionaries versus shabiha, majority versus minority, or people of one area versus another, must be avoided. What is required is to name the problem without turning it into a collective identity.
- Always proceed from a win–win logic. It is important to build coalitions around shared interest, since advocacy is stronger when it brings together different actors around a concrete issue, rather than appearing as the demand of a single group.

- Learn through practice. Every intervention, whatever it is, should be designed as an opportunity to test new mechanisms or forms of advocacy, or as a space to test the transition from one level to another, building on the lessons learned to develop our future interventions.
- Inclusion does not mean presence at an activity, but the capacity to influence the decision. It is dangerous for the success of an advocacy campaign to be marketed merely through the diversity of the parties that participated, as if it were a favor granted to them, rather than a genuine right such that the success of advocacy becomes measured by its capacity to ensure their effective participation and to achieve the intended impact.
- Protect civic space, as a community asset and a healthy condition for supporting institutional development during the transitional period, focusing at every step on the genuine role of civil society as a supporter and actor that needs its role and presence to be recognized, and its space to be preserved and supported.

The advocacy required in this project is not merely protest advocacy, nor neutral technical advocacy, but transitional advocacy that is mindful of the fragility of the context, sensitive to conflict, evidence-based, that searches for negotiable spaces of improvement, and that gradually builds local communities' capacity to influence public decision-making. Its success is therefore measured not only by the number of campaigns or meetings, but by its capacity to create clearer channels between people and local authorities, and to convert participation from a temporary reaction into a sustainable local practice.

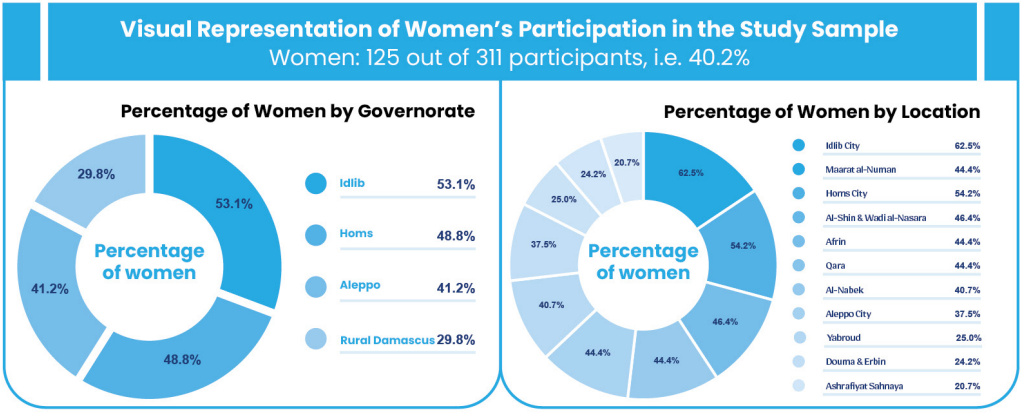
Annex 2: Analysis of Participants and Target Groups:

Approximately 311 participants took part in the interviews and in-depth dialogue sessions, of whom 125 were women, representing 40.2%.

of the total participants, with variation depending on the governorates or areas targeted by the study; the figures reveal that women's participation appears stronger in some sites where more open civic, educational, or communal spaces are available, as in the cities of Idlib, Homs, Al-Shin, Wadi al-Nasara, and Al-Nabek.

By contrast, it declines in sites where the public sphere appears more sensitive or more governed by social and religious authorities or identity-based tensions, as in Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, or Douma and Erbin.

