



# A CALL FOR TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

*Perceptions of Justice in the Syrian  
Arab Republic in the Early Phase of  
Transition*





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# Executive Summary

In December 2024, the fall of the Assad government ended more than five decades of authoritarian rule and opened a fragile, uncharted chapter in Syria’s history. Amid ongoing insecurity, social division, and the immense task of national reconstruction, Syrians now face a fundamental question: what does justice mean after so many years of war and repression?

This report presents the findings of a landmark participatory study on Syrian perceptions of justice in the aftermath of conflict and regime change. Drawing on 1,101 responses gathered across 13 governorates, the research captures how Syrians define justice, who they trust to deliver it, and what form a future transitional justice process should take. It is the first major nationwide study to document public attitudes in Syria toward the institutions now charged with rebuilding the rule of law.

## A call for transformative justice

Syrians want justice to reshape the future. Survey responses consistently linked justice to rebuilding a fair society: 47% defined justice as the restoration of rights, 20% emphasised equality and non-discrimination, 15% prioritised the rule of law and legal due process, and 13% connected justice with peace, stability, and nation-building. These are not traditional, backward-looking transitional justice demands; they are transformative justice goals aimed at dismantling the structures that enabled violence, exclusion, and impunity. As one respondent noted, “Justice means being protected by the law, not judged by it,” while another defined it as “equality before the law and recognition of the rights of every human being without discrimination.” Reflecting this vision, an overwhelming 91% of Syrians believe that peace cannot be achieved without justice – a powerful reminder that rights and the rule of law are seen as the foundation of national recovery, not its obstacle.



# Survey Sample

The survey captures the views of 1,101 Syrians across 13 governorates, reflecting a broad cross-section of the population. Respondents achieved near gender parity (53% women, 47% men) and spanned ages 18–89. The sample includes major ethnic and religious communities (78% Arab, 19% Kurdish, with Alawite, Shi’a, Christian, Druze and others represented). Displacement and conflict-related harm were widespread: 69% experienced displacement at some stage of the conflict, 17% had been detained, and 23% had a detained or disappeared family member. Displacement and conflict-related harm were widespread: 69% experienced displacement at some stage of the conflict, 14% had been detained, and 23% had a detained or disappeared family member. Education levels were relatively high (49% with university-level education or above). While not nationally representative, the diversity and geographic reach of the sample offer a credible snapshot of public attitudes toward justice and accountability during Syria’s transition.



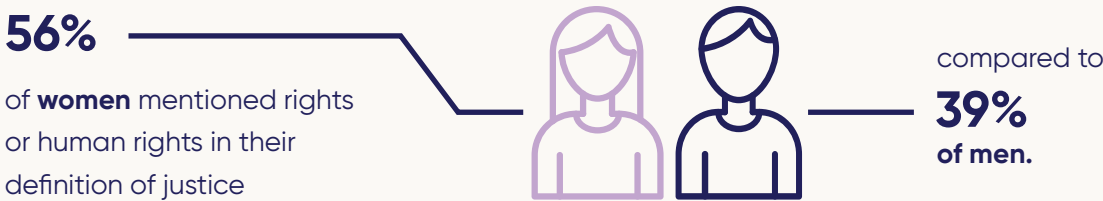
# Key Findings

## 1. SYRIANS DEFINE JUSTICE IN TRANSFORMATIVE TERMS.

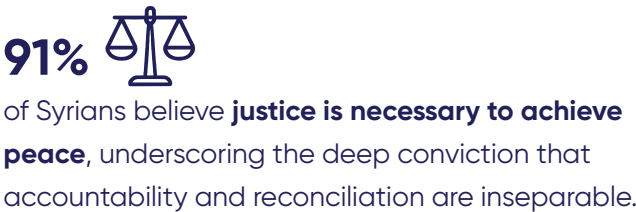
Justice is not simply about retribution or closure.



## 2. WOMEN ARTICULATE A MORE RIGHTS-BASED AND TRANSFORMATIVE VISION.



## 3. JUSTICE IS SEEN AS ESSENTIAL FOR PEACE AND NATIONAL RECOVERY.

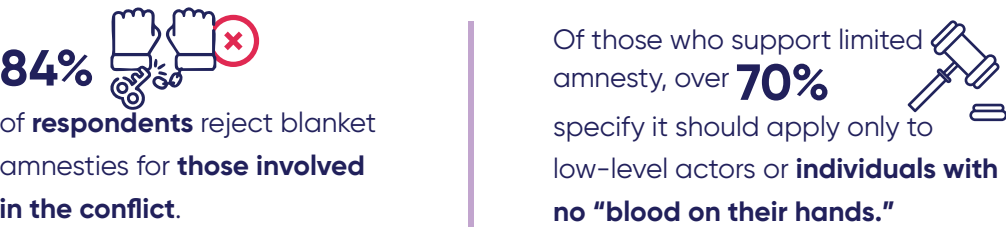


## 4. ACCOUNTABILITY IS AN INDISPENSABLE PILLAR OF JUSTICE.

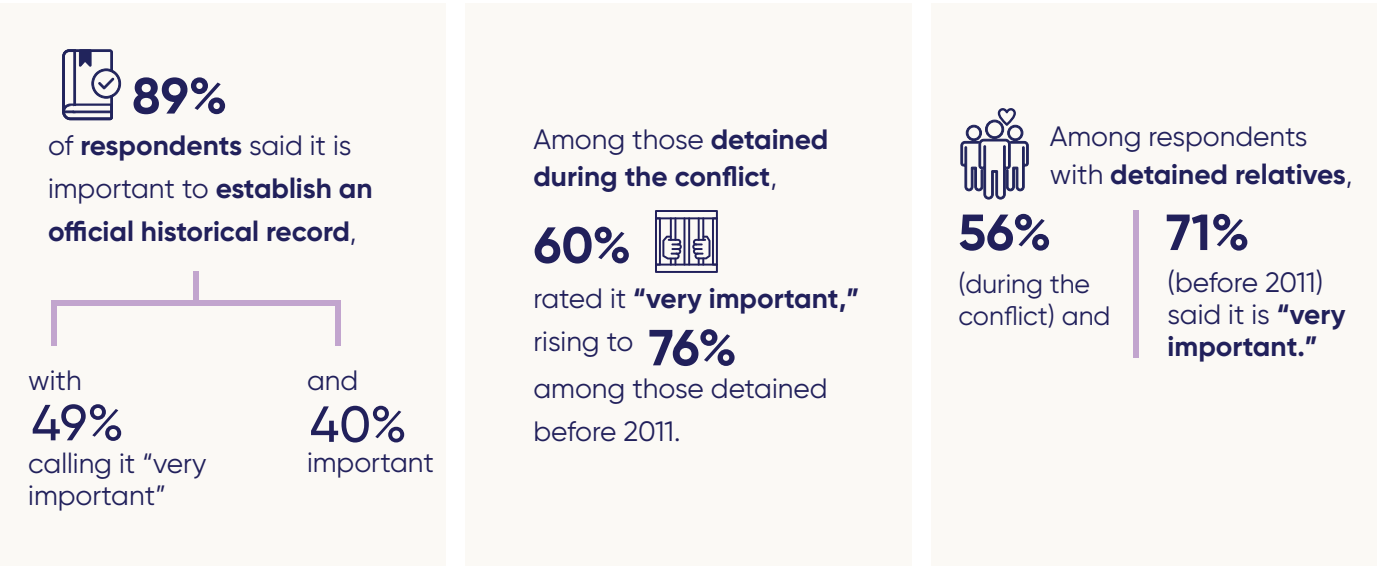
When asked to rank transitional justice mechanisms,



## 5. REJECTION OF IMPUNITY IS NEAR UNIVERSAL.



## 6. TRUTH-TELLING AND HISTORICAL RECORD-KEEPING MATTER DEEPLY.





## 7. REPARATIONS, RESTITUTION, AND REBUILDING ARE CENTRAL TO REDRESS.

**67%**  of **respondents** include **financial compensation** among their top three justice priorities, and **12%** rank it first.

**72%**  name **property restitution** among their top three, and **36%** include **rebuilding infrastructure**.

## 8. VICTIM PARTICIPATION IS A DEFINING EXPECTATION.

**85%**  of **respondents** consider **victim participation** important, with **51%** saying it is **"very important"** and **34%** saying it is **"important"** only **8%** saying it is **"somewhat important"** or **"not important"**




Among **survivors of detention** during the conflict, **76%**  said participation is **"very important,"** as did **60%**  of those with **detained family members** during the conflict. This reflects strong public demand for inclusive, survivor-centred justice.

## 9. TRUST IN SYRIAN INSTITUTIONS IS ASPIRATIONAL BUT FRAGILE.



Across the sample, **54%** expressed **confidence in the justice system**, but qualitative responses suggest this trust reflects optimism about political transition rather than direct experience.

## 10. SYRIANS FAVOUR A NATIONALLY LED JUSTICE PROCESS.


**61%**  of **respondents** of respondents say Syrian government institutions should lead justice efforts, **32%**  name the courts, and only **7%**  cite international bodies.

Awareness of international justice institutions is limited:





**48%** of **respondents** said they were **unfamiliar** with any, including the International Criminal Court or International Court of Justice. Women are less aware than men (60% vs 35%), **reinforcing the need for accessible, domestic mechanisms.**

## 11. ETHNIC AND REGIONAL DIVIDES PERSIST IN TRUST AND PRIORITIES.

**87%**  of **Kurdish respondents** are **"not confident"** or **"not confident at all"** about the situation in Syria, compared to just **11%** of **Arabs**.

**82%**  of Kurds **"distrust"** or **"strongly distrust"** the justice system, compared to **15.5%** of Arabs,

and **85%**  of Kurds said court judgements **are not credible**, versus **85%**  of Arabs who find them **credible**.



# I.Introduction

1. On 8 December 2024, a coalition of Syrian resistance forces led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) stormed Damascus, bringing an end to 53 years of Assad family rule. The fall of the Assad government marked the beginning of a new chapter in Syria's history. Although the country remains scarred by over thirteen years of devastating war and faces overlapping crises – from drought and food insecurity to mass displacement, intercommunal tensions, and economic collapse – the post-Assad government has taken decisive steps towards reconstruction and reform. A transitional president has been selected, an interim constitution adopted, security forces consolidated, and indirect elections held for a transitional parliament, the People's Assembly. With sanctions lifted, international debt repaid, and aid flowing into the country, Syria stands at a fragile yet hopeful crossroads of rebuilding and recovery.

2. For decades, Syria's judicial system and legal profession were deeply shaped – and constrained – by authoritarian control. The 1973 Constitution enshrined the dominance of the Ba'ath Party, while a nearly half-century-long state of emergency concentrated power in the presidency. The judiciary was administered by the Supreme Judicial Council, chaired by the president himself, and the Minister of Justice – a Ba'ath Party loyalist – oversaw prosecutorial authority. The party also extended its reach into the Legal Syndicate, essentially the country's bar association, and the nation's law faculties. Through these mechanisms, first Hafez and then Bashar al-Assad ensured that the law served power rather than justice, hollowing out the very institutions meant to uphold the rule of law.

