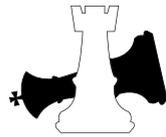


**The Impact of
Detention
Experience on
the Survivors'
Relationship
with Public
Affairs in Syria**

**A SURVEY OF 200 MALE AND
FEMALE FORMER DETAINEES
HELD BY THE SYRIAN REGIME**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study attempts to understand the impact of the detention experience on survivors' relationship with public affairs in terms of interest and engagement. For this purpose, research material was collected on the experiences of 200 male and female survivors from the Syrian regime's detention centers, and was analyzed along three tracks:

The first is a comparative analysis of the respondents' relationship with public affairs before and after the outbreak of the protests in the country.

The second is a comparative analysis of the same relationship before and after the detention.

The third track included a correlational analysis of the most prominent subjective and objective variables that are likely to play a role in maximizing or minimizing the impact of the experience on the survivors.

The study focused on procedural criteria to understand the levels of interest and engagement of respondents in public affairs, such as the extent of following up on news reports, commenting and posting on social media, as well as the percentage of respondents' participation in organized civil, political, or other activities.

The results showed that the majority of respondents were not interested or engaged in public affairs until the outbreak of the protests in 2011, when most of them participated in anti-regime activities. After their detention experience, most of them maintained a great degree of interest in public affairs, and more than a third said they were active within civil frameworks, while the percentage of those within political frameworks was much less.

It was also observed that those who were engaged in public affairs before 2011 tended to get involved in political and civil work to a greater degree after their release than those who opened up to public affairs for the first time after the protests. Those getting involved in public affairs for the first time were more involved in popular protests, while 13% of them showed a relatively greater inclination towards armed action.

The analysis also showed prominent effects of factors such as gender, place of residence, background, and duration of detention within a broader set of investigated factors. For instance, the results show that the percentage difference between those interested in public affairs and those actually engaged in public affairs is



higher for men than women among respondents. Women interested in public affairs were more engaged.

It also seemed that respondents who were younger at the time of detention are more interested in public affairs today, and the more educated are more heavily involved in civil and political frameworks. The duration of detention has a clear effect on this, as those who experienced longer periods of detention are less interested and less engaged at the same time.

Likewise, place of residence, whether inside or outside the country, emerged as a factor. While respondents living in Syria seem more interested in public affairs, respondents abroad are more active. This would appear to illustrate the issue of population dispersion and the deportation of political and civil life outside the country; the opportunities for participation in civil or political activities are more available to, for example, a Syrian refugee living in Turkey than a Syrian living in a regime-held area.



KESH MALEK

Kesh Malek is a civil society organization, started as a revolutionary youth group in the city of Aleppo in 2011. It was registered as non-profit organization in Turkey in 2014. Kesh Malek's work is focused in the Aleppo and Idlib governorate. Kesh Malek works toward an independent, democratic, pluralistic, and civil Syria that respects human rights and enshrines the values of citizenship and justice. Kesh Malek believes that the key to achieving this vision is by preparing the community for democratic transformation, through raising awareness of the civic rights and democratic change, improving the participation of community members in dialogues and discussions on public affairs (especially marginalized groups, such as youth and women), and motivating the society members to become active citizens.

Taafi (Recovery) Initiative is a Kesh Malek program that targets detention survivors and victims of torture, aiming to ensure their active participation in the struggle for justice based on the needs of victims. It also works on advocacy and lobbying for justice and accountability, and on ensuring that violations are not repeated.

The initiative aims to move away from the stereotype of merely demanding the voice of victims be heard and taken into account when making any decision and toward:

- relying on scientific and practical evidence and research to involve victims and formulate future justice based on their needs, demands and priorities.
- working on evidence-based advocacy by probing the views, attitudes, and opinions of victims on issues related to their case.
- conducting research that generates related evidence.

Because justice cannot be served without the will of the victims, and solutions based on their demands and vision, this study came as the first step in understanding the extent of their representation in the political process and working toward achieving justice. It also discusses their evaluation of some of the efforts in this regard, and the impact of the detention experience on their engagement in public affairs.

It is worth mentioning that the Orient Policy Center OPC, graciously provided technical support to Kesh Malek during various stages of this research, designing the work frame and methodology, monitoring the data collection and analysis, and presenting the results.

Orient Policy Center is an independent research center established in Gaziantep, Turkey in 2014. The center provides services and consultations for developing research and policies, orienting the development of humanitarian programs, and supporting stability and reconstruction in crises zones and fragile environment.

STUDY PROBLEM

Most Syrians understand how the Syrian regime has for decades used arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances as a tool to terrorize Syrian society and silence critics, ensuring the regime's near-complete control over Syrian society in its public sphere as well as its civil and political powers. The regime succeeded in this to a large extent until March of 2011; until this point, most Syrians feared to delve into matters of politics and public affairs to draw on a famous Syrian metaphor, they might be detained and never see "the light" again. However, the emergence of the public protests after 2011 was tantamount to a declaration of independence from this "submission to fear" to which the regime has responded with still more detentions and enforced disappearances over the past nine years.

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The question is: **Is this instrument of terror still truly effective today?**

According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, detention is a hard experience that at least 1.2 million Syrians have gone through since the outbreak of protests against the ruling regime in March 2011. If these estimates are correct, this number constitutes 11% of the total population of Syria between 15 and 60 years old. Most of these detentions were carried out for political reasons related to the detainees' engagement (or merely suspected engagement) in anti-regime activities. Such activities range from verbal or written criticism of the regime, to carrying weapons in the face of regime forces, to political, civil, and even humanitarian work which helps social incubators in opposition to the regime.

Given the level of violations detainees are subjected to in terms of detention conditions or in terms of the systematic torture which led to the deaths of tens of thousands detention undoubtedly carries profound impacts on the personalities of the victims, and survivors rarely regain their previous lives after release. Thus, this experience can be viewed as a milestone that divides the lives of victims into pre -and post- detention. The survivors of this experience are forced to live with a set of physical, psychological, social, and economic impacts often lasting for long periods of time.

Moreover, this study attempts to understand the impact of the detention experience on the interest and engagement of survivors in Syrian public affairs in general and the political dimension in particular. It is a fact that the majority were detained because of their stance towards the regime or their opposition activities, but

- To what extent did the detention experience **change their positions?**
- To what extent did the detention experience **affect their desire or ability to engage in political and social public issues after release?**

- Does the impact of the detention experience on the engagement of survivors **differ according to their gender, age, or level of education?**
- Finally, **how do the detainees view the response of the Syrian opposition groups to their ordeal**, and to what extent do they see themselves as a cohesive segment with special rights?

