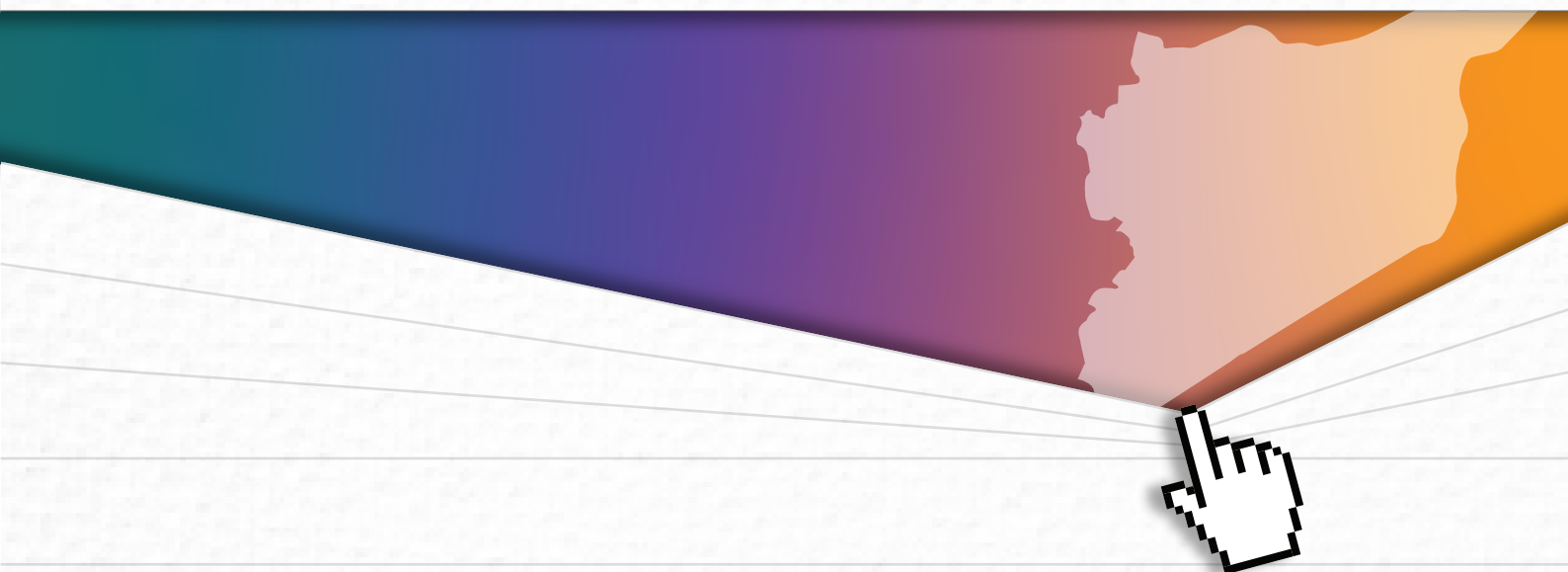


Political Perspectives of Young Syrians

An analysis of the current political situation with a focus on minority rights,
decentralisation and democratisation



2025
December

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European Center for Kurdish Studies



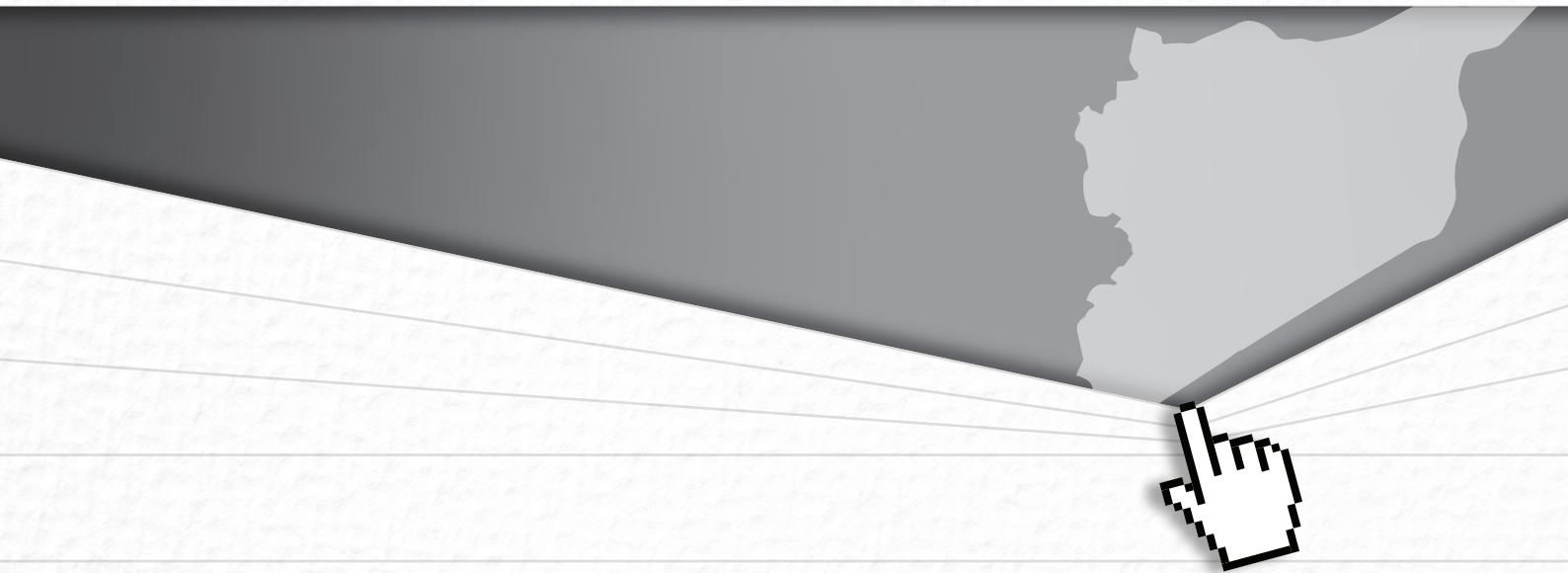
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„YES for Peace“ is supported with German Federal Foreign Office's funds by
ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) via zivik Funding Programme.



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Introduction

At the end of 2024, *Hayat Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS) and its allies first conquered Aleppo and within a few days all the major cities of Syria, including Damascus. Most Syrians were hopeful at first: a dictatorship was overthrown that had brought destruction, war and suffering to the country and its people for decades.

However, many Syrians, especially members of minorities, look with increasing scepticism at the political development. This is due to the formation of a transitional government, which was perceived by many as less inclusive, to the adoption of a constitutional declaration, which endows the transitional president with considerable power and largely lacks a separation of powers, as well as to the participation of members of the HTS in the attacks against Alawites and Druze in the first half of 2025 (Savelsberg et al., 2025: 10).