3. Now that the Assad era has ended, Syria faces a defining question: what does justice mean to its people? The country's transitional justice path will shape not only political reform but also the social fabric that binds Syrians together. Rebuilding the judiciary – through constitutional reform, legislative overhaul, and capacity-building for judges and lawyers – is essential. Yet there remains a profound lack of data on how Syrians themselves understand justice, accountability, and reconciliation. How do ordinary citizens perceive the courts, and what do they believe is necessary for a sustainable peace after years of violence and impunity?

4. Without answering these questions, any transitional justice process risks being detached from the realities and aspirations of the Syrian people. This report seeks to bridge that gap. Drawing on participatory research and the voices of 1,101 Syrians, it examines how people across the country define justice and what they expect from a system meant to deliver it. By grounding policy and reform efforts in the lived experiences and perceptions of Syrians themselves, this report aims to inform a more inclusive, legitimate, and durable path toward justice in the new Syria





## II. Methodology

5. The data and analysis presented in this report are the result of a comprehensive and rigorously designed research methodology. The approach was developed in collaboration with experts in survey design, data analysis, and field research inside Syria. The methodology underwent both internal and external review to ensure adherence to the highest standards of research ethics, data reliability, and neutrality, in line with international best practices for conflict-affected contexts. These standards were applied consistently throughout data collection and analysis. This section outlines the methodological framework and provides an overview of the demographic profile of the survey sample.

### A. Survey Methodology

6. This report is based on a mixed-method nationwide survey conducted between July and September 2025, reaching 1,101 Syrians across 13 governorates through a combination of online and offline data collection using Kobo Toolbox. The methodology was designed in partnership with Syrian research organisations – LAW, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), and the Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research (SCLSR) – and underwent a pilot test before rollout. The survey included 15 demographic questions and 14 substantive items combining closed, semi-open, and fully open-ended formats to capture both quantitative trends and qualitative insights. Responses were collected in Arabic (with informal translation support where needed), translated into English via DEEPL with manual verification, and analysed using descriptive statistics alongside inductive qualitative coding to identify emerging themes.

7. Surveyors were trained to maintain neutrality, and outreach was conducted through diverse networks in Damascus, Homs, Latakia, Idlib, Aleppo, Raqqqa, Deir Ez Zor, Hasakeh, Suweida, Daraa, and rural Damascus, supplemented by random street sampling to mitigate selection bias. The sample reflects broad demographic diversity across gender, age, ethnicity, religion, displacement status, and socio-economic background, with reliability thresholds applied to ensure subgroup validity. As with all research in conflict-affected settings, the findings represent perceptions at a specific moment in Syria's transition;

nonetheless, the scale, geographic scope, and methodological rigour provide a robust and credible basis for understanding how Syrians perceive justice, accountability, and the priorities of transitional justice.

### B. Overview of survey sample

8. The survey reached 1,101 respondents across 13 governorates, capturing a broad cross-section of Syrian society in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic background. Women constituted 53% of respondents and men 47%, with ages ranging from 18 to 89. The sample included Sunni Muslims (84%), Alawites (4.5%), Shi'a (4%), Christians (3%), and smaller numbers of Yazidis, Druze, and others; ethnically, 78% identified as Arab and 19% as Kurdish, alongside Turkmen, Assyrian, Circassian, and Armenian minorities. Respondents were geographically diverse – 22% from Damascus, 15% from Hasakeh, 12% from Idlib – with further representation across Aleppo, Homs, and Hama. Displacement was widespread: 31% had not been displaced, 29% were temporarily displaced, 22% had returned home, and 18% were permanently displaced. Socio-economic indicators varied, with 29% unemployed, 15% day workers, 29% part-time workers, 26% in full-time employment, and income levels skewing low. Education levels were comparatively high, with nearly half holding a university degree.

9. A significant proportion of the sample had direct experience with the justice system and conflict-related abuses. 11% reported being arrested after March 2011, and 18% had a detained immediate family member arrested after March 2011. 10% reported a disappeared relative, overwhelmingly since 2011. Engagement with the courts was also notable: 3% had been criminally tried post-2011 and 12% had been involved in civil proceedings. This combination of demographic breadth and personal exposure to violations provides a solid foundation for interpreting perceptions of justice, accountability, and reform during Syria's transition.







### III. Syria's Transitional Justice Process

10. The fall of the Assad government on 8 December 2024 marked the end of more than five decades of authoritarian rule and the beginning of a turbulent political transition. Within days, the coalition of opposition forces behind HTS's "Operation Deterrence of Aggression" initiated the formation of a transitional government. On 10 December, Mohamed al-Bashir – previously head of the Salvation Government in Idlib – was appointed caretaker Prime Minister, retaining an 11-member cabinet from his former administration. A general amnesty for conscripted soldiers followed immediately.

11. Ahmad al-Shara'a (Abu Mohammad al-Julani), leader of HTS, positioned accountability and reform at the centre of the transition. He pledged to close Assad-era prisons, prosecute those responsible for systematic abuses, and build a rights-based judicial system. In January 2025, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) visited Damascus to discuss cooperation on accountability measures – a signal of early engagement with international justice mechanisms.

12. Despite these commitments, the initial months of transition were marred by instability and sectarian violence. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) documented reprisals against Alawite communities and former regime affiliates, as well as large-scale operations in Homs and other areas that resulted in significant civilian casualties. Many of these clashes occurred in the context of "combing operations" in which security forces claimed they were attempting to disarm and arrest Assad government-aided militiamen. By March 2025, violence in Latakia and Tartus had escalated sharply, leaving an estimated 1,400 people dead.

13. At the political level, the "Revolution Victory Conference" of 29 January 2025 appointed al-Shara'a as interim President, dissolved Assad-era institutions, and called for unifying armed groups under a national security structure. A subsequent National Dialogue in February brought together a wide range of Syrian actors to affirm principles of national unity, women's participation, and judicial reform, alongside commitments to transitional justice and accountability.



14. On 13 March 2025, al-Shara'a signed the Constitutional Declaration, establishing the legal framework for the transition. The Declaration guarantees fundamental rights, nullifies emergency laws, abolishes the Terrorism Court, restores confiscated property, and affirms international human rights treaties as legally binding. It also sets out the structures of the transitional government – including a provisional legislature, executive, and judiciary – and mandates the creation of a Transitional Justice Commission. While widely welcomed, some observers have raised concerns about the concentration of executive powers in the presidency.

15. On 17 May, through presidential decree, two key institutions were created: the National Transitional Justice Authority (NATJ) and the National Authority for Missing Persons (NAMP). The former is mandated to uncover the truth about past violations, hold perpetrators accountable, provide reparations, and promote national reconciliation and non-recurrence. The latter focuses on documenting cases of enforced disappearance and supporting affected families. The Transitional Justice Authority has since organised its work around six thematic subcommittees: truth and investigation; justice and accountability; reparations; reconciliation; non-repetition; and national memory. A comprehensive transitional justice law, drafted to provide the framework for the transitional justice process in Syria, is reportedly nearing completion.

16. However, persistent insecurity has challenged the transition. In July 2025, intercommunal violence in Suweida between Druze militias and Bedouin tribes escalated into heavy fighting involving government forces and Israeli airstrikes. The conflict, which lasted until 19 July, resulted in approximately 1,400 deaths and was marked by credible reports of summary executions, looting, and sexual violence, later confirmed by UN special procedures.

17. In October 2025, Syria held the first "democratic elections" since the fall of Assad to select a People's Assembly. The Assembly was elected through a convoluted indirect election process overseen by the Supreme Electoral Committee. The Committee designated





subcommittees at the district level, and these subcommittees were tasked with forming electoral colleges in their respective districts. It is reported that a total of about 6,000 individuals were chosen to be electoral college representatives. On 5 October, these representatives elected 119 representatives to the People's Assembly. Only six women were elected and of the final results, only 13.45% of the seats were won by minorities. This is despite the fact that it is estimated that Syria's current population is over 30% ethnic and religious minorities. 21 additional seats are delegated to the governorates of Raqqqa, Suweida, and Hasakah, as well as Kobani in Aleppo, heavily minority populated provinces; however, elections in these regions were postponed until peace and stability are restored. A key element of the electoral process, Al Shara'a alone will have the responsibility of selecting the final 70 representatives of the 210 member body. The body will serve for an initial period of 30 months.

18. The emerging transitional justice framework in Syria presents both opportunity and risk. While new institutions such as the NATJ and the NAMP signal genuine intent to pursue accountability and reform, their long-term legitimacy will depend on whether they reflect the experiences and expectations of ordinary Syrians. Public trust in these mechanisms cannot be assumed; it must be earned through inclusive processes, transparency, and visible fairness in implementation.

19. For transitional authorities, understanding how Syrians define justice and perceive accountability is therefore essential for building credible institutions and preventing renewed cycles of grievance. For international donors and partners, these perceptions provide critical evidence for shaping support that strengthens – rather than substitutes – national ownership. Targeted assistance can help build institutional capacity, promote survivor-centred approaches, and ensure that transitional justice efforts contribute meaningfully to social cohesion, rule of law, and sustainable peace.

20. Against this complex backdrop of political transition, institutional rebuilding, and ongoing insecurity, understanding how Syrians perceive justice has never been more critical. The success of any transitional justice process will depend on its alignment with public expectations and its ability to restore trust in the rule of law. The following section presents the findings of the national survey on perceptions of

justice, exploring how Syrians define justice and accountability, their levels of trust in the current legal system, and their views on what is required to achieve lasting peace and reconciliation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

## IV. Perceptions of justice in the Syrian Arab Republic

21. As Syria embarks on an uncertain but historic transition, the success of its justice and reconciliation efforts will depend on whether they reflect the priorities and expectations of its people. While new institutions and laws now define the formal landscape of transitional justice, they will only gain legitimacy if they align with how Syrians themselves understand justice, accountability, and peace. This section presents findings from a nationwide survey designed to capture those perceptions – the voices, experiences, and definitions of justice articulated by ordinary Syrians from across the country's social, ethnic, and political spectrum. It explores four central questions:

- a) What does justice mean to people in Syria?**
- b) What shape should transitional justice take in Syria?**
- c) Do Syrians trust institutions to deliver justice?**
- d) What divisions exist in perceptions of justice among Syrians?**

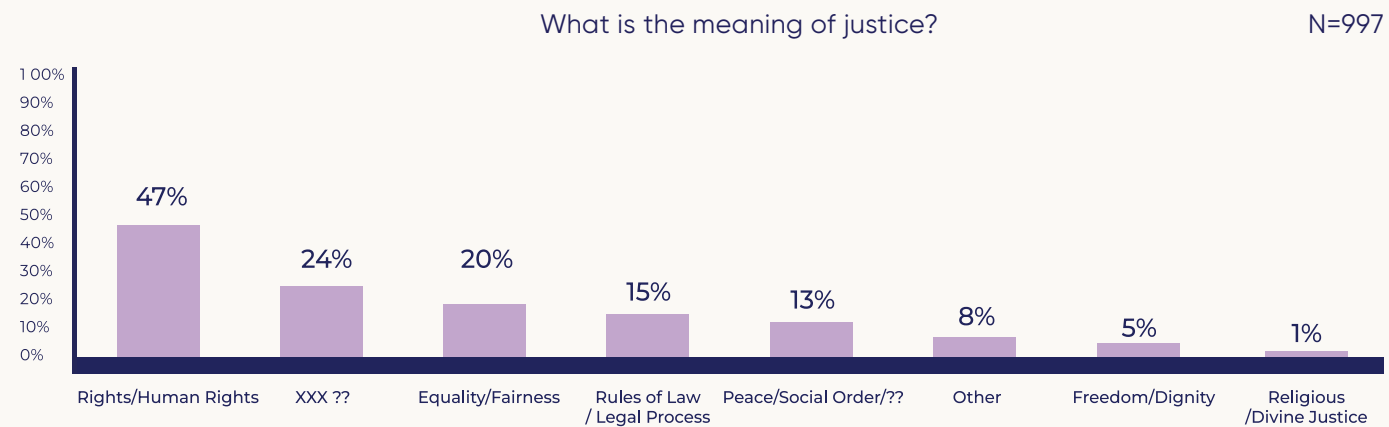
22. The analysis that follows draws on both quantitative and qualitative data from the perceptions survey. It provides an empirical foundation for understanding how Syrians conceptualise justice, what they see as essential to achieving it, and where differences emerge across gender, age, and regional lines. Taken together, these findings illuminate how the country's emerging transitional justice process can better align with the public's sense of fairness, accountability, and peace.