This sort of study is not easily accomplished, but the issue cannot be ignored; we are studying levels of political engagement within a dispersed and unstable society, on a sample distributed inside and outside of the country, within a transitional political condition that cannot and does not encourage the majority of Syrians to participate in it. All of this makes it more difficult to reach our target indicators, but it certainly should not silence them.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an investigative approach based on a regular stratified sample of two hundred male and female detention survivors residing inside and outside of Syria. The data collection process was carried out through standardized interviews conducted by a team of field researchers who themselves lived the experience of detention at the hands of the regime sometime after 2011—meaning that the researchers themselves, in some way, were part of the research community. This gave the study a greater ability to address different aspects of the survivors' experiences, and it was easier to access more in-depth information and details.

The study questionnaire investigated a set of indicators and facts that together give us a coherent picture of the experience of each sample individual, and later allows for the notation of any prominent patterns or associations. The research questionnaire consisted of about 40 questions, divided into three sections.

The first section documented general information about the respondents and searched for some indicators of their engagement in public and political affairs before the outbreak of the revolution. The second section was devoted to understanding the aspects of respondents' detention experience in terms of background, duration, and the circumstances of their detention. It also captured respondents' participation in anti-regime protests and activities during the period between the outbreak of the revolution and the date of their detention. The third section investigated the post-detention phase; it documented some detail on the various aspects of engagement or non-engagement of respondents in public affairs issues—political, civil, and social—and whether that engagement was in an individual capacity or through networks, organizations, bodies, or other forms.

The data collection process started on July 2, 2020, and lasted for two weeks until July 16. Given that the process took place during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic—with its accompanying prevention and social distancing measures—audio interviews were adopted instead of direct field interviews between researchers and respondents. This was the biggest difficulty faced by data collectors, which was solved through specialized training to enable field researchers to conduct this type of interview and ensure the greatest amount and quality of communication with the respondents.

With regard to the study sample of 200 individuals, three main balances were considered, taking into account the understood ratios among detainees as a whole: a gender balance between males and females, an age balance between four age groups, and an education level balance between three categories:

- low education, those with intermediate education or below
- mid-level education, those who finished secondary education
- high education, those with university or higher education.



Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to the three adopted balances.

It should be noted that we do not claim that the sample represents the research community in a statistical way, nor that the sample's results can be generalized to the whole community. When talking about the community of detention survivors it is almost impossible to apply standard methods of sampling, because there is no reliable sampling frame or database. It is also difficult to reach members of this community, as they are distributed throughout all Syrian regions and many other countries. Nevertheless, the sample data derives its value from the fact that it methodologically investigates the experiences of 200 male and female survivors of detention from different age groups, education levels, and livelihoods, and captures their relationship with public affairs in some detail. Analyzing these experiences contributes to developing a more realistic understanding of one aspect of detention and its impacts in Syria. However, we admit the relatively small sample size limits the ability to go into more depth in the analysis; in particular the comparative analysis at the naturally decreasing numbers in sub-samples.



SECTION I

SHIFTS IN RESPONDENTS' RELATIONSHIP WITH PUBLIC AFFAIRS DURING THE YEARS OF CONFLICT

1. FROM ISOLATION TO ENGAGEMENT: THE CHANGE IN THE RELATIONSHIP OF SAMPLE RESPONDENTS WITH SYRIAN PUBLIC AFFAIRS WITH THE OUTBREAK OF PROTESTS

The study data show that the vast majority of the sample respondents were not engaged in public affairs before the outbreak of protests in 2011. Sixty-six percent of the respondents said they were only interested in their private life, while 19.5% said they only followed public affairs from afar and were not engaged in it. The remaining respondents, 14.5%, said they were engaged in activities related to public affairs during that period. These activities varied between primarily civil and voluntary work, followed to a lesser degree by cultural and artistic work, and to a still lesser degree by activities of a political nature.

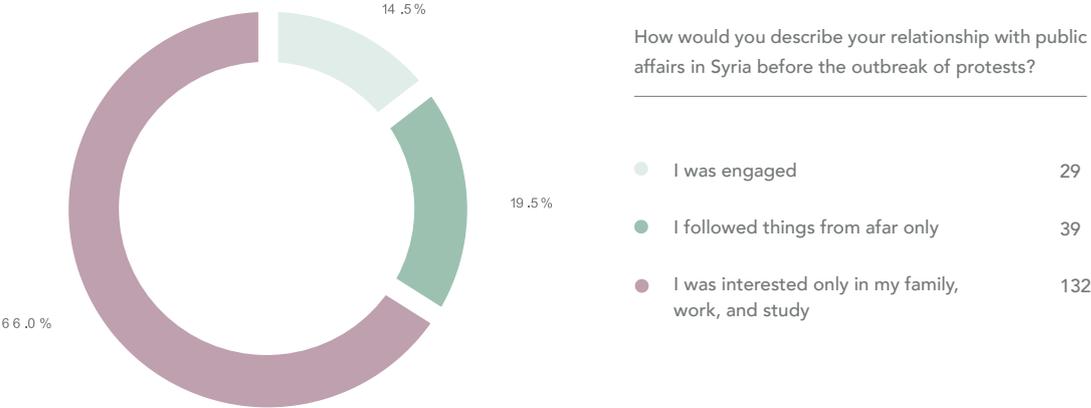


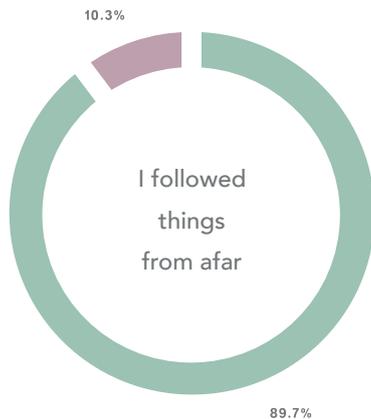
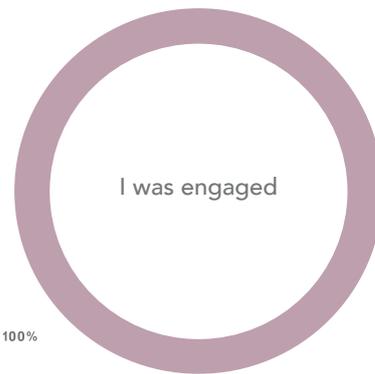
Figure 2 shows the relationship of respondents with public affairs before the outbreak of 2011 protests.

These results are consistent with the assumptions of the study, as the atmosphere of oppression and stifled freedoms in Syria made public affairs a monopolized space by governmental and semi-governmental institutions. There were no active and influential civil, union, or social organizations in the public sphere, and an almost total absence of political life.

However, this scene changed dramatically after the outbreak of protests in March 2011, as the protest movement and the accompanying civil, political, and military activities embodied the widest popular involvement of Syrians in public affairs in decades. This is also reflected in the study sample data, where 82% of the respondents said that they participated in anti-regime activities after the outbreak of the protests. It is of note that this percentage included—in addition to all of those who said they had been previously engaged—about 90% of those who previously “followed things from afar” without engagement, and it also included about 76% of those who were interested in their private life only.