One group that was little noticed until the fall of the regime is young Syrians. Young people were not adequately represented in the *Syrian Constitutional Committee*, which the United Nations established in 2018 to develop a new Syrian constitution (Savelsberg and Hajo, 2024: 10–11). The average age of the members was between 50 and 60 years, none of the members was under 30 years old (Barisch and El-Gamal, 2021: 18). This is also problematic because Syria is a young country: *The World Population Review* of 2025 names the median age of the female Syrian population at 25.24 years and the male Syrian population at 24.39 (World Population Review, 2025). Although young people started the Syrian revolution and must live the longest with agreed peace agreements, they were hardly involved in the political process until December 2024. To this day, we therefore know relatively little about their wishes and ideas about the future of Syria.

This study provides a first overview of how Syrians aged 20 to 35 assess the political situation in Syria. Which topics are particularly important to them? What are their positions on participation, decentralisation, separation of powers and minority rights? Do they feel represented by the transitional government? In particular, we are also interested in the question of whether there are and, if so, what differences

there are between young people of different ethnicities and denominations.

Our survey does not claim to formulate a representative picture of the opinions of young Syrians in Syria. Rather, it aims to identify potentially groundbreaking trends and structures on which future studies can be built.

Perceptions during the war

The war in Syria has taken away the youth of an entire generation of Syrians. Young people who are now between 20 and 35 years old were six to 21 years old at the beginning of the war in 2011. Milestones on the way to adulthood such as graduating from school, starting a career or starting a family were made more difficult by destruction, death, flight, financial hardship and other consequences of the war. A 2021 study by the International Red Cross, *A Decade of Loss: Syria's Youth After Ten Years of Crisis* (ICRC, 2021), illustrates the impact of the war on the young generation. A survey of 1,400 Syrians aged 18 to 25, of whom 800 lived in Syria, 400 in Lebanon and 200 in Germany, shows that eight out of ten respondents experienced times when they had no or very limited access to basic needs (ICRC, 2021: 4). Two-thirds were forced to leave their homeland. More than half had to interrupt their education. One in seven young people was wounded during the war (ICRC, 2021: 4).

The study *Youth Empowerment in Northern Syria – Field Research*, published in 2019, carried out by the non-governmental organisation *Local Development Organisation* (LDO) active in northern Syria, dealt with political and civil society participation of young people. Interviews with 16 experts from civil society organisations show that limited knowledge of political rights and duties, as well as the influence of extremist groups, are reasons for low political awareness and political participation (Local Development Organisation, 2019: 11–12). A lack of *governance* within civil society organisations, a lack of diversity, and the ineffectiveness of trade unions were reasons why “political knowledge and practices are becoming less and less important”. (Local Development Organisation, 2019: 12) According to the study, difficult economic conditions also lead to low political participation. Young people are therefore more likely to be preoccupied with earning a living than to get involved politically or socially at the municipal level. (Local Development Organisation, 2019: 11)

A 2019 *Mercy Corps study, Adolescence Lost: Forced Adulthood and a Fragile Future for Syria's Next Generation*, provides insights into how Syrian identity has been affected by the war. Based on focus group interviews with 227 Syrian youth aged 14–19 from five Syrian provinces – Aleppo, Hasaka, Hama, Homs, and Idlib – it finds that despite the war, young people identify with their country (Chen et al., 2019: 7). Never-

theless, a small number of young people express feeling less “Syrian” than before or being frustrated with how “being Syrian” was perceived by the outside world during the war. This leads to shame and sadness. (Chen et al., 2019: 25)

Another study, *Syrians’ Perceptions on the Concept and Implementation of Decentralisation by the NGO The Day After*, examines Syrians’ views on the concept of decentralisation and how decentralisation could affect politics, society and governance in the future. Of 2,500 respondents, 23.3% were between 18 and 25 and 40% were between 26 and 39 years old (The Day After, 2022: 6). However, the responses of young people are not explicitly disclosed. However, unlike many others, the study differentiates between Arab and Kurdish respondents in many places.

The *Day After* concludes that Syrians, regardless of their ethnic and religious identity or where they live, strongly support the introduction of decentralisation in Syria and its political and social impact on post-war governance. There is also agreement that decentralisation should not be interpreted narrowly. In addition to its role in administration and services, it is considered essential for facilitating a democratic transition, broader political representation and social participation, as well as supporting stabilisation and peacebuilding. (The Day After, 2022: 63) Below, we will compare individual findings of the study with our results.

Perceptions after the fall of the regime

Between July and August 2025, the *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies* and the *Arab Center for Contemporary Syria Studies* surveyed 3,690 Syrians on economic, social, and political issues in a nationwide study. The results were published in September 2025. The answers do not distinguish between respondents of different age cohorts. The study also does not reveal any differentiations regarding different ethnic origins, religious affiliations or gender.

Overall, 80% of respondents were interested in political issues; only 18% said they had no interest in politics at all (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025: paragraph 2). While 47% said that the government treats all Syrians equally in law, 12% felt that there is no such thing as equal legal treatment. Another 30% felt that the government favours certain groups. (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025: Figure 2b). More than half of the respondents agreed that the government had managed to respect human rights, encourage citizens to participate in political dialogue, guarantee freedom of expression and respect the right to freedom of assembly. Conversely, the majority saw government failures in ensuring political pluralism, in eliminating discrimination among citizens, and in holding senior government officials accountable. (Arab

Center Washington DC, 2025: Figure 2f) Furthermore, 60% of respondents agreed that despite problems, democracy is better than other forms of government; 20% disagreed. (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025: Figure 3a)

Respondents took different positions on which factors are important for the formation of a national identity: 19% felt that the most important factor is a common Syrian culture, followed by the Arabic language (17%), life in Syria (10%), social and cultural diversity (9%) and Islam (8%). (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025: paragraph 4) In addition, 85% of respondents stated that “denominational rhetoric” was widespread. 84% believed that Syrians define themselves and others based on their denominational and religious affiliation (Figure 4b), with 42% believing that this attitude has increased compared to the previous year. (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025: Figure 4c) 83% of respondents felt that discrimination based on denomination and religion was widespread. (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025: Paragraph 4, Figures 4b and 4c)

The study does not ask to what extent discrimination based on ethnicity is widespread. However, with 74 to 78% agreeing, respondents said they do not mind if their neighbours are from regions other than their own, of a different religion or denomination, or of a different ethnic origin. A total of 13% of respondents stated that they did not want to live with people of other ethnic origins. (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025: Figure 4f)

A study by the Damascus-based non-governmental organisation ETANA from May 2025, *Public Opinion on Syria's Transition*, interviewed groups of 100 people from all 14 Syrian provinces, a total of 1,400 persons, on the transition process in Syria. A total of 40% of the respondents were between 18 and 30 years old – but only at one point is a distinction made between members of different age groups. On the other hand, a distinction is made between Sunnis (who account for 68% of all respondents) and members of religious and ethnic minorities. Here, Ismaelites, Yazidis, Alawites, Druze, Christians and Shiites are mentioned. Apart from the fact that it can be questioned to what extent ethnic and not exclusively religious minorities are listed here at all, the selection raises the question of why Kurds are not separately identified as the largest ethnic group beyond the Arab population group. Presumably, Sunni Kurds were subsumed under “Sunnis”. The study thus refrains from examining possible differences between Kurdish and Arab Sunnis.