### A. What does justice mean to people in Syria?

23. Defining justice in post-conflict Syria is complex and deeply personal. The survey invited respondents to describe “what justice means” in their own words. Of the 1,101 respondents, 997 provided substantive answers, revealing overlapping yet distinct conceptions of justice.

#### Definitions of Justice



24. Restoration of rights was the dominant theme, cited by 47% of respondents – and notably more often by women (56%) than men (39%). Many equated justice with restoring rights and dignity: “Justice means equality before the law and recognition of the rights of every human being without discrimination,” explained a 31-year-old man. A 22-year-old woman linked it directly to fundamental freedoms: “Justice is closely linked to respect for the right to life, liberty, dignity, and peace.”

25. Accountability and retribution featured in 24% of responses, reflecting a strong desire for perpetrators to face punishment. “Hold accountable all those who stained their hands with the blood of Syrians,” urged one 38-year-old man. While some equated justice with “revenge,” most focused on fair punishment and due process, often framing accountability as a prerequisite for peace and healing.

26. Fairness and equality appeared in 20% of responses, cited more frequently by Kurds (32%) than Arabs (18%). Respondents defined justice as equality before the law and fairness in rights, duties, and opportunities – foundations for peaceful coexistence and social stability.

27. Rule of law and legal due process were emphasised by 15% of respondents, again higher among Kurdish participants (25%). Justice, they said, meant “being protected by the law, not judged by it,” and the creation of “independent courts formed through a reliable constitution.”

28. Finally, peace, social support, and nation-building emerged in 13% of responses, connecting justice to reconciliation, stability, and national unity. As one 38-year-old man expressed, justice means “providing space for building social bridges and a shared national identity.”

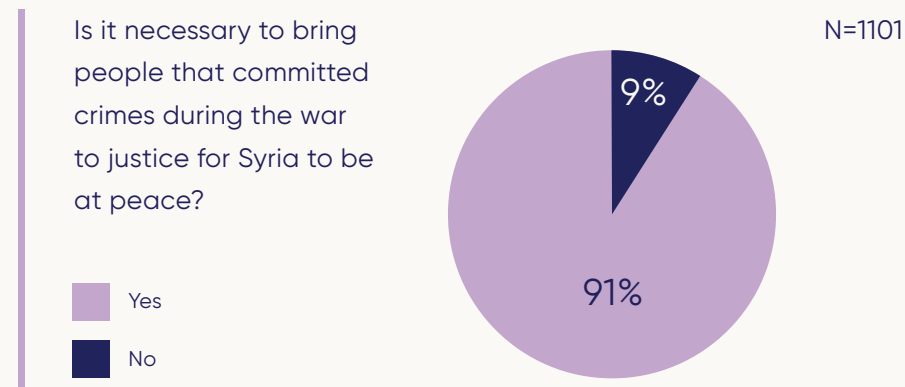
29. Together, these responses show that Syrians do not view justice as a technical sequence of trials or procedures. They see it as a project of social change – restoring rights, dismantling inequality, and preventing the return of repression. When Syrians define justice as equality before the law, the rule of law, or dignity, they are describing not only what was denied in the past, but what must be built for the future. This is not a narrow “transitional justice” agenda; it is a demand for transformative justice – a justice process that reforms institutions and redistributes power so that violations cannot recur.

30. The gender gap in definitions of justice adds an important dimension to this finding. Women’s strong emphasis on rights restoration and equality may suggest that a transitional justice process focused solely on redressing past harms would fall short of their expectations. For many women, justice could also mean transforming the social and institutional conditions that made them vulnerable to violence, exclusion, and impunity in the first place. This means that a gender-responsive transitional justice process must go beyond accountability for individual crimes: it must address structural discrimination in law and practice, guarantee women’s participation and protection, and ensure that violations against women are neither minimised nor repeated. In doing so, the transitional process can begin to align the meaning of justice as expressed by women – with its focus on dignity, equality, and future security – with the broader national goal of rebuilding a peaceful and lawful society.





### Justice as a Precondition for Peace



31. Across the survey, Syrians expressed a near-universal conviction that justice is essential for peace. 91% of respondents stated that justice must be delivered for Syria to achieve lasting stability. This belief was particularly strong among those directly affected by detention, disappearance, or other abuses. Among respondents who had themselves been detained during the Syrian conflict, 100% said justice was indispensable; only three respondents with family members detained during the conflict disagreed.

32. While this consensus spanned gender, region, and ethnicity, its intensity varied modestly by age. The youngest respondents (18–24) were somewhat less emphatic, with 79% identifying justice as necessary for peace, suggesting either generational fatigue or a greater focus on stability over accountability. Similarly, among the oldest respondents (65+), only six in ten expressed this view, perhaps reflecting a desire to prioritise reconciliation over renewed confrontation. Women also expressed slightly lower rates of endorsement (87%) than men (96%), a difference that may stem from variations in exposure to formal justice processes or differing perceptions of safety and access to the courts.

33. Among those who elaborated on what form of justice was “required” for peace, three-quarters (76%) called for trial, punishment,

and accountability for perpetrators. Many envisioned criminal prosecutions through fair legal processes: “A fair trial for anyone who caused the death of a person, oppressed them, or misappropriated their money with the support of the former regime,” wrote one 43-year-old man. Others stressed that justice must be impartial and extend to all sides of the conflict.

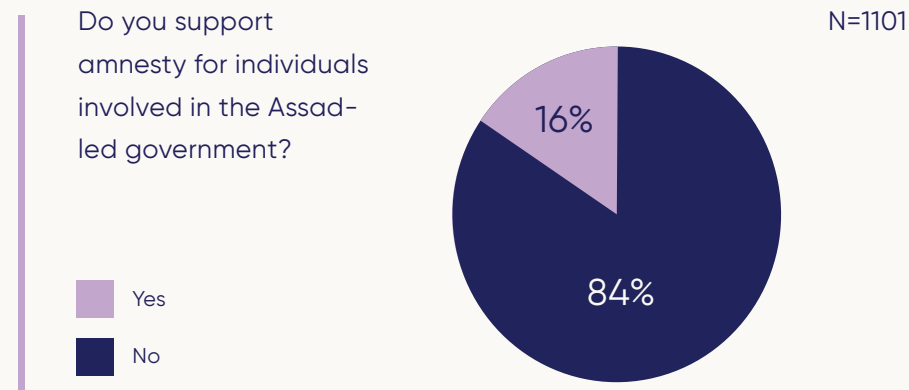
34. Reparations also emerged as a vital element of this peace–justice equation. Around 10% of respondents tied justice to compensation – financial, moral, or symbolic – for victims. “Prosecuting criminals and imposing financial penalties on them to compensate victims,” said one respondent, while others called for the restitution of property and guarantees of non-repetition.

35. Together, these responses paint a consistent picture: Syrians largely reject impunity as a basis for peace. Instead, they see peace as contingent upon visible, credible justice that acknowledges victims, punishes wrongdoers, and restores the moral order shattered by years of abuse. For many, accountability is not merely a legal necessity but a social and psychological one – a prerequisite for reconciliation and the rebuilding of trust between citizens and the state.

36. This finding has significant implications for transitional authorities and international partners. It suggests that efforts to prioritise “stability” at the expense of justice may fail to gain popular legitimacy. Syrians’ perceptions point instead toward a model of peacebuilding in which justice – fairly applied, transparent, and inclusive – is not a postscript to peace but its very foundation.

### Views on Amnesty

37. This widespread belief that peace depends on justice also helps explain Syrians’ overwhelming rejection of blanket amnesties. For most respondents, reconciliation cannot come at the expense of accountability, particularly after decades of impunity under the Assad government. While some expressed willingness to forgive those with lesser responsibility or who were coerced into participation, the dominant sentiment was that genuine peace requires recognition of wrongdoing and proportionate punishment.



38. When asked whether amnesty should be granted to individuals associated with the Assad government, 84% opposed it. Support for amnesty was highest in Hasakeh (34%) and among more educated respondents: 25% of graduate degree holders and 23% of university graduates supported amnesty, compared with just 6% of those with primary education and 7% of those with no education

39. Of those favouring amnesty (160 respondents), 67% limited it to individuals without "blood on their hands," while 29% supported amnesty for non-decision-makers or conscripts. "Those who gave orders should be held accountable," one 29-year-old woman wrote, "but not those who had no choice but to serve." Only 4% supported a general amnesty without restrictions.

#### Who Should Deliver Justice?

40. When asked who should be responsible for delivering justice in Syria, respondents overwhelmingly looked to state institutions. A clear majority, 61%, identified the government or executive branch as the primary authority, often referring broadly to "the state" or "the Syrian government." This finding underscores both a belief in the central role of state institutions and an expectation that justice should be led domestically, not externally imposed. However, many respondents qualified their support by emphasising that legitimacy depends on reform. As one 40-year-old man wrote, responsibility lies with "a true Syrian government formed from all components of the Syrian people."

41. A further 32% of respondents cited the judiciary and courts as the appropriate mechanisms for justice delivery. Several respondents

explicitly linked the government and the judiciary, viewing them as interdependent parts of a single institutional system. Others stressed that only an independent judiciary could deliver real justice: "The independent judiciary, supported by relevant state institutions, is responsible for ensuring justice," explained a 22-year-old woman. For many, courts represented both the ideal and the aspiration – a symbol of lawfulness, fairness, and state legitimacy after decades of arbitrary rule.

42. A smaller proportion, 5%, saw constitutional or legal reform as the key vehicle for achieving justice. These respondents highlighted the need for a robust legal framework that would outlast any single administration. As one 44-year-old man put it, "A comprehensive constitution and referendum through which reliable, impartial, and independent courts can be formed."

43. A handful of participants articulated a broader, systemic understanding of responsibility. They viewed justice as a shared duty among multiple actors – the government, judiciary, civil society, and the public itself. As a 32-year-old woman observed:

*The state, with its judicial, legislative, and executive institutions, is primarily responsible for ensuring that people's rights are protected without discrimination. But society is also an essential partner, through awareness and civil institutions that monitor violations. When states fail, international organisations must intervene to ensure that justice is not lost."*

44. The overwhelming majority of respondents emphasised that justice must be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned. International courts and mechanisms were rarely mentioned and, when they were, often framed as a last resort if domestic institutions fail to act.