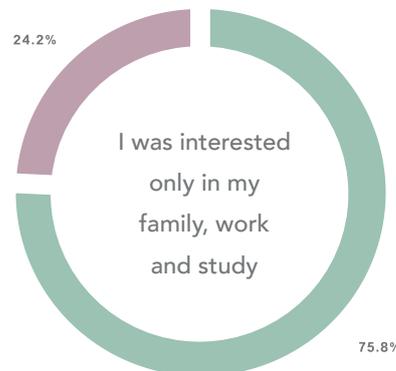
How would you describe your relationship with public affairs in Syria before the protests? With the outbreak of protests in Syria, did you participate in any anti-regime activities?

● Yes 29 ● No 0



How would you describe your relationship with public affairs in Syria before the protests? With the outbreak of protests in Syria, did you participate in any anti-regime activities?

● Yes 35 ● No 4



How would you describe your relationship with public affairs in Syria before the protests? With the outbreak of protests in Syria, did you participate in any anti-regime activities?

● Yes 100 ● No 32

Figure 3 shows the distribution of respondents according to their relationship with public affairs before the revolution and participation in anti-regime activities after the revolution.

As for the nature of activities in which the respondents engaged, we found that the largest percentage, 43.3%, participated in protests, while 18.3% engaged in humanitarian work, 13.4% were active in organizing demonstrations and peaceful protest activities, and 11% turned to armed action—either by participating in fighting or by supporting fighters opposing the regime. Only 2.4% said they practiced organized political action.

It must be noted here that a large percentage of the respondents who actively opposed the regime after the outbreak of protests had engaged in more than one type of anti-regime activity shown in the figure below, but they were asked to choose only one option expressing their primary field of activity, in order to avoid flattening the results of the question.

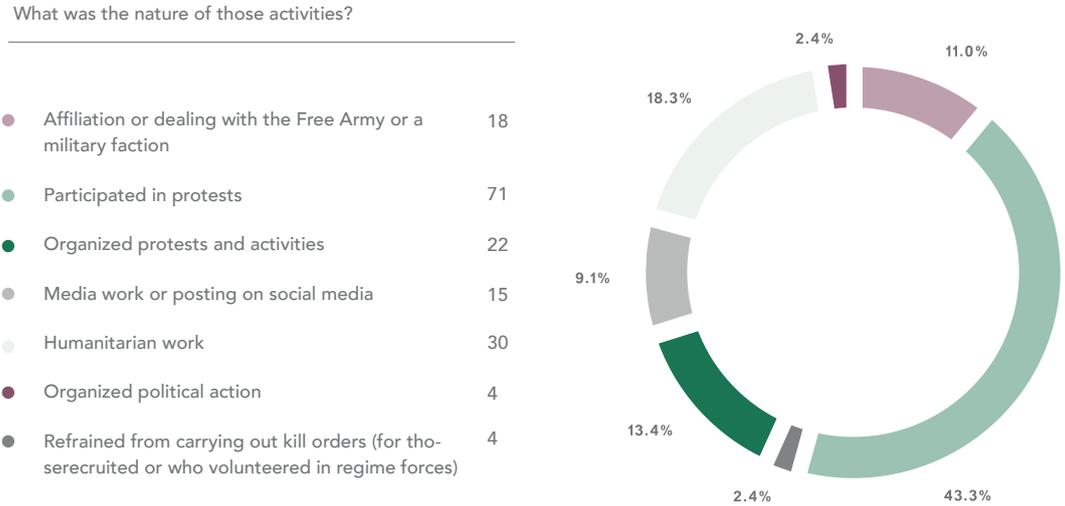
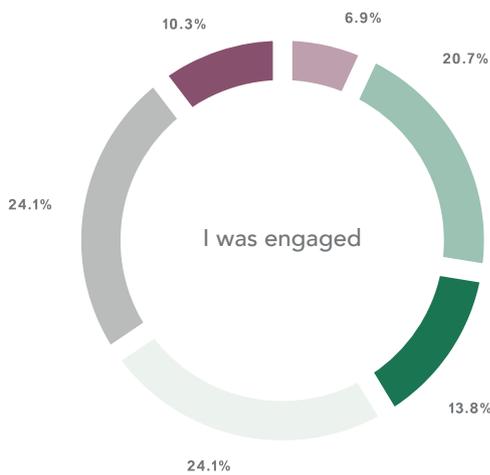


Figure 4 shows the distribution of respondents' primary activity type who were engaged in anti-regime activities after the outbreak of protests. (Many respondents engaged in more than one type.)

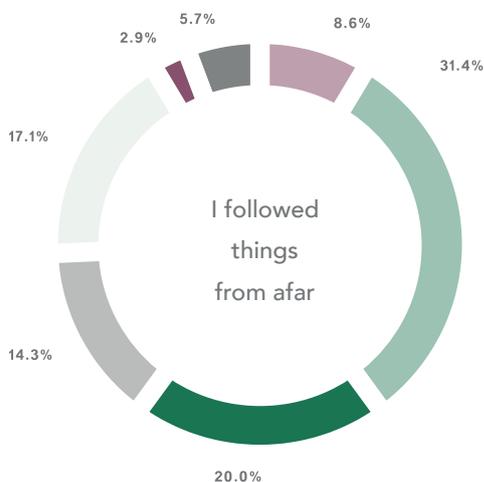
In short, the outbreak of protests prompted the majority of respondents to become newly active and engaged in public affairs, but a very small percentage of that engagement was directing or organizing political action; the largest percentage participated in popular protests. Of course, taking part in protests in and of itself can be considered a political act, but it is likely neither organizational nor sustainable.

It may be useful to compare the type of public-affairs-related activities respondents engaged in after 2011 to their pre-2011 relationship with public affairs. Here, we note that 10% of those who were previously engaged in public affairs participated in organizing political action, while the percentage did not exceed 3% among those who “followed things from afar.” None of those who were uninterested or unengaged turned to organizing political action.



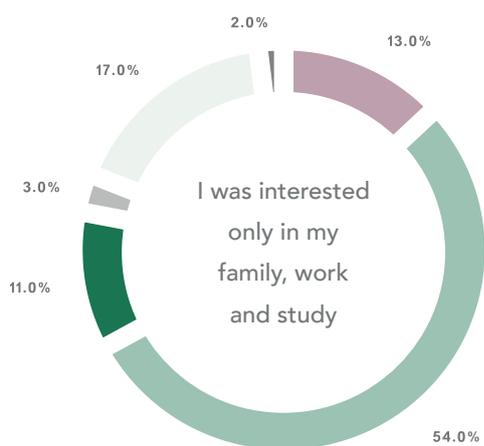
What was the nature of the activities in which you were engaged after the outbreak of protests?

Affiliation or dealing with the Free Army or a military faction	2
Participated in protests	6
Organized protests and activities	4
Media work or posting on social media	7
Humanitarian work	7
Organized political action	3
Refrained from carrying out kill orders (for those recruited or who volunteered in regime forces)	0



What was the nature of the activities in which you were engaged after the outbreak of protests?