Overall, it is striking that satisfaction with the transitional government is significantly higher among Sunnis than among the minority groups mentioned above. For example, about 87% of Sunni respondents are generally optimistic about the development in Syria, but only 45% of all other religious members. 86% of all Sunnis are sat-

isfied with the way Ahmed Al-Sharaa has managed the transition so far – but only 40% of all others. What is striking here is the fact that 76% of all people between the ages of 18 and 30 are satisfied, while the satisfaction scores of all other age groups are lower, i.e. between 65% and 69% – with 69% in the second youngest age cohort, respondents between the ages of 31 and 45. Furthermore, 81% of Sunnis believe that the transitional government represents their interests, but only 23% of the members of the other groups. 59% of the Sunnis surveyed also support the interim constitution – only 10% of the religious minorities listed. What is striking here in both groups is the high proportion (around 30% each) of people who say they do not know. When asked whether women’s rights are protected and supported by the new authorities, Sunnis and members of other religious groups are also far apart: 79% of Sunni respondents, but only 16% of respondents of all other religious groups answer this question with “yes”. (ETANA Syria, 2025)

As already mentioned, it would have been interesting to additionally distinguish between Arab and Kurdish Sunnis – the results of our study suggest that in particular Arab Sunnis are satisfied with the transitional government and political developments.

The methodology

To obtain the broadest possible opinion of young Syrians and to make access to the survey as low-threshold as possible, we shared our questionnaire in particular via social media channels. It was available online from August 13 to October 10, 2025. In addition, various Syrian non-governmental organizations that are part of the network of the European Center for Kurdish Studies shared the study with their respective multipliers. Participants from the ongoing ECSC *project YES for Peace – Young Engaged Syrians Making their Voices Heard* also helped spread the word.

In total, 430 people participated in the survey. However, part of the questionnaires could not be evaluated because either not all questions were answered, the participant was older than 35 or younger than 20 years old or was not residing in Syria. It also turned out that “Qualtrics”, the system used to set up the survey, was only accessible via VPN in Syria. This also applies to numerous other data collection tools. A significant part of the incomplete questionnaires is likely to be due to this problem. A total of 252 of the 430 questionnaires were considered.

The questionnaire (see Annex 1) covers four different core areas. In the first part, the participants are asked about their place of residence, their ethnic and religious affiliation as well as their professional background. In the second part, the study collects data on political participation: whether and where respondents are involved,

whether they feel represented by the transitional government and what the current social, cultural or political offer for participation opportunities looks like, depending on where they live. The third part of the survey asks positions on democratisation and power-sharing in general, while the fourth part focuses on women's rights, quota systems, language rights and federalism.

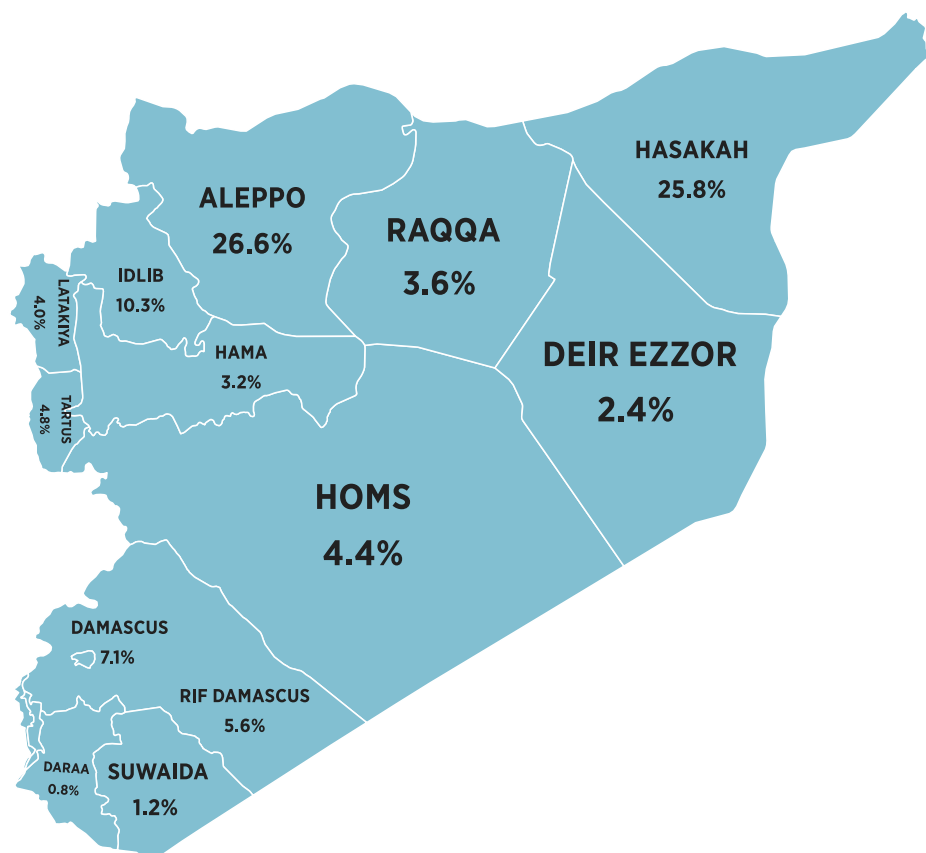
Our survey is not representative for various reasons: the total number of respondents is not sufficiently large, nor could its uniform distribution throughout Syria be guaranteed. The socio-economic background of the respondents was also not systematically surveyed. Against the background that the study was carried out almost exclusively online, only relatively educated people could be reached; the positions of (functional) illiterates were not reached.

Results

Part I – Background to the sample

A total of 252 Syrians between the ages of 20 and 35 completed the study, 43% of whom identified as male and 57% as female.

Their average age was 27.19 years.



26.6% of respondents were living in Aleppo, 25.8% in Hasaka, 10.3% in Idlib, 7.1% in Damascus, 5.6% in Rif Damascus, the area around the capital, 4.8% in Tartus, 4.4% in Homs, 4% in Latakia, 3.6% in Raqqa, 3.2% in Hama, 2.4% in Deir Ezzor, 1.2% in Suwaida and 0.8% in Daraa at the time of the survey.