This reflects both a strong sense of national sovereignty and a deep mistrust of external actors after years of foreign involvement in the conflict. For Syrians, justice must emerge from within – through reformed, credible, and transparent national institutions capable of upholding rights and delivering accountability. For transitional authorities and their international partners, this signals that meaningful support should strengthen domestic capacity, independence, and public confidence, rather than substitute for Syrian leadership in shaping the country's justice future.





45. The strong public preference for a Syrian-led, state-based justice process raises a critical next question: what form should such a process take? Understanding how Syrians envision the mechanisms, tools, and principles of transitional justice is essential for shaping policies that are legitimate and effective. The following section explores what respondents believe transitional justice in Syria should look like – the balance between accountability and reconciliation, the mechanisms they prioritise, and the approaches they view as most capable of securing both justice and lasting peace.

**B. What shape should transitional justice take in Syria?**

46. With an understanding of how Syrians perceive justice, the next step is to examine what tools they believe should be used to achieve it. The survey therefore asked respondents to consider a range of conventional transitional justice mechanisms and to rank them by priority “for justice to be achieved.” The tools presented were: (1) punishment of perpetrators; (2) financial compensation; (3) restoration of property; (4) public apologies; (5) rebuilding of infrastructure destroyed during the war; (6) public memorialisation; and (7) protection guarantees. While not exhaustive, this list captures the primary retributive and reparative measures available in post-conflict Syria.



47. Respondents overwhelmingly prioritised retributive justice. “Punishment of perpetrators” was ranked first by 63% of all respondents and among the top three choices by 83%, far exceeding any other option. In no demographic did support fall below 50%. This strong consensus reflects a widespread demand for accountability as the cornerstone of Syria’s transitional justice process. While experiences of detention or family disappearance did not substantially alter these preferences, displacement status showed some variation: 70% of non-displaced

respondents ranked punishment of perpetrators first, compared to 52% of those permanently displaced. This may indicate that displaced Syrians place relatively greater emphasis on reparations and property restitution, while those who remained prioritise retribution.

48. The survey also provides a glimpse into how far Syrians believe accountability should go, including views on capital punishment. The death penalty remains a divisive issue in global transitional justice debates, yet in Syria, many respondents continue to view it as an appropriate response to grave crimes. There were approximately 54 references to capital punishment across the survey. Although this number may appear small, these were entirely unprompted mentions – respondents were not directly asked about their views on the death penalty. Therefore, the frequency is striking: it indicates that capital punishment remains a salient issue in how Syrians conceptualise justice and accountability. Several respondents invoked both legal and religious rationales to justify their view. “All criminals who have blood on their hands must be executed in public squares,” said one 26-year-old man, while another respondent, aged 28, stated, “Justice must follow sharia law – a murderer shall be put to death.” Others adopted a more qualified stance, supporting life imprisonment or capital punishment depending on the severity of the crime.

49. These findings highlight that retribution remains a moral and emotional imperative for some Syrians, particularly those directly affected by the conflict, but also that the majority favour justice through legal due process rather than vengeance. For transitional authorities, this underscores the importance of transparent and rights-based judicial mechanisms to ensure punishment does not devolve into retaliation.





50. The second most frequently prioritised tool was financial compensation, selected as the first choice by 12% of respondents and ranked among the top three by 67%. This finding suggests that while financial reparations are important to many Syrians, they are viewed as secondary to accountability. Detention or disappearance experiences did not significantly affect these preferences; in fact, those who were not directly affected by such violations were slightly more likely to prioritise compensation. Socioeconomic or employment status also had limited influence: 9% of unemployed respondents ranked financial compensation first, compared with 18% of part-time workers, suggesting that material need alone does not drive this preference.

51. Rebuilding of infrastructure ranked third, with 9% identifying it as their top priority and 36% as top-three. Protection guarantees followed with 7% of first-choice selections and 21% of top-three rankings. Notably, 15% of Kurdish respondents ranked protection guarantees first, compared to just 5% of Arab respondents, indicating lingering security concerns among Kurdish communities even after the transition.

52. Restoration of property was ranked first by only 5% of respondents, yet it appeared in 72% of respondents' top-three lists – the second highest overall ranking after punishment of perpetrators. This suggests that while not seen as the foremost priority, property restitution remains a central element of justice for many, likely reflecting the scale of dispossession during the conflict.

53. Public apologies and memorialisation were the least prioritised tools, ranked first by only 3% and 1% of respondents respectively. Even so, when allowed to select their top three, 15% included public apologies and 6% memorialisation. These lower rankings suggest that symbolic measures alone are not perceived as sufficient forms of justice, though they retain some secondary importance.

54. Similarly, while public memorialisation ranked low as a stand-alone justice tool, respondents expressed strong support for an accurate historical record when asked directly. Nearly half (49%) said it is "very important," and 40% found it "important," that a truthful and accessible record of the conflict be established. Support was strong among those who had experienced detention – 60% of those detained during the conflict and 76% of those detained before it said a historical record is "very important." No respondents in these groups considered it "not important."

55. The same pattern held among respondents with detained family members: 56% of those with relatives detained during the conflict and 71% with relatives detained before 2011 said a historical record is "very important," compared to 46% of those without detained relatives. These findings suggest that for many Syrians, preserving truth and memory complements formal justice mechanisms, especially for those directly affected by violations.

56. Victim participation also emerged as a defining feature of how Syrians understand justice. 51% of respondents said it is "very important" for victims to be directly involved in justice processes, and another 34% said it is "important." Only 8% described it as "somewhat important" or "not important." Victim participation was especially pronounced among those who had experienced detention during the conflict (76% "very important") and those with detained family members during the conflict (60% "very important") or before (73% "very important"). By contrast, only 48% of those not detained and 48% without detained relatives selected "very important." These results show that Syrians see justice not only as something delivered for survivors but with them – a participatory process that validates their experiences and restores their agency.

57. Overall, Syrians envision a transitional justice process grounded in accountability and reinforced by reparations, truth-telling, and participation. Punishment of perpetrators remains the central demand, while financial compensation, property restitution, and rebuilding are also vital for redress and recovery. Survivors' emphasis on participation and documentation may highlight a forward-looking desire not only to punish wrongdoing but also to prevent its recurrence by ensuring truth, transparency, and acknowledgment.

58. For transitional authorities and international donors, these findings carry clear implications. Syrians overwhelmingly prioritise accountability because they see it as integral to preventing future abuse. Accountability is not understood only as retribution, but also as a precondition for rebuilding institutions that command trust. Preserving a historical record, establishing truth, and prosecuting serious crimes were repeatedly described as necessary for non-recurrence and healing. This underscores the forward-looking logic: Syrians believe that confronting the past is essential to transforming the future. Accountability is therefore not one tool within transitional justice – it is a pillar of transformative justice.

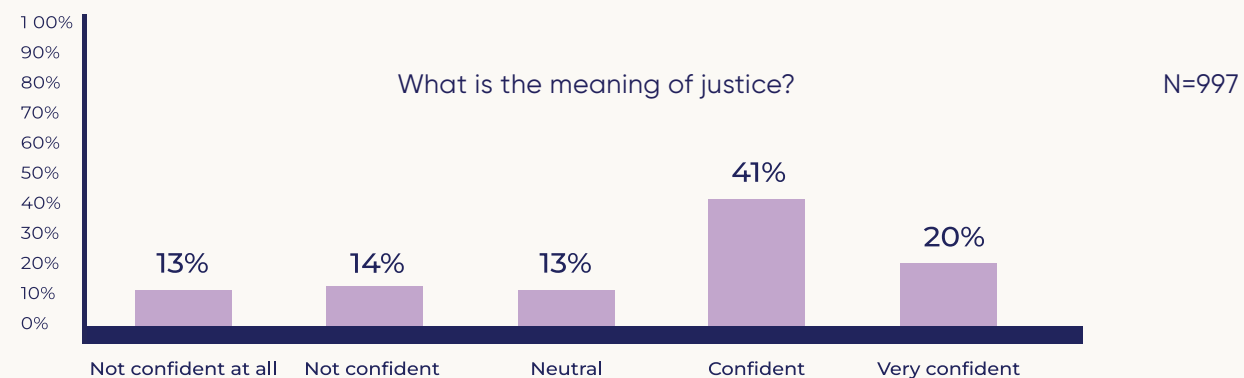




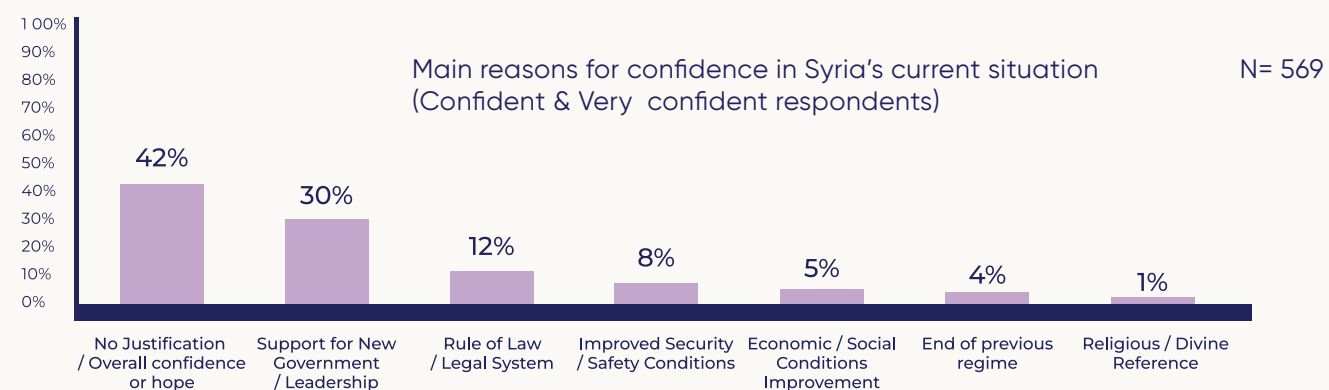
### C. Do Syrians trust institutions to deliver justice?

59. Understanding what justice means to Syrians and what tools they prefer is only part of the picture. For justice to take root, it must be delivered by institutions that people trust. In transitional contexts such as Syria, confidence in government, courts, and international mechanisms will determine whether justice processes are seen as legitimate and effective. This section therefore examines how Syrians perceive and trust the institutions tasked with delivering justice – focusing on three dimensions: trust in government, trust in the national justice system, and the perceived role of international institutions.