Affiliation or dealing with the Free Army or a military faction	3
Participated in protests	11
Organized protests and activities	7
Media work or posting on social media	5
Humanitarian work	6
Organized political action	1
Refrained from carrying out kill orders (for those recruited or who volunteered in regime forces)	2



What was the nature of the activities in which you were engaged after the outbreak of protests?

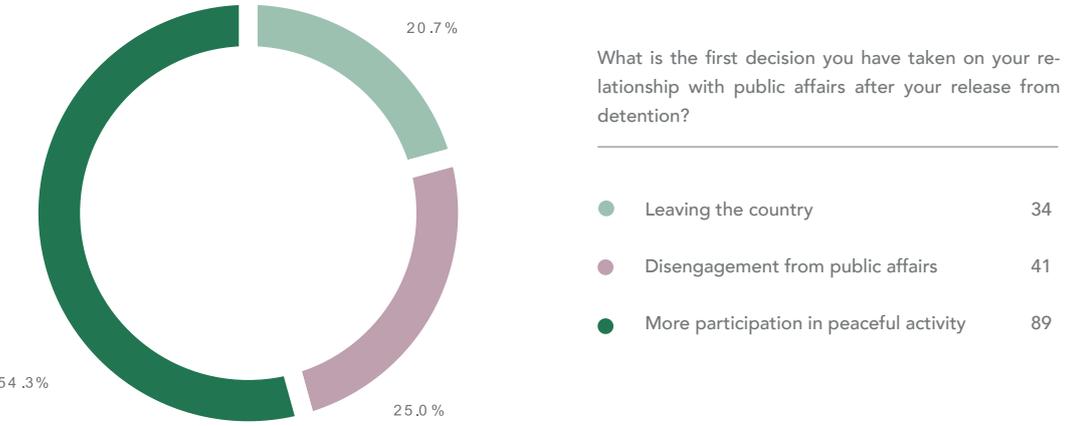
● Affiliation or dealing with the Free Army or a military faction	13
● Participated in protests	54
● Organized protests and activities	11
● Media work or posting on social media	3
● Humanitarian work	17
● Organized political action	0
● Refrained from carrying out kill orders (for those recruited or who volunteered in regime forces)	2

Figure 5 shows the distribution of respondents who engaged in anti-regime activities according to their relationship with public affairs before the protests and the nature of their engaged activities after the outbreak of the protests.

This means those who engaged in public affairs activities before the outbreak of protests tended to practice political and civil work to a greater extent after protests began than those who engaged in public affairs for the first time after protests began this latter segment largely participated in popular protests. Fifty-four percent of respondents said they participated in protests, compared to 17% who engaged in humanitarian and relief activities. Thirteen percent directly or indirectly participated in armed action thus it can be said that the least engaged in public affairs before the outbreak of protests had a greater tendency toward armed action afterwards.

2.ATTEMPTS TO PUT DOWN THE FIRST RESURGENCE: THE DETENTION EXPERIENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON CHANGING RESPONDENTS' RELATIONSHIP WITH PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The protests prompted a greater number of respondents to engage in public affairs, but the experience of detention—an attempt by the regime to disconnect that engagement and relegate survivors back to the ranks of spectators or the uninterested—has left varied impacts on the respondents. If we examine the first post-release decisions taken by our respondents who had participated in anti-regime activities following the protests, we find that a quarter of them decided to abandon any engagement in the public sphere, and 20.7% decided to leave the country—or at least regime-controlled areas—which may mean they also ceased to engage in public affairs, or they simply wished to protect themselves from being subjected to detention a second time. In both cases, however, these groups are no longer able to exercise their pre-detention roles. But more than half of respondents, 54.3%, said that upon their release they decided to increase their participation in peaceful, or even armed, activities against the regime.



.....
Figure 6 shows the distribution of respondents who participated in anti-regime activities according to the first decision they have taken after their release.

These percentages reflect the attitudes of the respondents at the moment they were released from detention; those first decisions may have changed after the survivors spent some time outside detention and felt the changes that had occurred in their surroundings. Many of the survivors went into detention during the stage of peaceful protests and came out to find themselves in a country divided by conflicting military forces, so we asked a direct question about the level of the respondents' interest in public affairs now.

The most significant result here is that the respondents' attitudes have completely reversed. The majority of respondents, over 68%, said that they became interested "to a large extent" in public affairs—almost the same figure as the percentage of those who were not interested in public affairs at all before 2011. (See Figure 2)

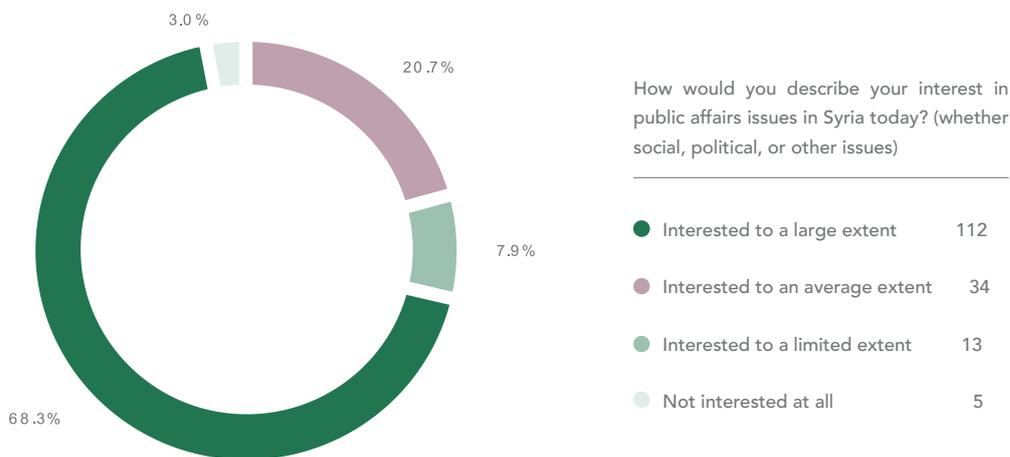


Figure 7 shows the distribution of respondents who participated in anti-regime activities according to the extent of their interest in Syrian public affairs today.

In short, it can be said that the majority of those engaged in public affairs issues after 2011 remained interested to some degree after their release from detention, even if they were not engaged in any activities—meaning the detention experience did not return them to their pre-2011 situation. But in order to take a closer look at their current activities related to public affairs, we needed to learn the nature and frequency of those activities.

More than 35% of the respondents stated they are currently active in organizations or groups working in civil, humanitarian, or cultural fields—known as civil frameworks. Although this percentage is not a majority, it remains an indication of a relatively high degree of engagement.