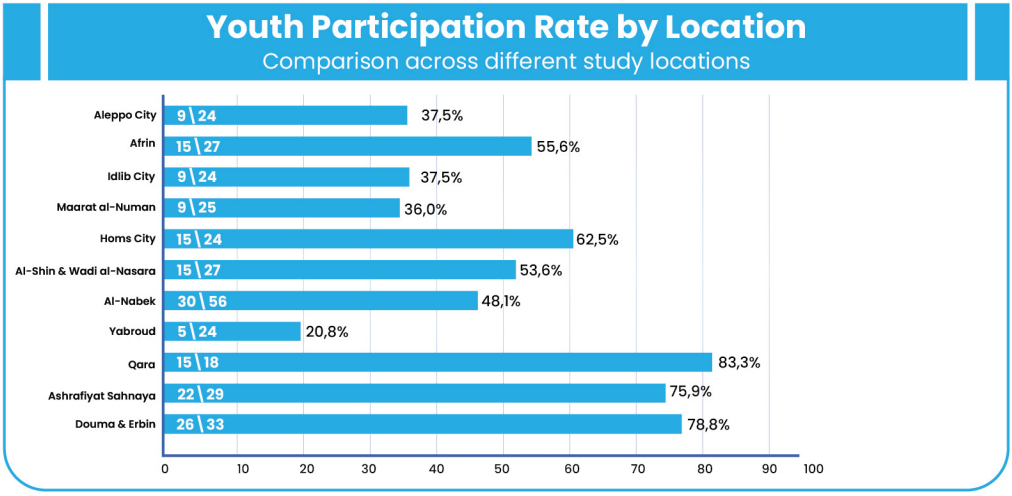
This should be taken into account when analyzing the results relating to civic participation, local governance, and social representation.



Note: Douma/Erbin and Al-Shin/Wadi al-Nasara appear as combined locations, as in the original table.

In terms of youth participation, their number reached 168 out of the total participants, i.e., 54% — a high and significant proportion, as it gives the study a clear capacity to capture youth perceptions of local governance, civic participation, services, trust in institutions, and civil peace.

However, disparity between areas can be observed, particularly in Rural Damascus governorate.



The number inside the bar indicates: number of youth / total participants

In Qara, where the local scene is connected to tensions between returnees and residents and the representation of different groups, the high youth turnout may reflect a desire among young people to express their position within the period of reshaping local authority. In Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, youth presence may be an indicator of the importance of reading their positions toward traditional religious and social authority, hate speech, and representation. In Douma and Erbin, the high youth presence is linked to the context of return, volunteer initiatives, and repositioning.

In general, the strength of youth presence in the sample may affect the nature of the priorities raised, and the level of focus on issues such as job opportunities, initiatives, participation, volunteer work, and representation.

On another note, the project team took care to ensure — as much as possible — identity-based and social diversity in the sample, and even diversity with respect to positions on the transitional authority. The aim of this composition of attendance was not to achieve statistical representativeness of the population, but to allow for the intersection of multiple experiences relating to governmental, civic, and communal work; this diversity allows for theoretical saturation on one hand, and, on the other, provides rich analytical material without falling into repetition or dispersion.

Also, given the study's context and its thematic axes, the project team sought to ensure a balanced presence of two key groups within the local landscape in the target cities and across Syrian areas generally: representatives of local authority (local council – mukhtar – neighborhood committee – administrative staff), and the other group being returnees to their areas.

The following table shows the proportions of returnees relative to the total participants in each governorate:

Governorate	Total Participants	Number of Returnees	Percentage
Aleppo	51	24	47.1%
Idlib	49	27	55.1%
Homs	80	34	42.5%
Rural Damascus	131	30	22.9%
Total	311	115	37 %

At the level of the overall sample, residents constitute the majority at 63%, which gives the study an important basis for understanding the perceptions of the population who remained in or continued residing in their areas, with a relatively sufficient presence of returnees allowing certain return dynamics to be captured, albeit to varying degrees between governorates.

Against the balance in the proportions of returnee and resident representation in the governorates of Aleppo, Idlib, and Homs which points to the intensive return these governorates are witnessing across their various cities the disparity appears clearly in favor of residents in Rural Damascus governorate, at 77%. This does not mean the governorate is not witnessing significant return; rather, it can be attributed to the political and representational weight that returnees gain within their localities, which makes them less interested in participating in such dialogues, unlike residents, who may view the narrowness of the spaces available to them as a reason to hold on to any opportunity to convey their voice and concerns, and, most importantly, to assert their presence, identity, and narratives regarding what has happened and is happening. If this is taken into account, it should be treated with caution with respect to the outputs of the meetings and dialogue sessions in a number of areas.