#### Trust in Syrian government

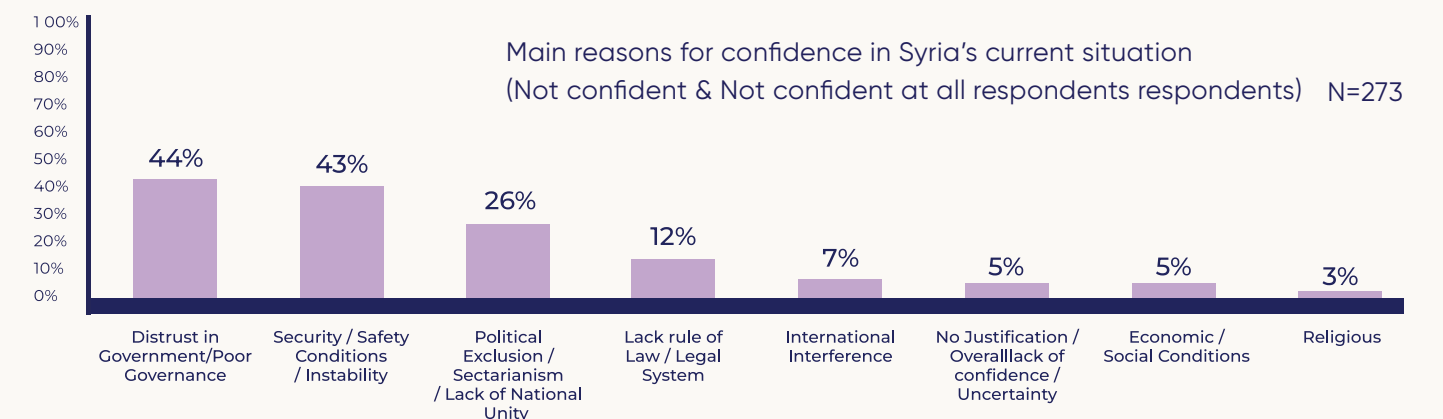


60. To gauge current attitudes, respondents were asked about their overall feeling regarding the "current situation in Syria." 20% reported being "very confident," 41% "confident," and 13% "neutral." Of those expressing confidence, 30% credited the current government and leadership as the source of their trust. A 40-year-old man explained, "The current government is working as the people want it to, staying away from wars and problems with neighbouring countries and focusing on the country's economic situation." Similarly, a 55-year-old woman shared simply, "We trust our new government."



61. 12% of respondents highlighted the re-establishment of rule of law or renewed confidence in the judicial system as the basis for their optimism. "Syrian judges are acting with integrity and independence in applying the law, free from any influence or pressure," said a 22-year-old woman. Another respondent, aged 48, noted, "Government agencies are moving toward the rule of law and citizenship despite all the obstacles."

62. 42% expressed general optimism or hope in the post-Assad transition without citing specific reasons. "The vision set out for the transitional period meets the aspirations of the Syrian people," said one 37-year-old man, while a 49-year-old woman described her hope as rooted in "a commitment to building a new Syria with all." Only 8% referred to improved security as the basis of their confidence, and 5% cited economic improvement.



63. At the same time, distrust remains significant. 14% reported being "not confident" and another 13% "not confident at all." Among this group, 44% cited distrust in government as the main reason, and 43% pointed to insecurity and instability. "The current regime monopolises power completely and does not accept anyone with different ideological orientations," said one 49-year-old man. A 35-year-old woman echoed this, stating, "There is nothing reassuring about the new government, especially in light of the torture of dissidents and the inability to control the behaviour of security forces."

64. Concerns about security were equally strong. "Sectarianism is at its peak among the various components. The security situation is poor, especially in coastal areas and southern Syria," said a 34-year-old man. Another respondent, aged 60, summarised, "No security, no stability, chaos, fear, terrorism – the situation is unstable and uncontrolled."



65. Political exclusion, sectarian division, and lack of national unity were also common sources of unease, cited by 26% of those lacking confidence. "The ideas planted by the former regime - sectarianism, division, disregard for the law - still remain to this day," explained a 31-year-old man. Others warned that "extremist tendencies and exclusion" were widening social rifts rather than healing them.

66. 12% explicitly mentioned distrust in the current legal system. A 22-year-old woman wrote:

"The independence, impartiality, and fairness of the judiciary are fundamental principles in any legal system that aims to achieve justice. Although the constitution stipulates independence, the reality still reflects the influence of the executive branch."

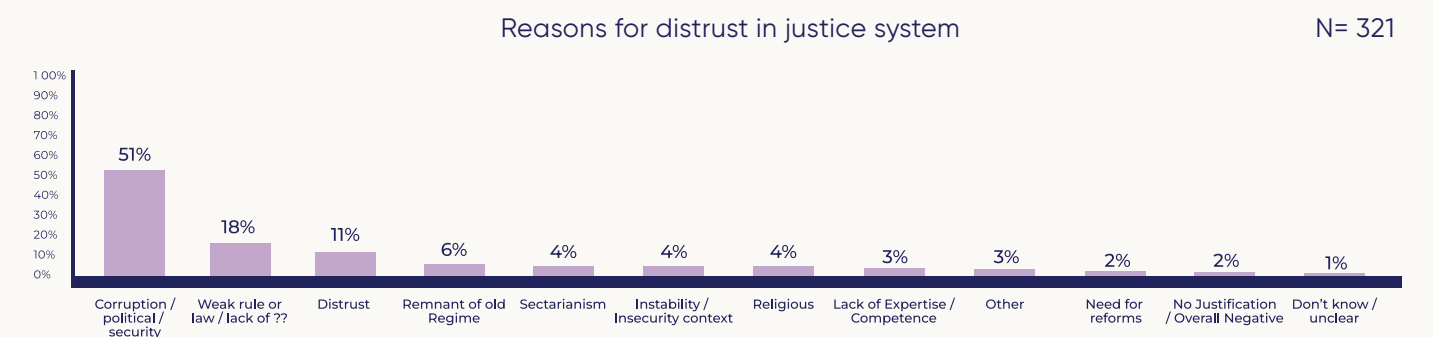
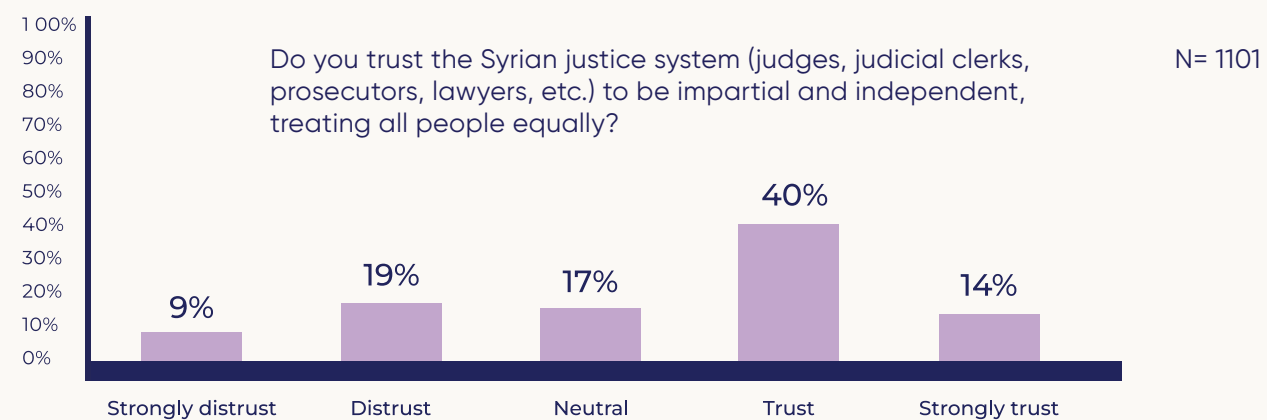
A 33-year-old woman added simply, "Fighting remnants of the regime are outside the law."

67. Distrust was particularly pronounced among Kurdish respondents and those living in Kurdish-dominated Hasakeh. 180 of 209 Kurdish respondents said they were "not confident" or "not confident at all," often citing insecurity and marginalisation. By contrast, most Druze and Alawite respondents - despite ongoing violence affecting their communities - expressed either neutrality or confidence in the current situation.

68. When asked directly whether they "trust the Syrian justice system to be impartial and independent, treating all people equally," 40% of respondents said they "trust" and 14% said they "strongly trust" the system, while 17% were neutral. 29% of those who elaborated said their confidence stemmed from perceived fairness, impartiality, and integrity. "When the tyrant fell, corruption fell with him, and justice took its place with the presence of competent people," said a 34-year-old man. Another respondent, aged 55, explained, "I trust the government and the courts when they treat people fairly and without discrimination."

69. These expressions of confidence in the judiciary appear closely tied to broader optimism about the new government rather than to concrete experiences of judicial performance. In other words, reported trust in the justice system may be functioning more as political capital generated by regime change rather than evidence of institutional resilience. Support for judicial institutions, therefore, may be aspirational - rooted in hope that the new system will deliver fairness - rather than based on a proven record of impartiality or reform. This alignment between political trust and judicial confidence underscores both an opportunity and a risk for transitional authorities: while faith in new institutions can accelerate legitimacy-building, it also means that any failure to deliver tangible justice outcomes could quickly erode public trust.

### Trust in the justice system







70. Conversely, 19% of respondents indicated that they “distrust” and 9% “strongly distrust” the justice system. Over half of these respondents – 51% – cited corruption, political influence, or bias as their main concern. “The judiciary is politicised and linked to the security apparatus,” said one 35-year-old woman. Another, aged 27, noted, “Reform attempts are still in their early stages.” Several highlighted that criminals remain free and that transitional justice is progressing too slowly.

71. 18% attributed their distrust to weak rule of law or lack of accountability. “There are no courts. All rulings are based on Sharia law,” said a 43-year-old man. “The judiciary is not authorised to enforce laws,” said another, aged 65. A 44-year-old man summarised, “In my opinion, there are no courts or judges. I do not see a state, especially a state of law and social justice.” Distrust again concentrated among Kurds and residents of Hasakeh, while Alawite and Druze respondents tended to report more positive views.

72. A related question asked whether Syrian court judgments “are credible and should be followed.” 29% answered “no,” closely aligning with the earlier question. 47% of those who doubted the courts cited bias, corruption, and political interference. “Corruption remains prevalent in the judiciary and law enforcement, even among new recruits,” said a 44-year-old man. 14% called for systemic legal reform: “The current rulings are based on Sharia, not civil law,” said one 43-year-old woman. Another, aged 40, pointed to “a lack of experience among judges and legal uncertainty in some areas.”

73. Respondents were also asked whether they felt that they have “access to legal assistance [they] can trust.” 81% said yes – an encouraging indicator that access is relatively widespread despite institutional challenges. Those who had prior experience in criminal or civil proceedings before or after 2011 reported high levels of trust in legal services. However, respondents from Hasakeh (53% “no”) and Kurdish communities (57% “no”) showed lower confidence overall.