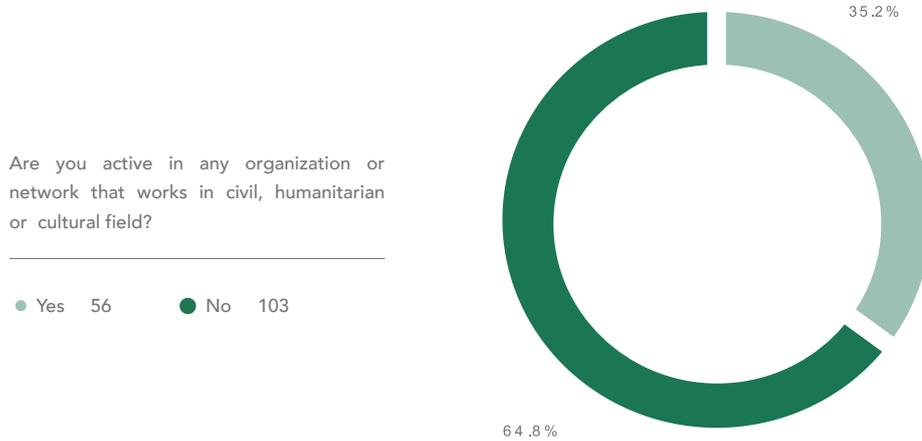


Figure 8 shows the distribution of respondents who currently participate in anti-regime activities according to their variable of activity within civil organizations or networks.

However, the percentage drops sharply when it comes to the activity of respondents within political organizations. Less than 12% said that they belong to or are active in a political organization. But this decline should not be noted without linking it to the state of political and military conflict in the country, and the international interventions that factor in discouraging Syrians from political action.

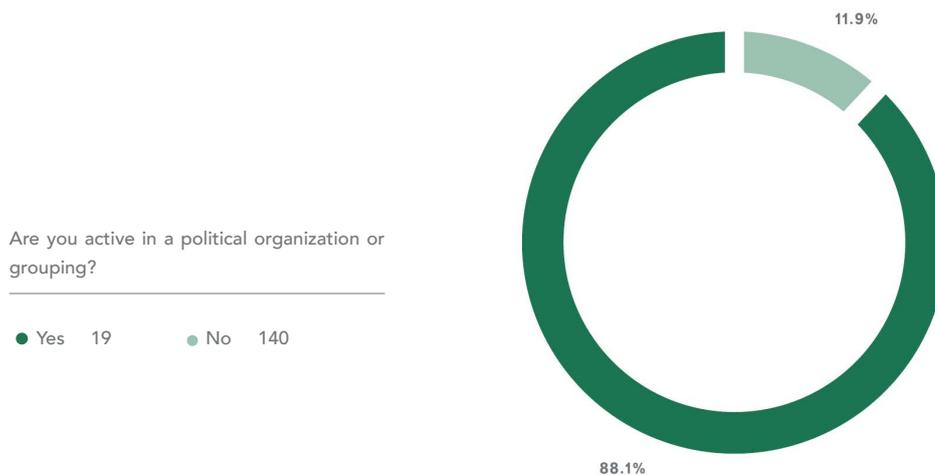


Figure 9 shows the distribution of respondents who participated in anti-regime activities according to the variable of their affiliation or activity within political organizations.

One-third of those who said that they are active in civil frameworks were concerned with public affairs, which remains an indication of the survivors' preference for working in the civil sphere over direct involvement in political action. But in reality, any work in public affairs necessarily carries direct or indirect political intentions at some level. Referencing the aforementioned discouragement factors, this one-third can be seen as potential practitioners of political action at any time in the future according to the changes in the political scene in Syria.

Hence, it can be said that the detention policy aimed at discouraging engagement in public affairs—which the regime practiced with greater intensity during the years of conflict—led to pushing 3% of our sample respondents to retreat to their private lives, while it pushed more than 35% of them to engage organizationally in public affairs. As for the remaining percentage, more than half, who said they are interested but not engaged organizationally, we can understand more about their unframed activity level through Figure 10, which shows the frequency of respondents' participation in a selection of behaviors related to public affairs: the extent to which they follow the news related to Syria, the extent of their participation in political discussions with their social milieu, and their attendance or participation in political seminars.

The results show that the vast majority, about 86%, "often" follow the news of Syria, while 74% said that they "often" participate in political conversations within their social milieu. However, the percentages decreased sharply related to posting and commenting about public affairs issues on social media, with "often" dropping to 43%.

In general, these numbers indicate a high degree of relevance to public affairs. But about 60% of the respondents said they "never" or "rarely" participate in political seminars or meetings. Part of that percentage can be linked to the limited number of these political activities available, but the other part may indicate some reluctance. For instance, the percentage of those who said they "often" participate in workshops or trainings was higher (26%) than those who "often" attend political meetings (18%).