With 56%, the majority of all respondents are of Arab descent, followed by 17.5% persons of Assyrian origin, 13.5% persons of Kurdish origin and 1.2% persons of Turkmen origin. 7.5% stated a different ethnic origin and 9.9% stated that their ethnic origin was not important to them. Overall, Assyrians are thus significantly overrepresented in the survey.

90.1% of all respondents identify as Syrian, 2% say they do not identify as Syrian, 1.6% do not know how they identify, and for 6.3%, national identity does not matter.

In terms of religion, the majority profess Sunni Islam (58.7%), followed by 19% Christians and 11.5% Alawites. 6.7% state that religion is not important to them and 2.4% mention other denominations. 0.7% declare to be atheists, and 0.4% identify as Druze.

Part II – Political Participation

Youth organisations

A clear majority of 69.4% of respondents say they have access to youth organisations in their environment. It is striking that, in Aleppo, 86.6% of respondents confirm this access, while in Hasaka, only 66.2% do.

In comparison, the access numbers for Damascus are relatively low: although they would rather expect good coverage by youth services due to the urban infrastructure, only 50% of respondents in the capital state that they have access to youth organizations.

Young People

When asked in which areas more young people should be represented, the education sector receives the most support with 57.1%, followed by local political institutions with 51.2%. Overall, 47.6% of respondents want more young people in ministries, 37.7% in parliament, and 37.3% in international diplomacy. The desire for young people in advisory committees is confirmed by 28.2% of respondents, and 19.4% of all respondents want young people in top positions of political parties.

Minimum age of ministers and deputies

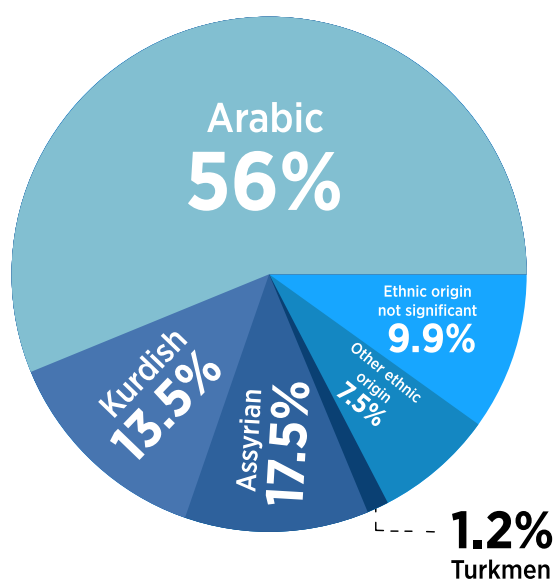
A majority of 62.3% believe that the legal minimum age of ministers or deputies should be 30 years. Only 20.2% opt for a minimum age of 40 and 15.9% for a minimum age of 21.

Political representation and participation

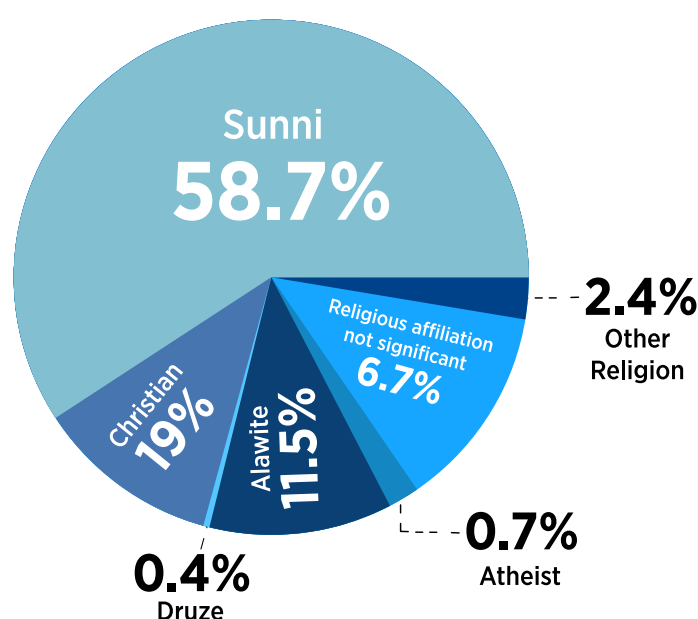
The respondents' assessment of the extent to which they feel represented by the current government results in an average score of 2.27 on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (good). Only 15.5% of all respondents feel themselves well or very well represented.

42.5% agree that young people are involved in political decision-making or can be-

Ethnic origin of participants



Religious affiliation of the participants



come politically engaged at the local level; 57.5% disagree.

The provinces where most young people are involved in political decision-making or engage at the local level are Idlib (69.2%) and Aleppo (49.3%). The figures are 44.4% for Damascus and 27.7% for Hasakah.

Although only 37.7% of all respondents are currently politically engaged, 73.4% say they *would* like to be politically engaged. 28.2% of respondents are not interested in political work.

Overall, 38.1% of respondents are potentially interested in engagement in education and women's rights, followed by 32.1% in business and job creation. 23.4% each are interested in equality and inclusion, and 22.6% in minority rights and culture. 21.8% are interested in health, 8.7% in climate change and sustainability, 7.9% in housing creation and 7.1% in finance.

PART III – Political positions on democratic principles

Need for change

Regarding the intended changes in Syria, 62.7% consider economic stability and 61.9% the reconstruction of schools and universities to be particularly important. This is followed by the expansion of training opportunities for young people (50.4%), the protection of minority rights and cultural diversity (41.3%), the promotion of women's rights (28.6%), the political participation of young people (26.6%) and an increased commitment to mental health (25%). 22.2% are in favour of decentralizing political power, while 15.1% say creating more housing is a priority.

Importance of Fundamental Principles of Democracy

On a scale of 1 (unimportant) to 5 (very important), respondents rate the anchoring of human rights in the constitution by an average of 4.68. The importance of free and democratic elections is rated at an average of 4.35, and that of the separation of powers at an average of 3.81.

Political institutions

Regarding the question of which institutions should be strengthened, 54.4% of respondents see a strong need in the government, 53.6% in the media, 47.2% in the Constitutional Court and 42.9% in parliament.

The army (38.5%), the police (30.6%) as well as political parties and the office of the President receive comparatively fewer votes. These institutions should be strengthened, according to 26.5% of respondents.

Part IV – Political positions on diversity

Challenges for women

On a scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good), respondents rated the political representation of women in Syria with an average score of 2.72.