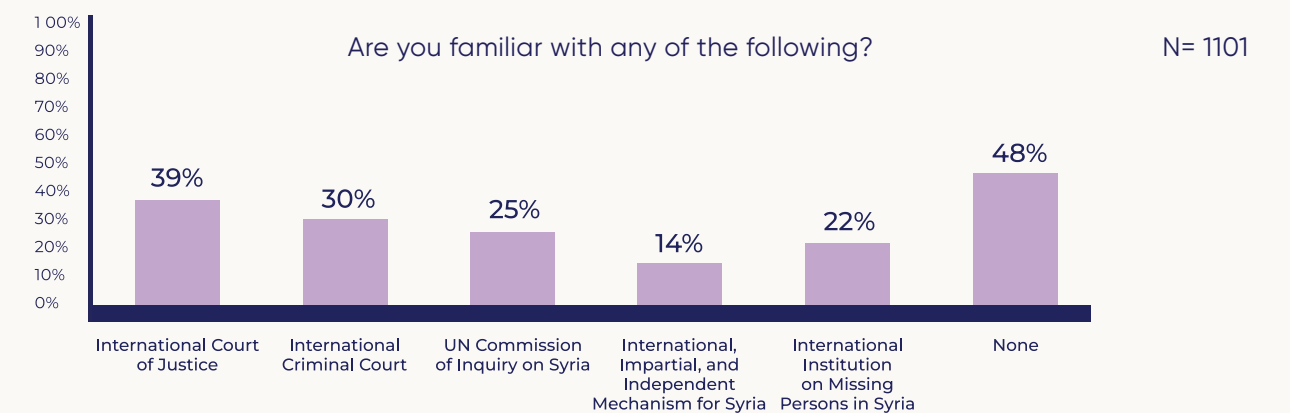
74. Among the 19% who said they felt they lacked trusted legal support, explanations varied. 30% cited fear and distrust, often linked to political interference. “The lack of judicial independence and the concentration of power in the president’s hands,” said a 33-year-old man, “makes courts impossible to trust.” 25% described systemic weakness or lack of structure: “There is no judicial system – only the rule of an autocratic authority,” said one 43-year-old man. 17% mentioned partiality and

discrimination, while 10% cited insecurity and instability. 7% described access barriers related to isolation or poverty. “If I had enough money, I could trust them,” said one 29-year-old man, “but I don’t have money, so I don’t trust them.”

75. High levels of trust in new institutions indicate that Syrians are investing hope in institutional transformation. Trust reflects an expectation that the justice system will be different from the past – independent, rights-based, and accountable. Yet because this trust is aspirational rather than earned, it is fragile: if institutions fail to deliver visible, fair outcomes, support may deteriorate rapidly. The legitimacy of new institutions will depend not only on whether they punish perpetrators, but whether they transform how power is exercised. Transitional justice becomes transformative justice only if institutional change endures beyond the political moment.

#### Role of international institutions

76. International involvement in justice and accountability in Syria has been significant since the early years of the conflict. To assess



77. 48% of respondents said they were not familiar with any of these institutions. Lack of familiarity was high among those with no (58%) or only primary education (69%) and among respondents from Damascus (78%). The ICJ was the best known (39%), followed by the ICC (30%), Col (25%), IIMP (22%), and IIM (14%). Education and geography strongly influenced awareness: respondents with graduate degrees and those from Hasakeh, Aleppo, and Raqqa were notably more familiar with international mechanisms.



78. When asked what role these institutions should play in delivering justice for Syria, 30% of respondents said international mechanisms should support accountability and criminal prosecution. Many specifically called for Bashar al-Assad to face trial abroad. 15% emphasised the importance of international investigation and documentation, and 10% wanted these institutions to help reform the judiciary and strengthen rule of law. "A key role in achieving accountability and supporting transitional justice is needed, as local institutions lack independence," explained a 35-year-old woman.

79. 16% said international actors should focus on humanitarian assistance, and 11% highlighted compensation and reconstruction support. As one displaced man, aged 46, wrote, international institutions could help "return displaced persons to their homes, compensate victims, support redress for damages, administer services, and provide protection guarantees."

80. Taken together, the data shows that most Syrians place their faith in national institutions to deliver justice, but this trust is often aspirational rather than grounded in demonstrated performance. Confidence in the justice system appears closely tied to support for the new government and optimism about political change, rather than to evidence of institutional reform or impartiality. However, this support may prove fragile and could dissipate quickly if national institutions fail to deliver tangible improvements in independence, fairness, and accountability. At the same time, while many respondents recognise a supporting role for international mechanisms – particularly in accountability, documentation, and victim support – understanding of these institutions remains limited. Nearly half of respondents were unfamiliar with key international justice bodies such as the ICC, ICJ, and IIIM, suggesting that meaningful international engagement in Syria's transitional justice process will depend on clearer communication, transparency, and locally grounded collaboration. Together, these findings point to a transitional moment defined by cautious optimism but uneven trust-patterns that become even more complex when examining the divisions in perception that exist among different groups across Syria.

#### **D. What divisions exist in perceptions of justice amongst Syrians?**

81. While Syrians broadly share a desire for accountability and the restoration of rights, the survey reveals significant divisions in how different groups understand justice, who they trust to deliver it, and what form it

should take. These differences are not merely statistical – they reflect the unequal ways the conflict, displacement, and political exclusion have shaped lives and expectations across society. Understanding these divides is essential for designing a transitional justice process that is legitimate, inclusive, and responsive to the full spectrum of Syrian experience. This section explores those divisions, focusing on gender, socio-economic and educational status, and religious and ethnic identity.

#### **Gender**

82. The data reveals several meaningful gender-based distinctions that go beyond simple variation in opinion – they reflect the ways in which women and men have experienced the conflict and its aftermath differently.

83. Most notably, women were more likely than men to define justice through a rights-based lens. 56% of women mentioned rights or human rights in their definition of justice, compared to 39% of men. This emphasis on rights may suggest that women view justice less in terms of retribution and more as a means of restoring dignity, equality, and protection under the law. Qualitative responses also indicated that women often linked justice to the rebuilding of social order and the safeguarding of freedoms, rather than to the punishment of individual perpetrators.

84. However, women were also less convinced that justice is a prerequisite for lasting peace. 13% of women said that peace could be achieved without justice, compared to only 4% of men. This may reflect a greater pragmatism among women about peacebuilding, shaped by their disproportionate exposure to displacement, economic hardship, and the social consequences of conflict. For many women, stability and security appear to be immediate priorities, even if full accountability remains an aspiration.

85. Women expressed significantly higher levels of confidence in Syria's institutions than men. 64% of women said they "trust" or "strongly trust" the current justice system, compared to 44% of men. Similarly, 79% of women viewed Syrian court judgements as credible, while only 63% of men agreed. Women were also slightly more confident in their access to trusted legal assistance (86% compared to 77% for men). This pattern likely reflects a perception that the transitional government's



rhetoric around rights and inclusion may create new space for women's participation, even if tangible results remain limited.

86. At the same time, women showed markedly lower awareness of international mechanisms that seek to support justice in Syria. 60% of women were unfamiliar with all the identified institutions, compared to 35% of men. Across every listed international mechanism – including the ICC, ICJ, IIM, and COI – women reported lower levels of familiarity. This disparity is likely a reflection of unequal access to information, education, and international networks, but it also signals that international justice mechanisms have not effectively communicated with or engaged Syrian women as key stakeholders in the justice process.

87. Despite this information gap, the overall trend suggests that women are more inclined to view justice through a holistic, rights-based lens that connects personal security and social stability with the principles of equality and rule of law. Their greater faith in domestic institutions may stem from a cautious optimism that the transitional period offers an opportunity for women to claim political and legal space previously denied under Assad-era governance.

88. However, this optimism also presents a risk. If new Syrian institutions fail to deliver concrete improvements in women's rights, access to justice, and protection from violence, the current high levels of trust could erode rapidly. For transitional authorities and donors, these findings point to the need for targeted outreach to women, both to ensure meaningful participation in justice processes and to build sustained confidence through visible reforms in law enforcement, the judiciary, and gender-based violence response systems.

### **Socioeconomic and educational status**

89. Economic and educational background were key determinants of trust in institutions and perceptions of justice. Respondents with higher incomes or full-time employment tended to express lower confidence in Syria's direction and institutions than those who were unemployed or underemployed. 45% of fully employed respondents were "confident" or "very confident" about the situation in Syria, compared to 66% of part-time employed, 71% of day workers, and 65% of unemployed respondents.

90. Trust in institutions followed the same pattern. 44% of fully employed respondents said they "distrust" or "strongly distrust" the justice system, compared to 26% of part-time workers. Many cited corruption, political influence, and weak rule of law as reasons for their skepticism. Lower-middle-income and no-income respondents, by contrast, were more optimistic about the transitional government's role in restoring order and the justice system's ability to deliver. This inversion suggests that those least advantaged economically are also those most hopeful about institutional reform – perhaps because they perceive it as their best route to stability and recognition.

91. Educational attainment further sharpened these differences. Respondents with university or higher degrees expressed greater skepticism of national institutions. 40% of university graduates, 54% of graduate degree holders, and 53% of post-graduate respondents said they were "not confident" or "not confident at all" in the situation in Syria, compared to 11% of those with no education, 10% with a primary education, and 13% with secondary schooling. The same pattern applied to trust in the judiciary: 53% of post-graduates "distrust" or "strongly distrust" the courts, while 91% of uneducated respondents said they "trust" or "strongly trust" them.

92. Education also strongly influenced awareness of international mechanisms. Respondents with university or higher degrees were far more familiar with the ICC, ICJ, IIM, and COI than those with lower educational backgrounds. Moreover, they were more likely to advocate for international monitoring and technical assistance in judicial reform.

93. Together, socio-economic and educational trends reveal an inverse relationship between privilege and institutional trust: the better off and more educated tend to be more critical, while those with fewer resources tend to be more trusting and hopeful. This has important implications for transitional justice programming, underscoring the need to manage expectations across social strata and to ensure that reform efforts visibly benefit both marginalised and educated populations alike.





### Religious and ethnic identity

94. Religious and ethnic identity emerged as one of the strongest predictors of how Syrians perceive justice and the legitimacy of state institutions. The divide between Kurdish- and Arab-identifying respondents was particularly stark, but differences were also visible among other religious minorities.

95. Among Kurdish respondents, 87% said they were “not confident” or “not confident at all” about the current situation in Syria, compared to just 11% of Arab respondents. Over half of Kurdish respondents (51%) who expressed a lack of confidence about the situation in Syria cited distrust in government and governance structures as the reason for their pessimism, while 41% highlighted insecurity and instability. In contrast, the majority of Arab respondents expressed optimism, often pointing to improved governance, national unity, or a sense of renewal under the new administration.

96. Kurdish respondents were also far less trusting of the justice system. 82% said they “distrust” or “strongly distrust” the Syrian justice system, compared to 16% of Arabs. Among Kurds who expressed their distrust of the justice system, 58% identified corruption, political influence, and bias as the source of this distrust, and 19% referenced weak rule of law and institutional fragility. 85% of Kurds said they do not find Syrian court judgements credible, while 85% of Arabs said they do.

97. At the same time, Kurdish respondents were more familiar with international justice mechanisms and more likely to see a role for them in Syria’s transitional justice process. 18% of Kurds said international institutions should assist with judicial reform and rule of law development, compared to 8% of Arabs. Both groups prioritised accountability and prosecution, but Kurds more frequently emphasised structural reform, oversight, and protection guarantees.

98. These divides partly reflect differing political realities. Kurdish-majority areas in northeast Syria operate under decentralised administration with limited connection to Damascus-based institutions, creating a natural skepticism toward the central government. Yet, the scale of Kurdish distrust also reveals deeper historical grievances, rooted in exclusion from political representation, limited recognition of Kurdish rights, and the absence of genuine inclusion in post-conflict state-building efforts.