Do you participate in any of the following

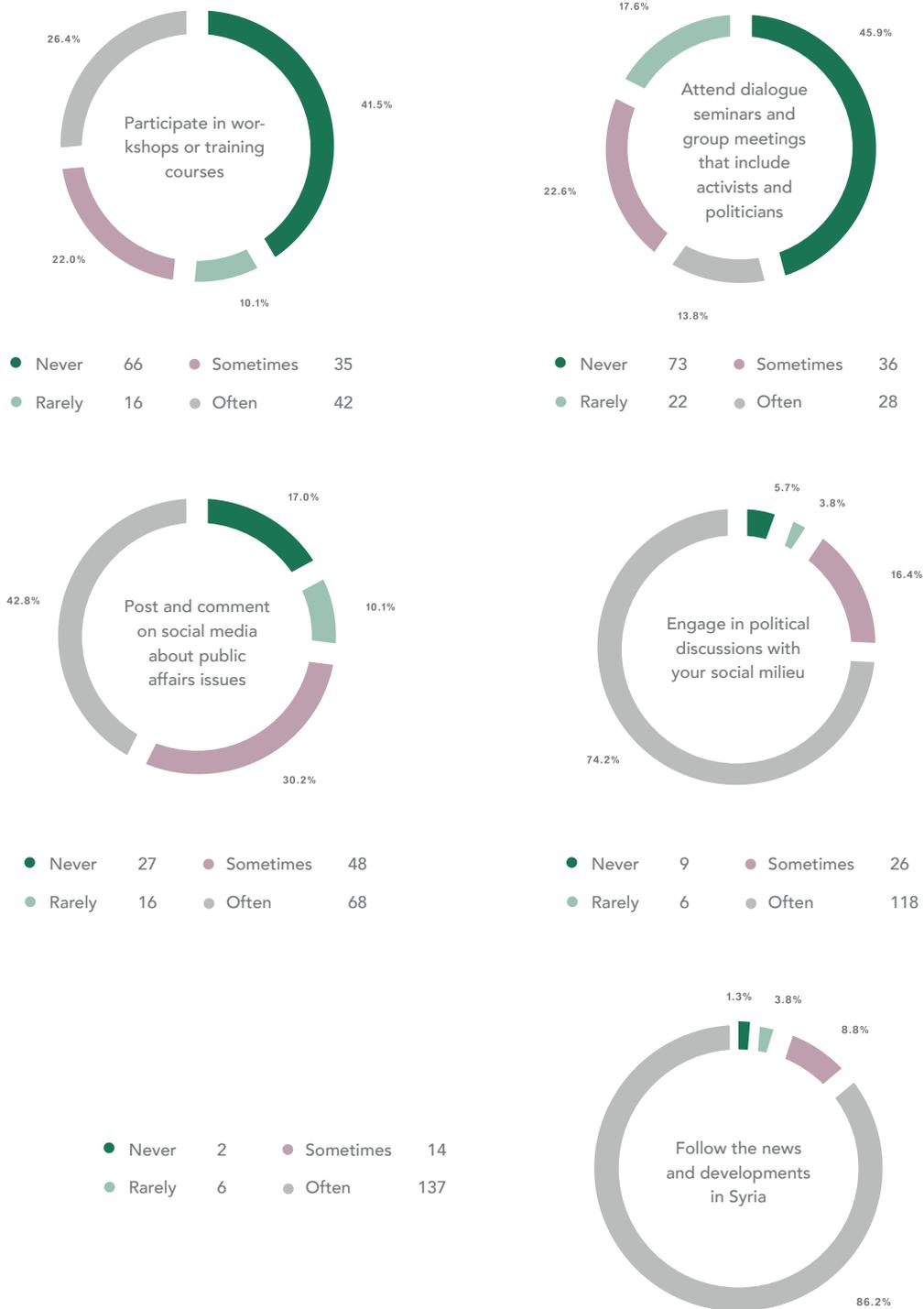


Figure 10 shows the distribution of respondents who participated in anti-regime activities according to the frequency of their participation in activities or behaviors related to public affairs.

One thing of note about the options presented above: the first three options following the news, engaging in political discussions, and posting on social media are all individual activities or behaviors, not requiring the presence of collective frameworks. In contrast, the last two options about workshops and political meetings require the presence of organized collective action. The difference between these values may indicate the survivors' greater tendency toward individual participation patterns, as well as a failure to keep pace with collective frameworks that fit the level of survivors' interest in public affairs and enable them to participate in an organized collective action. Further clarification of this result will be shown in the next section of this study, approaching the matter from a comparative perspective.

3. SURVIVORS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ISSUE OF DETENTION IN SYRIA: INTERESTS AND PERCEPTIONS

Although 85% of the sample respondents expressed interest in detention as an issue of public concern in Syria "to a large extent," only 24% said they are members of any detainee defense or advocacy groups. In other words, we see here another manifestation of the survivors' tendency toward individual engagement in public affairs as opposed to organized collective action.

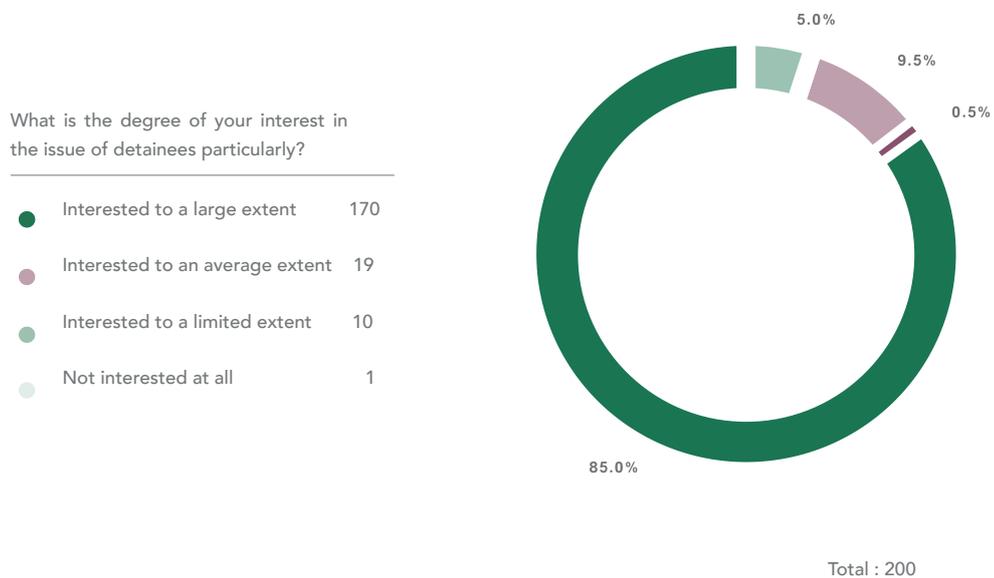
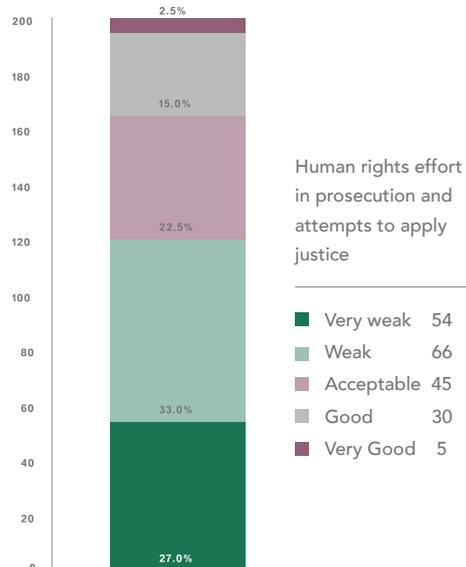
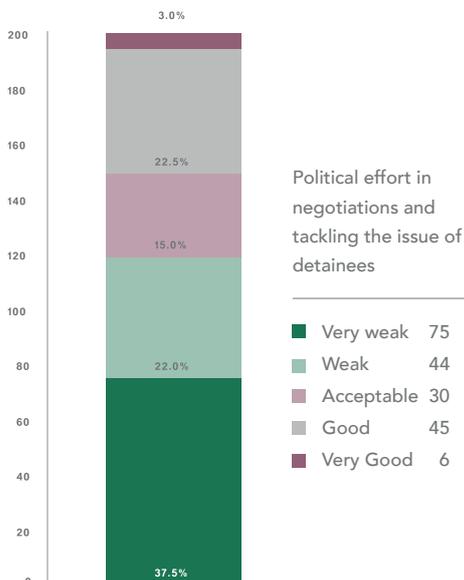
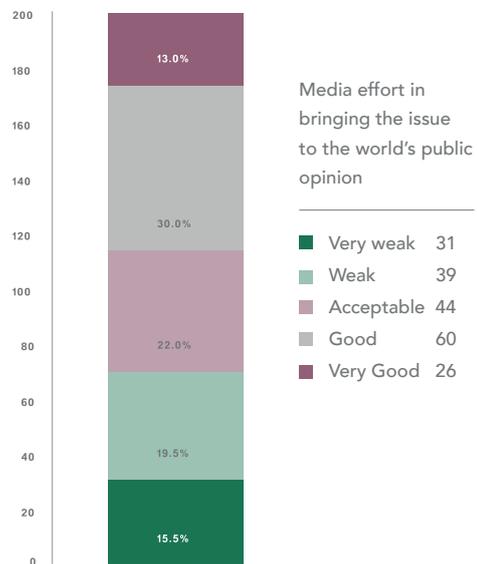
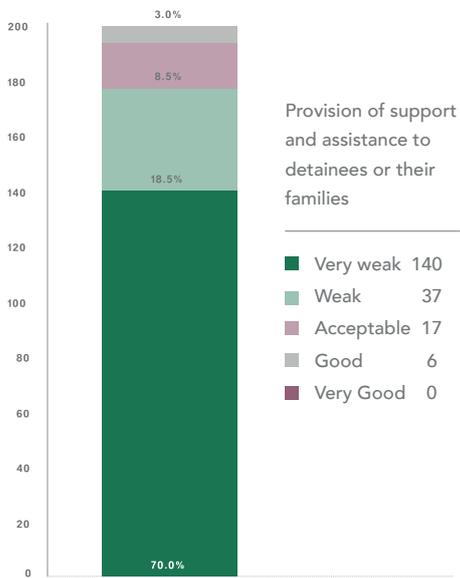