The question of the biggest challenges facing women in Syria – up to three options could be selected – yielded the following results:

- 52.7% – Lack of representation of women in management positions
- 49.1% – Violence and insecurity
- 48.5% – Social and cultural pressure from family members
- 43.8% – Religious laws
- 43.0% – Gender discrimination in the workplace
- 28.2% – Lack of representation in politics and media
- 25.6% – Limited access to education
- 22.8% – Health and Reproductive Rights

Quota

Regarding the question of whether Syrian government institutions should introduce a quota system for young people, women, and minorities (multiple answers possible), 44.4% of respondents opt for a quota system for women. 35.7% say they have no opinion ("I don't know"). 33.3% support a quota system for young people and 32.9% for minorities. 7.5% completely reject a quota system.

Challenges for minorities

55.9% of all respondents consider the lack of minority presence in political institutions to be the most significant challenge. In second place is everyday discrimination with 46.1%, followed by the unequal distribution of resources, which is considered a challenge by 43.5%. 32.4% of respondents see the low protection of language rights, such as the lack of teaching in the mother tongue, as a problem, and 9% criticize a lack of places of worship.

Language rights for minorities

Overall, 75% of all participants voted for Syrian schools to offer lessons in more than one language in regions where there are a significant number of people whose native language is not Arabic (such as Kurds, Assyrians, Turkmen). The remaining 25% are against it.

Furthermore, 77.8% favour offering public services in additional languages to Arabic in these regions. 20.6% are against it.

Naming Syria

The question of which official name Syria should bear results in relatively balanced opinions. 45.2% prefer the name "Syrian Arab Republic" and 42.5% vote for "Syrian Republic". There are 5.2% abstentions, and 6% propose alternatives such as "Syria".

Decentralisation

Participants were asked about the consequences of potential decentralisation in Syria. It turned out that:

- 63.1% see decentralisation as a measure to promote peace,
- 46% combine decentralisation with a fairer distribution of resources,

- 43.3% believe that decentralisation contributes to the fight against corruption,
- 41.7% believe that decentralisation strengthens social inclusion,
- 23% express concern that decentralisation could lead to a decline in administration,
- 22.2% see decentralisation as an opportunity for more democratisation,
- 15.9% fear that decentralisation could favour separatist tendencies.

Federalism

Participants were also asked if minorities such as Kurds, Druze, or Alawites should have the opportunity to live in a self-governing area. 41.3% of respondents support this, 31.7% reject it, and 26.6% are undecided.

Regarding the differences between provinces, 28.4% of participants in Aleppo and 19.2% in Idlib support federalism. In Hasaka, on the other hand, 58.5% and in Tartus 100% of respondents are in favour of federalism.

Comparing individual components

Due to the low participation of Armenian and Turkmen Syrians, only comparisons among Arab, Kurdish and Assyrian respondents are drawn in the following part. These together account for 86.9% of all participants in the study.

Political involvement

Currently, 42.6% of Arab, 38.2% of Kurdish, and 20.5% of Assyrian participants are politically engaged. People are most often involved in Idlib (69.2%) and Aleppo (49.3%). In addition, 83.7% of Arab, 85.3% of Kurdish and 34.1% of Assyrian participants say they want to get involved in politics (in the future).

The main areas of interest in terms of political engagement differ little across ethnic groups. Women's rights are most frequently mentioned by respondents of all three groups. For the Arab and Kurdish participants, education is another central issue, while culture plays an important role for the Assyrian respondents. For the Kurdish respondents, minority rights are in third place, and for the Arab respondents, economy and employment opportunities are in third place.

Political Representation

Participants feel, on average, rather badly represented by the current government, with major differences between ethnicities. For example, 84.6% of those who feel “good” and “very good” are Arabs.

At the same time, of those Arabs, only 23.4% of respondents feel well to very well represented, as well as 2.9% of Kurdish and 4.5% of Assyrian respondents. “Poorly” or “very poorly” represented (≤ 2): 50.4% of Arab, 85.3% of Kurdish, and 84.1% of Assyrian respondents. Over 90% of Arab respondents who feel well or very well represented are Sunnis.

Diversity within the government

Just under half of all respondents (45.5%) rank the representation of people of different ages, genders and ethnicities in the government with a ≤ 2 , i.e. poor to very poor. A total of 27.7% of all Arab, 64.7% of all Kurdish and 63.6% of all Assyrian respondents state this.

The diversity within the government is rated as good to very good (≥ 4) by 31.9% of Arab, 11.8% of Kurdish and only 6.8% of Assyrian respondents.

Need for change

Members of all components agree that the biggest changes are necessary in the areas of economic stability and reconstruction of schools and universities. More economic stability is essential for 46.1% of the Arab, 64.7% of the Kurdish and 70.5% of the Assyrian respondents, while the reconstruction of schools and universities is essential for 66% of the Arab, 50% of the Kurdish and 61.4% of the Assyrian respondents.

Among the Arab participants, improvements in vocational training for young people are also a high priority, while for Kurdish and Assyrian participants, improvements in the legal situation for minorities and the protection of cultural diversity are essential. Among the Kurds, a large proportion (44.1%) are also in favour of decentralising power.

Importance of Fundamental Principles of Democracy

Democratic principles such as elections, separation of powers and human rights are often referred to as “important” or “very important” by members of all components

(4 and 5 on a scale of 1–5). Specifically, the following results are obtained:

Free and democratic elections are “important” or “very important” for

- 77.3% of Arab,
- 79.4% of Kurdish and
- 86.4% of Assyrian respondents.

Separation of powers is ‘important’ or ‘very important’ for

- 53.9% of Arab,
- 70.6% of Kurdish and
- 50% of Assyrian respondents

Considering the enshrining of human rights in the Constitution as “important” or “very important”

- 92.2% of Arab,
- 82.4% of Kurdish and
- 95.5% of Assyrian respondents.

In summary, it can be said that the anchoring of human rights is particularly important for members of all three groups. This is not surprising given the massive human rights violations under the Baath regime.

Looking at religious categories, it is striking that with 86%, Alawites are the ones who care most about the separation of powers. This is the case for 53% of Christians and 53% of Sunnis.

Political institutions

Around half of all respondents (54.4%) are in favour of strengthening the government. The situation is similar in the three subgroups: 57.4% of Arab, 56.8% of Assyrian and 50% of Kurdish respondents vote in favour of strengthening the government.

Around 53.6% of respondents consider strengthening the media to be essential. Among Arab respondents, 44.7%, among Kurds 73.5%, and among Assyrians 65.9%

The fewest number of participants wants to strengthen the presidency: 26.5%. Within the Arab group, it is 32.6%, among Assyrians 27.3%, and among Kurds only 5.9%.

Regarding the question of which institutions should be strengthened, 54.4% of respondents prioritise the government, 53.6% the media, 47.2% the Constitutional Court and 42.9% parliament.