In the town of Qara, reference will be made in more than one place to a state of monopolization by returnees over all decision-making levers and their control of the entire public scene, which can be explained within the context of this study by the fact that 17 of the 18 participants are residents of the town; however, we certainly cannot take this characterization as absolute, especially since we were not able to hear the opposing viewpoints.

Finally, with respect to representatives of local authority, the total number of participants from among local-authority representatives reached 78, representing 25.1%. The distribution of local-authority categories reveals a kind of balance between two levels: the first is the direct institutional level, including mayors, members of executive offices, and local-council staff, totaling 39 participants.
The second is the intermediary or grassroots level, including mukhtars and members of neighborhood committees, also totaling 39 participants.

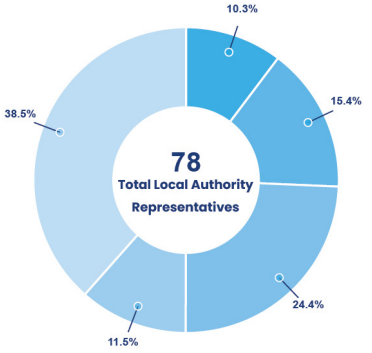
Thus, the sample does not reflect the voice of local authority in its narrow administrative sense alone, but also reflects the voice of the channels that convey community needs to this authority or assist it in implementation and follow-up. This balance is analytically important, and is consistent with one of the study's conclusions, namely that local governance is not practiced only through councils and municipalities, but through a broad intermediary layer of neighborhood committees, mukhtars, and actors close to the population.

We also note from the figure that the largest presence among local-authority representatives was among members of neighborhood committees, numbering 30 participants out of the total local-authority representatives. This is an important indicator, as it reflects the growing importance of neighborhood committees as an intermediary channel between the population and local authorities, particularly in cities witnessing attempts to reorganize the relationship between the community and institutions.

As for the heads of local councils, they numbered only 8 out of the local-authority representatives, meaning that the voice of the top of the local hierarchy is present in the sample but does not dominate it. Likewise, the number of mukhtars reached 9 participants — an important presence, as it reflects the mukhtar's position as an intermediary actor between the formal and the social, particularly in cities and towns that still rely on mukhtars to convey complaints, identify residents, facilitate communication, and carry out everyday mediation.

Proportional Distribution of Local Authority Representative Categories

Donut Chart showing the distribution of categories among all local-authority representatives



Category Details

Category	number	Percentage
Mayor	8	10.3%
Executive Office Member	12	15.4%
Local Council Staff	19	24.4%
Mukhtar	9	11.5%
Neighborhood Committee Member	30	38.5%

This chart represents the distribution of the 78 local-authority representatives, i.e. 25.1% of the total study participants.

- **Annex 3 – Tool One: Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide URL**
- **Annex 4 – Tool Two: Focus Group Discussion Guide (FGD) URL**
- **Annex 5 – Tool Three: Direct Observation URL**
- **Annex 6 – Outputs of the Meetings and Focus Group Discussions in the Target Areas:**

- **Institutional Maps:**

- Institutional Map of Aleppo Governorate – 2026 URL
- Institutional Map of Idlib Governorate – 2026 URL
- Institutional Map of Homs Governorate – 2026 URL
- Institutional Map of Rural Damascus Governorate – 2026 URL

- **Diagnostic Reports for the Target Areas**

- Diagnostic Report on the City of Aleppo URL
- Diagnostic Report on the City of Afrin URL
- Diagnostic Report on the City of Idlib URL
- Diagnostic Report on the City of Maarat al-Numan URL
- Diagnostic Report on the City of Homs URL
- Diagnostic Report on the Wadi al-Nasara/Al-Hisn Area URL
- Diagnostic Report on the Town of Al-Shin URL
- Diagnostic Report on the City of Al-Nabek URL
- Diagnostic Report on the Town of Qara URL
- Diagnostic Report on the City of Yabroud URL
- Diagnostic Report on the City of Ashrafiyat Sahnaya URL
- Diagnostic Report on the Cities of Erbin and Douma URL

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