99. By contrast, respondents from Alawite and Druze backgrounds – though fewer in number – expressed higher trust in national institutions and a stronger sense of stability. Many of these respondents referenced improvements in security and governance. Christian respondents, while also a small sample, tended to align more closely with Arab respondents in their expressions of institutional confidence, often associating it with safety and communal protection.

100. Across these religious and ethnic lines, trust appears to correlate with perceived inclusion in-or distance from-the centers of power in post-conflict Syria. Those who feel represented or protected by the state report confidence in justice institutions; those who remain politically marginalised or geographically isolated express deep skepticism.

101. These findings reveal that perceptions of justice in Syria are shaped as much by social position and identity as by experience of the conflict itself. Gender, education, economic standing, religion, and ethnicity each influence how Syrians define justice, who they trust to deliver it, and what they expect from the transitional period. For transitional justice to gain legitimacy, it must therefore be both inclusive and differentiated-acknowledging that justice means different things to different Syrians. Processes that fail to engage women, marginalised ethnic groups, or the highly educated risk reproducing old hierarchies of exclusion and mistrust. Building confidence across these divides will require visible reforms in national institutions, open channels of communication with all communities, and a sustained commitment to fairness and representation as Syria moves forward.



# Conclusion

102. This research provides a rare window into how Syrians themselves define justice, how they view the institutions responsible for delivering it, and what they expect from any transitional justice process. It makes one thing unmistakably clear: Syrians are not asking for a narrow, technical exercise of transitional justice. They are demanding transformative justice – a form of justice that both confronts past harms and fundamentally reshapes the systems that enabled them. Syrians consistently tied justice to the restoration of rights, equality before the law, protection from arbitrary power, and the rebuilding of institutions that serve the public rather than control it. Accountability and truth-seeking are seen as essential, not as ends in themselves, but as foundations for a different kind of future.

103. Public trust in emerging justice institutions is real but fragile. Respondents expressed confidence in courts and legal actors not because they have witnessed systemic reform, but because they believe that the political transition creates the possibility of reform. This trust therefore reflects political hope rather than demonstrated institutional strength. The implication for transitional authorities is clear: unless new institutions rapidly prove themselves fair, transparent, and independent, this early trust may erode as quickly as it appeared.



104. Equally, Syrians’ demand for justice is not passive – they expect to participate in shaping the process. Survivor participation emerged as one of the strongest and most consistent findings across the survey. For many, being able to testify, to be informed, and to have a voice in decision-making is part of what makes justice just. Yet the data also shows that not all groups feel equally safe or included: for Kurdish respondents, for example, protection guarantees ranked as the most important mechanism. Justice that excludes or endangers some communities cannot build legitimacy.

105. For Syria’s transitional authorities and their international partners, the task is therefore not simply to prosecute perpetrators, compensate victims, or discover the fate of the disappeared – though all of these are essential. It is to build a system in which the state is accountable to its citizens, rights are protected by law, and power cannot again be used to harm with impunity. Syrians are not asking merely to close the chapter on the past. They are asking to rewrite the rules of the future.



## Recommendations

The following recommendations are derived directly from these findings and are intended to support national and international actors in shaping an inclusive, legitimate, and effective transitional justice process.

### FOR THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

#### National Authority on Transitional Justice (NATJ)

- In light of Syrians' strong preference for a process that changes systems, not only punishes individuals, the NATJ should develop and publish a National Transformative Justice Strategy with time-bound priorities across accountability, reparations, truth, and non-recurrence. This strategy should be developed through broad public consultation, with deliberate outreach to low-trust areas and communities.
- Because Syrians see accountability as the foundation for a different future, not only punishment for the past, the transitional justice process must include a specialised, independent court for grave crimes with a mandate to prosecute those most responsible for systematic violations. The court must operate transparently, with public case-selection criteria and regular reporting on progress. Accountability must be linked to deeper institutional change: prosecutions should expose how abuses were enabled and identify the reforms needed to dismantle the structures of repression, not simply convict individuals.
- Because Syrians define justice as the restoration of rights and the rebuilding of dignity, the NATJ should develop a transformative reparations programme that combines financial compensation, property restitution, and access to essential services (housing, healthcare, education, and livelihoods). The programme must prioritise displaced families and female-headed households – not

simply to repair individual harm, but to reduce the structural inequalities that made certain groups (particularly women) more vulnerable in the first place. Reparations should be designed to redistribute access to resources, restore agency, and enable full participation in the country's reconstruction.

- Given the overwhelming view that survivor participation is central to achieving justice, the NATJ should make participation a formal design principle. Standing survivor advisory panels should be established in every governorate, with guaranteed representation of victims on reparations and truth-telling committees. Participation should include structured opportunities to provide testimony, with robust procedural and psychosocial safeguards to protect confidentiality, dignity, and wellbeing, including witness protection, informed consent processes, and access to independent legal and psychosocial support.
- To ensure broad-based participation, the process must be survivor-centred and trauma-informed, with deliberate efforts to remove barriers to access. This includes providing clear information in accessible language, outreach to rural and low-trust communities, safe reporting channels, mobile consultation teams, and dedicated support for survivors of detention, sexual and gender-based violence, and enforced disappearance. The NATJ should also develop and implement a comprehensive gender strategy, ensuring women's equal participation and leadership, gender-sensitive procedures, and measures that recognise and address structural inequalities that make women and girls more vulnerable to violence and exclusion.



- Given the widespread rejection of blanket amnesties, the NATJ should issue a narrowly tailored amnesty framework limited to low-level offenders without involvement in serious crimes, with victim consultation. All amnesties should be subject to judicial review.

- In light of respondents' emphasis on fair trials and rights guarantees, the NATJ should issue binding fair-trial directives for transitional justice cases, including access to counsel from first appearance, exclusion of evidence obtained through torture, and protection for victims and witnesses.

#### Ministry of Justice and Supreme Judicial Council

- Given persistent concerns about political influence and bias in the judiciary, the Ministry should implement a transparent judicial vetting and appointment process with clear, public criteria, ensuring gender and regional representation among judges and prosecutors.
- Given Syrians' overwhelming demand for widespread accountability and rejection of amnesties, the Ministry of Justice and the Supreme Judicial Council must ensure that the national justice system has the capacity to support the work of the NATJ. This includes building specialised capacity for investigation, case preparation, and prosecution of conflict-related crimes.

#### People's Assembly and Legal Reform Commission

- Because Syrians expressed frustration with remnants of emergency-era law and executive overreach, the Assembly should repeal or sunset all

emergency and counterterrorism provisions that undermine judicial independence, and codify safeguards for prosecutorial and judicial impartiality.

- Given the central importance of reparations and restitution to perceptions of justice, the Assembly should pass a Property Restitution and Compensation Law that simplifies claims procedures, establishes alternative remedies where return is impossible, and prioritises displaced persons and vulnerable households.

#### Security Institutions

- Because protection guarantees are especially valued among communities with low trust and security concerns, the government should issue and enforce protection guarantees for witnesses, judges, lawyers, and victims.

### FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

#### Member States

- Because Syrians strongly favour a Syrian-led justice process, donors should align all funding with national institutional priorities – accountability, reparations, property claims, and court reform – while avoiding the creation of parallel structures.
- Given persistent regional distrust and gaps in legal access, donors should invest in justice-sector digitalisation, mobile legal clinics, and provincial legal aid networks, especially in under-served and minority-majority areas.





- Because women demonstrate high trust in institutions but remain underrepresented in leadership, donor programs should include measurable benchmarks for gender and minority inclusion in justice institutions, with public progress tracking.

#### UN entities (IILM, IIMP, OHCHR, etc.)

- Given Syrians' overwhelming desire for a Syrian-led justice process and low familiarity with international bodies, UN agencies should support – not substitute – national institutions. Agencies should sign formal Memoranda of Understanding with the national transitional justice authorities to define technical assistance parameters, information-sharing protocols, and data protection safeguards. Where national transitional authorities lack credibility amongst the population, UN entities should focus on direct technical support to and capacity building for communities trying to engage directly with transitional justice processes.
- In light of the fragile but growing trust in the Syrian justice system, the UN should prioritise embedding technical experts within Syrian institutions rather than launching externally run mechanisms. Advisors in case management, forensic documentation, evidence handling, and psychosocial support should work alongside Syrian staff, with clear timelines for full national takeover.

#### International Courts and Mechanisms (ICC, ICJ, Col, IILM)

- Given the widespread lack of understanding of international justice mechanisms, these bodies

should launch Arabic-language outreach explaining their mandates, procedures, and limits through radio, social media, and community forums, particularly targeting areas outside of Damascus and female audiences.

## FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

#### Legal Aid Organisations and Bar Associations

*Because Syrians emphasise that justice is a process, not only an outcome, legal aid actors should move beyond case-by-case assistance and act as structural enablers of participation by*

- Democratising access to justice by running regular public information sessions – prioritising women, displaced persons, and communities with low trust – on how to submit claims, provide testimony, and access reparations under the NATJ and NAMP.
- Creating secure and confidential referral pathways that allow survivors to engage with justice institutions without fear of harm or retaliation.
- Providing independent moral and psychosocial support, recognising that participation often involves personal risk, social tension, or re-traumatisation.

#### Victim and Survivor Associations, Documentation Groups

*Given that Syrians see justice as transformation of power relationships, away from the state and toward the rights of those harmed, survivor-led organisations should:*

- Establish a national survivor-led alliance that enables victims to shape transitional justice design, monitoring, and implementation rather than merely being consulted.
- Standardise documentation practices, adopt consent-based and trauma-informed protocols, and ensure secure evidence-sharing with NATJ/NAMP, so that evidence collected by communities becomes admissible and actionable.

#### Women's Rights Organisations

*Because women described justice not only as accountability but as structural change, women's organisations should:*

- Partner with the NATJ and NAMP to design gender-sensitive reparations, reporting mechanisms, and participation pathways that address the inequalities that made women vulnerable to harm.
- Monitor women's representation and leadership in transitional justice bodies and publish regular accountability scorecards. Women's Rights Organisations

#### Community and Religious Leaders

*Because Syrians associate justice with a future based on equality and shared citizenship, community leaders should:*

- Facilitate dialogue and co-existence processes, complementing accountability efforts by preventing new cycles of exclusion or retaliation.
- Lead legal literacy campaigns – in accessible Arabic and Kurdish – explaining how to engage with NATJ and NAMP, targeting women, rural populations, and minority groups.

#### Independent Monitors and Networks

*Because trust in institutions is high but fragile – and based on political hope, not performance – independent monitors should:*

- Track whether institutions honour fair-trial standards, regional inclusion, and participation of victims and minorities.
- Publish periodic public scorecards that measure whether justice is becoming more equitable, transparent, and transformative over time.



# Annex I Survey Methodology

At the heart of this study lies a compound research question:

**What do Syrians think about the country’s justice system? What do justice and accountability mean, particularly within Syria’s transitional justice process, and how important are they for achieving a sustainable peace after the conflict?**

As Syria enters a transitional justice phase, rebuilding judicial institutions on foundations of trust, fairness, and impartiality is essential. Understanding public perceptions of justice and accountability is therefore a prerequisite for designing legitimate and effective transitional justice mechanisms.