The army (38.5%), the police (30.6%) as well as political parties and the office of the president receive comparatively fewer replies. These institutions should be strengthened, according to 26.5% of respondents.

Women 's rights

In response to the question of how well women are represented politically in Syria, 34.5% of all participants indicate "bad", i.e. they rate the situation on a scale of 1–5 (very bad – very good) with an average of 2.

While there is a relatively even distribution of positions among Arab respondents when it comes to assessing the political representation of women, Kurds and Assyrians are more polarised:

39% of all Arabs, 76.5% of Kurds and 47.7% of Assyrians rate the political representation of women as "bad" to "very bad". On the other hand, 28.4% of Arab participants, 8.8% of Kurds and 15.9% of Assyrians rate it as "average". After all, 32.6% of Arab respondents, 14.7% of Kurdish and 34.1% of Assyrian participants rated the representation of women as "good" to "very good". Thus, Kurdish respondents rate the political representation of women in Syria the worst (76.5%), i.e. almost twice as many Kurds compared to Arab participants (39%) consider the political representation of women to be bad or very bad.

Challenges for women

Regarding the most important challenges for women in Syria, differences of opinion between ethnic groups are less evident. There is a consensus among Arab, Kurdish and Assyrian participants that the biggest challenge is the lack of representation of women in leadership positions.

All respondents also cited social and cultural pressure from the family and society as a challenge – 48.9% of Arab respondents, 47% of Kurdish respondents and 45.5% of Assyrians. At the same time, the number of Kurdish and Assyrian respondents who perceive religious laws as a challenge is significantly higher at 64.7% and 52.3%, re-

spectively, than that of Arab respondents (33.3%).

Quota

Quotas for the participation of women are desirable

- 39% of Arab,
- 67.6% of Kurdish and
- 36.4% of Assyrian participants.

Quotas for the participation of young people are favoured by

- 28.4% of Arab,
- 50% of Kurdish and
- 34.1% of Assyrian participants.

Holding quotas for minorities

- 17% of Arab,
- 61.8% of Kurds, and
- 38.6% of Assyrian participants.

Kurds are therefore most in favour of quotas in all categories. Among the Assyrians, about the same number of people – more than a third – support the different quota models, while there are clear differences among the Arab respondents: almost 40% support a women's quota, but only 17% support a quota for minorities.

Language rights for minorities

94.1% of Kurdish participants and 88.6% of Assyrian participants vote for teaching languages in addition to Arabic at schools in areas where a majority of the population speaks a mother tongue other than Arabic. Among Arab participants, 66% were in favour.

68.8% of Arab participants are in favour of providing public services in other languages in addition to Arabic in areas with linguistic minorities. It is 100% among Kurds and 84.1% among Assyrians.

Naming Syria

91.2% of respondents who chose “Syrian Arab Republic” as their preferred official name are Arab respondents, representing 73.8% of the total Arab respondents. Among the Kurdish respondents, no one chose this designation, among the Assyrians it was two people, as well as 5% of those who do not indicate their ethnic origin.

Decentralisation

63.5% of all respondents say that decentralisation is conducive to peace. Broken down by individual components, it is 59.6% of all Arab, 79.4% of all Kurdish, and 61.4% of all Assyrian participants.

22.6% of all Arab respondents believe that decentralisation leads to separatism. This opinion is shared by 8.8% of all Kurdish and by 6.8% of Assyrian respondents.

37.6% of Arab, 64.7% of Kurdish and 50% of Assyrian respondents state that decentralisation can lead to a fairer distribution of resources.

Federalism

27% of all Arab, 82.4% of Kurdish and 38.6% of Assyrian respondents state that minorities should have the opportunity to live in a self-governing region at their own request.

Regarding the members of different religions, 27.5% of Sunni, 29% of Christian and 100% of Alawite respondents are pro-federalism.

It is striking that almost 96% of Kurds living in Hasaka – 64.7% of the total number of Kurds surveyed – support federalism in Syria. In Aleppo, only 63.6% of the Kurds living there, i.e. 20.6% of the total Kurds surveyed, are in favour of federal structures.

Evaluation of results and outlook

The results of the study show, on the one hand, that young people share many positions regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliation. Thus, members of all components agree that the biggest changes are necessary in the areas of economic stability and reconstruction of schools and universities. Looking at the figures more closely, the approval rates are still quite different: 46.1% of the Arab, 64.7% of the Kurdish and 70.5% of the Assyrian respondents find economic stability essential, and the reconstruction of schools and universities essential for 66% of the Arab, 50% of

the Kurdish and 61.4% of the Assyrian respondents. It cannot be deduced from our study why the difference is so high, especially between Arab and Assyrian respondents, in terms of economic stability and reconstruction. It is conceivable that this is linked to socio-economic factors that were not collected as part of our investigation.

Similarities can also be found in areas that concern basic democratic values: approval values for democratic elections, separation of powers, and the anchoring of human rights in the constitution are never below 50% and reach up to 95.5% across all ethnic groups. Considering Syria's transformation into a democratic state, this value makes us optimistic. However, there are also differences here: 50% of Assyrian, 53.9% of Arab and 70.6% of Kurdish respondents find separation of powers "important" or "very important". This means we are dealing with differences of up to 20%. In the framework of the data collected in our study, it is not possible to explain these deviations.

At the same time, there are indications that the diversity of certain positions could be related to the ethnic, respectively confessional origin of the respondents. The study concludes that many young people do not feel well represented by the transitional government: only 15.5% of all respondents feel "well" or "very well" represented. Within the Arab respondents, this applies to 23.4% of all respondents, while only 2.9% of Kurdish and 4.5% of Assyrian respondents feel "well" or "very well" represented. 50.4% of Arab respondents, 85.3% of Kurdish respondents, and 84.1% of Assyrian respondents feel "poorly" to "very poorly" represented. Over 90% of Arab respondents who feel "well" or "very well" represented are Sunnis.

On the one hand, this result is alarming, because not even a quarter of the young respondents feel themselves well or very well represented. In this respect, our study contradicts the results of ETANA's May 2025 study cited above, which found significantly higher levels of satisfaction with the governance under Ahmed Al-Sharaa. Here, 86% of all Sunnis are satisfied with the way in which he has organised the transition phase so far – and at least 40% of all other people. In addition, the study points to particular satisfaction among young people: 76% of people between the ages of 18 and 30 are satisfied, while the satisfaction scores of all other age groups are lower. It is between 65% and 69% – with 69% in the second youngest age cohort, respondents between 31 and 45 years. There is an overlap with our study insofar as, according to ETANA, mainly Sunnis (81%) are of the opinion that the transitional government represents their interests, but only 23% of the members of the other groups

Both our study and ETANA's survey thus indicate that Arab respondents or Sunnis are significantly more satisfied with the transitional government than other groups. This could be related to the fact that a large part of the government members them-

selves belongs to this group or these groups. Other ethnic or religious groups are clearly underrepresented: there is only one Kurdish minister and one Arab female Christian within the government – Assyrians are not represented at all.