Figure 11 shows the distribution of respondents according to their extent of interest in the issue of detainees in Syria.

But the remaining 24% of respondents who said they are active in detention advocacy bodies is not a small percentage—nearly one-quarter—when you consider that these individuals have endured one of the cruelest human experiences, described by Amnesty International as “it breaks the human.”

Here, too, the explanation needs a point of balance between the reluctance of individuals and the failure of organizations. We add another indicator to help shed more light on this point. We asked respondents to evaluate the performance of Syrian political and civil institutions affiliated with aid and advocacy for detainees on five aspects, using a five-point scale from “very weak” to “very good.”



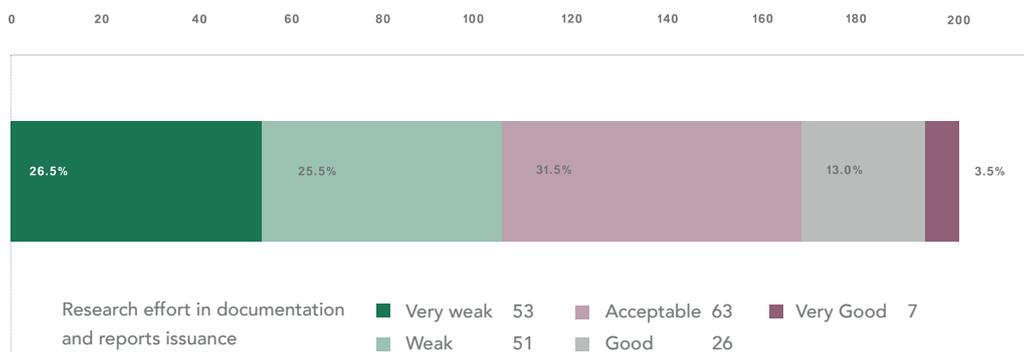


Figure 12 shows the distribution of respondents according to their evaluation of the level of performance of organizations towards the issue of detainees.

The highest positive performance evaluation of organizations affiliated with the Syrian opposition was the media effort, with 43% of respondents rating it “good” or “very good.” The lowest by far was that of organizations providing support and assistance to detainees or their families, with only 3% giving any sort of positive rating. Political efforts over the issue of detainees at the negotiation table received only 26% positive ratings among respondents. Human rights work and the prosecutions of those involved in the practice of detention also reached only about 30% positive evaluations.

In short, respondents showed generally negative evaluations of the performance of the forces and organizations affiliated with the detention opposition and advocacy in the five aspects presented. Media performance was the least negatively rated with 25%, followed by research efforts to document and report violations at 52% negative. Human rights attempts at justice application tied at 60% negative with political performance at about 60% negative each. And the worst by far, with 89% negative ratings, was the area of support and assistance to detainees and their families.

We now return to the interrelationship between the failure of organizations and the reluctance of individuals, and the large discrepancy between the percentage of those “very interested” in the issue of detainees (85%), and those involved actively in groupings or associations concerned with detainees (24%).

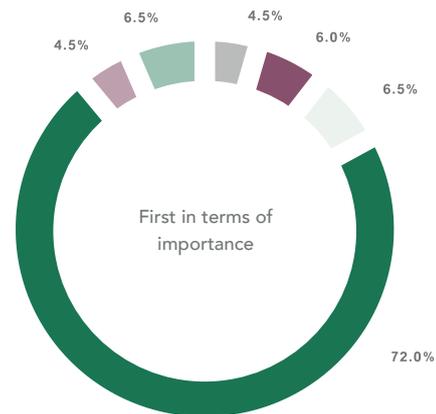
It can be reasonably said that even if respondents’ evaluations of the entities affiliated with anti-detention issues do not necessarily reflect these entities’ actual level of performance, the perception is key here. And there is no doubt that the negative perceptions expressed by most respondents is itself a factor inhibiting their participation in public affairs within collective frameworks. It contributes to

the prevalence of individual participation patterns, such as posting on social media and engaging in discussions. It also reflects respondents' perceptions about the usefulness (or not) of working within the current collective frameworks.

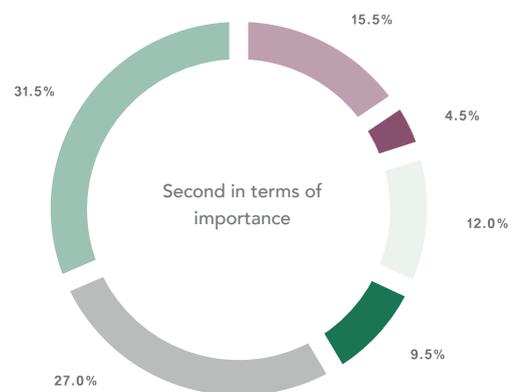
We add a final indicator to reflect the respondents' preferences for realistic best practices that can be applied to resolve the issue of former and current detainees in Syria. Understanding the prevailing trends of opinion and priorities among victims of detention is useful in determining the features of programs or interventions designed to support them, which increases the chances these programs will succeed.

A list of procedures and practices were offered as potential solutions to the issue, as shown in Figure 13. We asked each respondent to choose three options from that list, ranked in order of personal priorities, as a realistic solution to the issue of detainees.