From this central question, a series of focused inquiries were developed to explore Syrians’ experiences, perceptions, and expectations regarding justice. These sub-questions guided survey design and analysis:

- **Trust and functionality** – Do Syrians trust the current justice system?
- **Fair trial rights** – Are fair trial guarantees perceived as respected in Syrian courts?
- **Judicial integrity** – Are judges seen as competent, impartial, and just?
- **Access to justice** – Can Syrians obtain legal advice and representation they trust?
- **Institutional reform** – How can a new government, Ministry of Justice, and the National Commission for Transitional Justice build credibility and public confidence?
- **Role of civil society** – How can civil society organisations support justice processes and foster trust?
- **Definitions of justice** – What does “justice” mean to ordinary Syrians?
- **Reparations and redress** – What forms of reparation do survivors consider necessary to restore dignity and wholeness?
- **Inclusion of survivors** – How can survivors be reached and supported within the transitional justice process?
- **Accountability** – Who do Syrians believe bears responsibility for delivering justice?
- **Barriers to justice** – What obstacles prevent Syrians from accessing justice today?
- **International dimensions** – What roles do international courts and mechanisms, such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the International Criminal Court (ICC), the UN Commission of Inquiry for Syria (COI), and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), play in Syrians’ perceptions of justice?



By addressing these questions, the survey aims to generate a comprehensive understanding of Syrians’ perceptions of justice – including how they define it, where they place their trust, and what they believe must happen for true accountability and reconciliation to emerge. These insights are critical for civil society actors, transitional authorities, and international partners seeking to design justice processes that reflect Syrian realities and contribute to a sustainable and legitimate peace.

To answer the research question, quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a mixed-method survey delivered to the Syrian population. The survey was hosted on Kobo Toolbox, a secure data collection platform widely used in humanitarian and social research.

The survey had two sections. The first gathered demographic information to understand respondent profiles and enable comparison between groups. The second explored perceptions of justice in Syria through a mix of quantitative items and open-ended questions to capture nuanced views.

The target sample size was 1,000, and the final number of responses collected was 1,101. Once the survey closed, responses were translated from Arabic to English using DEEPL, with a sample being manually reviewed to ensure accuracy. Data was checked for missing values and inconsistencies, and translation and recoding processes were logged for traceability. Quantitative data was analysed using Microsoft Excel, while qualitative data was coded inductively to identify key themes emerging from respondents’ words. After completing the analysis, this report was developed to highlight and discuss the main findings and trends in the data.

## SURVEY CONSTRUCT

The survey began with basic instructions (Annex I), followed by 15 demographic questions designed to inform the analysis and identify correlations between responses and demographic factors. These were primarily closed-ended, though certain questions (e.g. “current location” and “family member detained”) allowed brief open-ended follow-ups. Respondents were also asked if they received assistance completing the survey and, if so, what form it took. The demographic questions are included in Annex II.

The substantive portion of the survey comprised 14 questions, structured to balance depth with manageability. This number was selected in line with survey best practice to encourage completion while capturing sufficient data to answer the research question. Of these:

- **Seven were fully closed-ended;**
- **Four were yes/no questions with open-ended follow-ups; and**
- **Three were fully open-ended.**

These substantive questions are listed in Annex II.

## DELIVERING THE SURVEY

The survey was delivered through Kobo Toolbox in both Arabic and English, allowing participation from respondents across linguistic backgrounds. While Arabic was the primary language, surveyors from local communities provided informal translation where needed to accommodate respondents who spoke other local languages. Kobo Toolbox’s offline functionality allowed data to be collected even in areas with limited internet access.



LAW, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), and the Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research (SCLSR) disseminated the survey through their networks, staff, and partner organisations. LAW's partners and lawyers collected responses in Damascus, Homs, Latakia, Idlib, and Aleppo. STJ focused on northeast Syria, including Hasakeh, Deir Ez Zor, and Raqqqa, while SCLSR extended outreach to Suweida, Dara'a, Latakia, and rural Damascus. In all cases, surveyors were instructed to maintain objectivity, providing clarification only when necessary and avoiding any influence on responses.

A pilot survey with 50 respondents was conducted in July 2025 to test the design and flow. Based on feedback, minor adjustments were made to improve question clarity and accessibility.

## ANALYSING THE SURVEY

The analysis combined quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data was analysed descriptively, while qualitative data was examined through an inductive coding process. Each open-ended response was reviewed and assigned one or more open codes representing key ideas. Similar codes were grouped into thematic categories compiled in a codebook (Annex IV). This approach ensured that insights emerged directly from respondents' words, allowing the data to reflect Syrian perspectives without imposing external assumptions.

The combined dataset was then analysed against demographic variables to identify trends and variations across regions, genders, and other subgroups. Given the total sample size of 1,101 respondents, findings were considered reliable when a subgroup comprised at least 5% (approximately 55 respondents) of the total. Subgroups representing fewer than 3%

(about 33 respondents) were treated as indicative only.

## ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Several factors may have influenced the results. The distribution of the survey through local networks may have introduced selection bias, though this was mitigated by targeted outreach and random street sampling in Homs and Damascus. Digital access requirements limited participation to those with access to a phone, tablet, or computer, though Kobo Toolbox's offline mode expanded reach in low-connectivity areas.

The complexity of some questions and the diversity of educational backgrounds may have affected comprehension. Respondents could seek neutral assistance from surveyors, and the survey included a question to capture whether assistance was provided.

Translation between Arabic and English introduced the potential for subtle shifts in meaning, although translations were manually verified to preserve accuracy. Similarly, respondents whose first language was not Arabic or English may have faced challenges in expressing nuanced views.

Finally, the survey reflects perceptions during a specific period – between July and September 2025 – and therefore represents a snapshot in time. Opinions on justice and accountability are likely to evolve as Syria's transition continues.



# Annex II Survey Instructions

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this survey. The survey is made up of two sets of questions. The first are basic demographic questions about you. The second are questions to understand your opinions and feelings about certain issues related to Syria's post-Assad government and perceptions on justice.

Please answer all questions to the best of your knowledge and ability. Please do not seek outside help to complete the survey. If you require help, please seek assistance only from the person that has given you the survey. If you do not understand a question, please answer it to the best of your understanding. If you still require assistance in understanding, please seek it only from the person that has given you the survey.

Once you begin the survey, you must answer every question. There are 18 demographic questions and 14 substantive questions. You cannot pause the survey. You cannot save your answers, close the survey, and return to the survey. So, please allot enough time to complete the survey in whole before you begin.

The survey is produced using software provided by "Kobo Toolbox." Kobo Toolbox is a widely used service for online polling that ensures data collection meets industry regulations and data privacy and security standards. Legal Action Worldwide will have access to the data collected in the survey, but identifying information such as name, birthday, and contact information will not be asked for, recorded, or stored. The survey is completely anonymous and confidential. The results of the survey will inform us about future private and public work products created by Legal Action Worldwide. There will be a space at the end of the survey to include further comments and questions if you have any.





# Annex III Survey Questionnaire

## DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- **Age?**
  - > Dropdown of numbers
- **Did you receive any help with this survey?**
  - > Did someone ask you the questions; did someone help you understand a question or several questions; did someone provide you with a phone, internet, or laptop to complete this survey; did someone help you translate questions or answers; none of the above
- **Gender?**
  - Male; female; other
- **Religion?**
  - > Muslim Sunni; Muslim Shi'a; Alawite; Druze; Christian; Yazidi; Other
- **Ethnic identity?**
  - > Arab; Yazidi; Kurdish; Turkmen; Assyrian; Armenia; Circassian; other
- **Current location (based on province with an open answer box for exact location)?**
  - > Aleppo; Raqqqa; Al Hasakah; Deir Ez Zor; Homs; Hama; Idlib; Latakia; Tartus; Damascus; Rif Dimashq; Quneitra; Dara'a; As-Suwayda
- **Displacement status?**
  - > Temporarily displaced; permanently displaced; was displaced but returned home; not displaced.
- **Employment status?**
  - > Fully employed; part-time employed; day worker; unemployed
- **Self-identifying socio-economic status?**
  - > Wealthy; high middle income; middle income; lower middle income; low income; no income
- **Highest level of education achieved?**
  - > Post-graduate degree; graduate degree; university degree; secondary school completion; primary school completion; none.
- **Family status?**
  - > Single; married with children; married without children; single with children
- **Have you ever been held in detention in Syria?**
  - > Yes, before March 2011; yes, after March 2011; no
- **Have you had an immediate family member (mother, father, son, daughter, brother, or sister) detained in Syria?**
  - > Yes, before March 2011; yes, after March 2011; no



- **Do you have an immediate family member (mother, father, son, daughter, brother, or sister) who is currently disappeared?**
  - > Yes, disappeared before 2011; yes, disappeared after 2011; no
- **Have you ever been tried in a criminal legal action in Syria?**
  - > Yes, before March 2011; yes, after March 2011; no
- **Have you ever been a part of a civil lawsuit in Syria?**
  - > Yes, before March 2011; yes, after March 2011; no

## PERCEPTIONS OF JUSTICE

1. **Do you feel confident about the current situation in Syria?**
  - a. Closed: very confident, confident, neutral, not confident, not confident at all
  - b. Follow up (required): explain more
2. **Do you trust the Syrian justice system (judges, judicial clerks, prosecutors, lawyers, etc.) to be impartial and independent, treating all people equally?**
  - a. Closed: strongly trust, trust, neutral, distrust, strongly distrust
  - b. Follow up (required): explain more
3. **Do you believe judgements from Syrian courts are credible and should be followed?**
  - a. Closed: yes or no
  - b. Follow up (required): if your answer is 'no,' why?
4. **Do you feel you have access to legal assistance that you can trust?**
  - a. Closed: yes or no
  - b. Follow up (required): if your answer is 'no,' why?
5. **Is it necessary to bring people that committed crimes during the war to justice for Syria to be at peace?**
  - a. Closed: yes or no
  - b. Follow up (required): if your answer is 'yes,' what 'justice' is required?
6. **What does 'justice' mean to you?**
  - a. Open answer
7. **Who is responsible for delivering justice?**
  - a. Open answer
8. **Will accountability for crimes committed during the conflict be achieved?**
  - a. Closed: very likely, likely, unsure, unlikely, very unlikely



**9. Do you support amnesty for individuals involved in the Assad-led government?**

- a. Closed: yes or no
- b. Follow up (required): if your answer is 'yes,' who should receive amnesty?

**10. What would you like to see happen for justice to be achieved? (Rank in order of priority)**

- a. Closed answer with numbered boxes: punishment of perpetrators, financial compensation, restoration of property, public apologies, rebuilding of infrastructure destroyed during the war, public memorialization, protection guarantees.

**11. How important is it for victims to participate in processes for achieving justice?**

- a. Closed: very important, important, unsure, somewhat important, not important

**12. How important is it for a historical record of the conflict, including the objective truth about certain incidents, to be publicly accessible?**

- a. Closed: very important, important, unsure, somewhat important, not important

**13. Are you familiar with any of the following?**

- a. Closed answer with tick boxes: International Court of Justice; International Criminal Court; UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria; the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism for Syria; the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria; none of the above

**14. What role do you think international institutions should have, if any, in achieving justice in Syria?**

- a. Open answer

**15. Would you like to add any further comments?**

- a. Open answer





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