The results on granting language rights are also interesting: 94.1% of Kurdish participants and 88.6% of Assyrian participants vote for teaching languages in addition to Arabic at schools in areas where a majority of the population speaks a mother tongue other than Arabic. Among Arab participants, 66% opt for teaching in languages other than Arabic. Additionally, 100% of Kurds and 84.1% of Assyrians are in favour of providing public services in languages in addition to Arabic in areas with linguistic minorities. Among the Arab respondents, it is 68.8%. On the one hand, the differences here are considerable – it is hardly surprising that people who speak a family language other than Arabic attach particular importance to language rights. At the same time, two-thirds of all Arab respondents also vote in favour of granting language rights in regions with significant linguistic minorities, thus recognising language rights as legitimate, although they do not directly benefit from them.

This result is consistent with data collected by *The Day After* which presented the following statement: “The elected municipal councils (provinces, cities or municipalities) have the right to introduce at the local level, in addition to High Arabic, the official language of the state, languages that correspond to the ethnicity or nationality of the population of their administrative units”. With this statement, 19.8% of the Arab respondents “fully agree”, 50.7% agree, that is, here too, more than two thirds of the respondents support language rights for minorities. Among Kurds, it is 66.5% and 25.3% respectively (*The Day After*, 2022: 32). Considering another study based on a different sample, *The Day After* therefore concludes that “in Syria there is generally a willingness to accept other languages in addition to Arabic at the local level. This consent is not limited to non-Arab minorities but also includes a large number of Arabs living in different areas both inside and outside Syria.” (*The Day After*, 2022: 33)

Young Syrians are much more divided along ethnic lines when it comes to the question of whether minorities should have the opportunity to live in a self-governing region at their own request. 82.4% of Kurdish respondents but only 27.0% of all Arab and 38.6% of Assyrian respondents are positive about this idea. On the one hand, the high approval rate among the Kurdish population likely reflects the fact that autonomy demands have been represented within the Kurdish elite since the 1930s. In addition, the Kurdish population represents a relatively large group (estimates assume 10 to 15% of the total Syrian population) that lives relatively compactly in the Jazira and Kobanî as well as in Afrin, i.e., this group could benefit from one or more autonomous region(s). This does not apply to the significantly smaller Assyrian minority,

which is relatively dispersed. The exact reasons why Arab Syrians are sceptical of self-governing regions must be left open at this point. One concrete reason could be the bad experiences of the Arab population in the predominantly Arab areas in northeast Syria managed by the Kurdish-led SDF (*Syrian Democratic Forces*) until January 2026 (Savelsberg & Hajo 2026).

This scepticism about self-governing regions does not mean that Arab respondents fundamentally oppose decentralisation: 63.5% of all respondents say that decentralisation is conducive to peace. Broken down by individual components, it is 59.6% of all Arab, 79.4% of all Kurdish, and 61.4% of all Assyrian participants. Again, this agrees with the results of *The Day After* study: 77.5% of respondents agree (“I agree” or “I strongly agree”) with the statement “decentralisation plays a supporting role in reducing the severity of the conflict and in peace building at the local level”. According to *The Day After*, there are no significant differences here in terms of ethnic or denominational origin. (The Day After, 2022: 21–22)

Syrian youth is also clearly divided along ethnic markers regarding the name for Syria: 91.2% of respondents who choose “Syrian Arab Republic” as their official name are Arab, which corresponds to 73.8% of the total Arab participants. At the same time, none of the Kurdish respondents chooses this option. Why the alternative “Syrian Republic” is so unattractive for Arab respondents must be left open at this point. It becomes clear that Arab nationalist symbolism is also appreciated by those who do not question the multi-ethnic or diverse identity of Syria elsewhere.

Overall, the study makes it clear that differentiation based on ethnic and religious affiliation is important for identifying and explaining different political attitudes among young Syrians. The fear that this will lead to an emphasis on differences and thus to a division of society is as unfounded as it is counterproductive and unscientific. It is unfounded, as there are important similarities beyond national and denominational borders. And it is counterproductive, since ignoring differences along ethnic and denominational affiliations does not lead to their dissolution. On the contrary, if the differences are ignored, they cannot be addressed politically. It is then not possible to work out compromises that can have an inclusive effect. After all, such suppression would also be unscientific, as revealing findings would be subordinated to political motives. At the same time, additional differentiating features must be integrated into the evaluation: in addition to place of residence and gender, the socio-economic situation of the respondents must also be considered. Otherwise, there is a risk of “ethicising” or “confessionalising” positions that have other causes. Finally, it would be important to query political concepts more differentiated, or to define them more clearly to better grasp which ideas the respondents associate with the respective terminology. This is hardly possible as part of an online study – instead,

interviews should be conducted on site and by trained interviewers. In this sense, a representative youth study involving young men and women throughout Syria is still pending.

Appendix I: Questionnaire

Part I – Personal Information

1. Age
2. Gender
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other
3. Province
 - Damascus
 - Rif Dimashq
 - Quneitra
 - Daraa
 - As-Suwayda
 - Homs
 - Tartus
 - Latakia
 - Hama
 - Idlib
 - Aleppo
 - Raqqa
 - Deir ez-Zor
 - Al-Hasakah
 - Other [...]
4. Do you identify as Syrian?
 - Yes
 - No
 - I don't know
 - National identities are not important to me
5. With which ethnic group do you identify?
 - Arab

- Kurdish
- Assyrian
- Armenian
- Turkmen
- Ethnicity does not matter to me
- Other [....]

6. Please indicate your religious identity.

- Sunni
- Alawite
- Druze
- Christian
- Yezidi
- Atheist
- Religion doesn't matter to me
- Other [....]

7. What is your occupation?

Part II – Political Participation

8. Are there any specific youth organisations or initiatives in your community?

- Yes
- No

9. How would you rate the representation of social groups in the government in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, etc.? (Scale of 1–5)

1 = Government officials are not diverse at all

5 = Government officials are very diverse

10. Are you politically active in Syria? If so, in which areas?
(Multiple answers possible)

- Yes
- No

- Education
- Finance
- Culture
- Economy and employment
- Climate change and sustainability
- Health (especially mental health)
- Inclusion and equality
- Housing
- Women's rights
- Minority rights

**11. Where would you like to see greater representation of young people?
(Multiple answers possible)**

- Local political institutions
- Parliament
- Ministries
- Party leadership
- Education system
- Advisory bodies
- International diplomacy

12. In your opinion, what should be the minimum age for the office of minister or member of parliament?

- 18 years
- 21 years
- 30 years
- 40 years

**13. How well do you feel represented by the current government?
(Scale of 1–5)**

1 = I do not feel represented

5 = I feel very well represented

14. Are there representatives of your age group in your community who are involved in politics or decision-making processes?

- Yes
 - No
15. Do you feel that people in your age group are well represented in the new government?
- Yes
 - No
16. Would you like to get involved in politics? If so, on what issue? (Multiple answers allowed)
- Yes
 - No
 - Education
 - Finance
 - Culture
 - Economy and Employment
 - Climate Change and Sustainability
 - Health (especially mental health)
 - Inclusion and Equality
 - Housing
 - Women's Rights
 - Minority Rights

Part III – Political Stances on Democratic Principles

17. If you could decide on political changes, what would your priorities be? (Select three)
- Economic stability
 - Vocational training for youth
 - Political participation of young people
 - Promotion of mental health
 - Education: Reconstruction of schools and universities
 - Minority rights and protection of cultural diversity

- Women's rights
 - Housing development
 - Decentralisation of power
 - Other: [...]
18. How important are free and fair elections for a democratic Syria?
(Scale of 1–5)
- 1 = Not at all important
5 = Very important
19. How important is the separation of powers? (Scale of 1–5)
- 1 = Not at all important
5 = Very important
20. How important is it to enshrine human rights in the constitution?
(Scale of 1–5)
- 1 = Not at all important
5 = Very important
21. Which political institutions are particularly important and should be strengthened? (Multiple answers allowed)
- Parliament
 - President
 - Government
 - Constitutional Court
 - Police
 - Army
 - Political parties
 - Media

Part IV – Political Views on Diversity

22. Do you believe that women are well represented politically in Syria?
(Scale of 1–5)
- 1 = Not represented at all
5 = Very well represented

23. Where do you see challenges for women? (Multiple answers allowed)

- Gender inequality in the workplace (gender pay gap)
- Underrepresentation in leadership positions
- Violence and insecurity
- Access to education
- Health and reproductive rights
- Representation in politics and the media
- Social and/or cultural pressure from family members and friends
- Religiously influenced laws

24. Do you believe that Syrian government agencies need a quota system for young people, women, and minorities? (Multiple answers possible)

- Yes, for women
- Yes, for young people
- Yes, for minorities
- I don't know
- No

25. Where do you see problems regarding the rights of minorities in your place of residence? (Multiple answers possible)

- Daily discrimination against members of minority groups
- Unequal distribution of resources
- Underrepresentation in political institutions
- Lack of places of worship
- Lack of language rights (e.g., lack of instruction in the minority language in schools)

26. Do you believe that Syrian schools in regions where a significant number of members of minority groups with a native language other than Arabic (Kurds, Assyrians/Turkmens) live should offer instruction in more than one language?

- Yes
- No

27. Do you believe that the Syrian government should offer public services in additional languages in regions where a significant portion of the population belongs to linguistic minorities?
- Yes
 - No
28. Which name would you prefer as the official name for Syria?
- Syrian Arab Republic
 - Syrian Republic
 - Neither
 - I don't know
 - Other [...]
29. In your opinion, how does decentralisation affect society and politics? (Multiple answers possible)
- Peace
 - Social integration
 - Fighting corruption
 - Democratization
 - Fair distribution of resources
 - Fragmentation of the administration
 - Separatism
30. Do you believe that minorities such as Kurds, Druze, or Alawites should have the option to live in a federal region or under Kurdish, Druze, or Alawite self-administration if they so choose?
- Yes
 - No
 - I don't know

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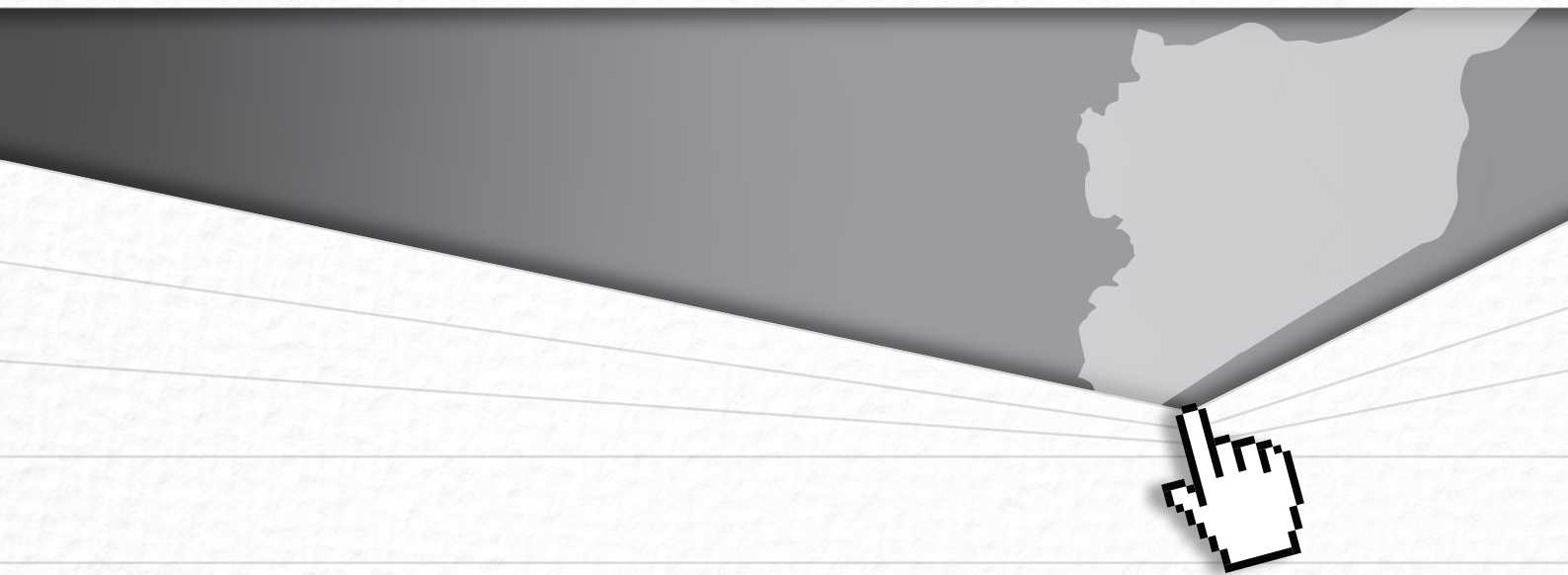
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Political Perspectives of Young Syrians

An analysis of the current political situation with a focus on minority rights,
decentralisation and democratisation



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