- Moral and material support and reparation for the victims 9
- Changing the laws and institutions that permitted and implemented those crimes 12
- Negotiation between the opposition factions and the regime and exchange of prisoners 13
- Disclosing the whereabouts of the forcibly disappeared, clarifying their fate, and allowing international organizations access all the secret detention centers and prisons 144
- The demand for fair public real trials for all the detainees and the forcibly disappeared. 9
- Prosecution of the perpetrators of detention and forcible disappearance crimes under international supervision 13



- The demand for fair public real trials for all the detainees and the forcibly disappeared. 54
- Changing the laws and institutions that permitted and implemented those crimes 9
- Negotiation between the opposition factions and the regime and exchange of prisoners 24
- Disclosing the whereabouts of the forcibly disappeared, clarifying their fate, and allowing international organizations access all the secret detention centers and prisons 19
- Moral and material support and reparation for the victims 31
- Prosecution of the perpetrators of detention and forcible disappearance crimes under international supervision 63



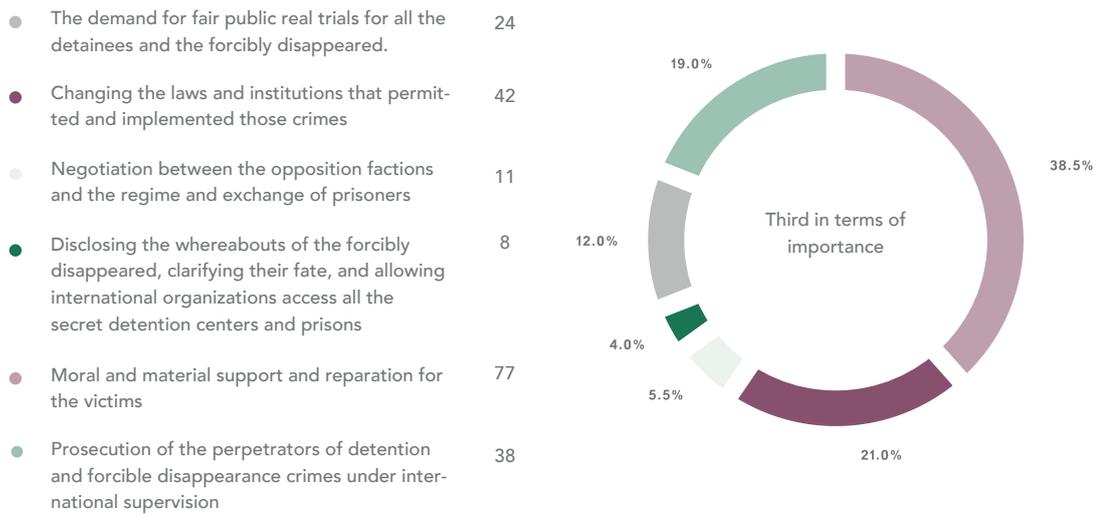


Figure 13 shows the distribution of respondents according to their preferences of the best practices that can be applied in resolving the issue of detainees.

The majority of respondents, 72%, chose “disclosing the whereabouts of detainees and allowing international organizations to access them” as their first option for the most realistic practice that can be applied. Second choices were more varied, with 31.5% choosing “prosecuting those involved in the detention process” and 27% choosing “the demand for fair trials for all detainees.” Third choices also centered around two particular solutions; 38.5% chose “the demand for material and moral compensation for the victims and their families” and 21% chose “the demand for changing the laws and institutions that have permitted and implemented detention practices.”

SECTION II

DECONSTRUCTING THE RELATIONSHIP: DISPARITIES IN THE IMPACTS OF DETENTION AMONG THE SAMPLE RESPONDENTS

In this section, we investigate the impact of respondents' personal factors—such as age, gender, and education level—in shaping their relationship with public affairs after their release from detention. Can any prominent relationships be identified?

FIRST: THE ROLE OF THE RESPONDENTS' INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS AND THEIR IMPACT ON SHAPING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH PUBLIC AFFAIRS

1. MEN ARE CLOSER TO PUBLIC AFFAIRS, AND WOMEN ARE MORE AFFECTED BY THE EXPERIENCE OF DETENTION

If we examine the condition of the respondents during the first phase of their release from detention through the lens of gender, along with the first decision made after their release related to public affairs, we notice that 35.3% of female respondents decided to leave the country post-release, while the percentage among males did not exceed 21%. The percentage of female respondents who decided to isolate from public affairs was also higher than their male counterparts, albeit with a difference of less than 5%. The clearest difference for the gender factor appears among those who decided to have more engagement in anti-regime activity, which reached more than 54% among male respondents, while it was around 35% among female respondents.

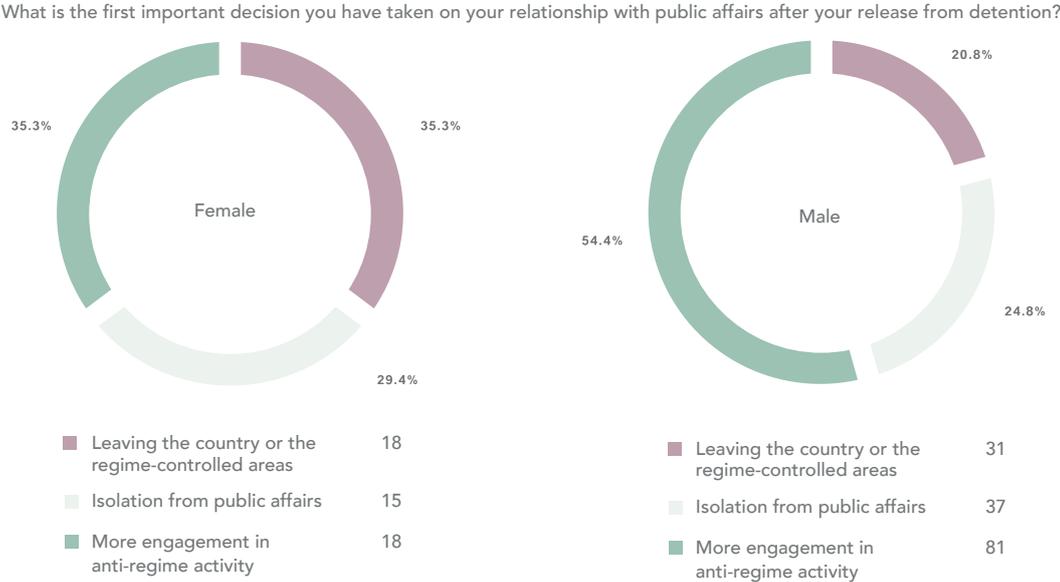


Figure 14 shows the distribution of respondents according to the variables of gender and the first decision they made after their release from detention.

Although the data suggests that men are less affected by the experience of detention and its reflections in their relationship to public affairs, this result must be understood within social and cultural contexts surrounding survivors: men and women who have gone through the same detention experience are treated very differently once they are released. Men who survive detention are often treated as “brave and altruistic,” while a large proportion of women have difficulty being accepted by society post-detention. This is likely to encourage men to become more involved in public affairs, while driving women out of that space.

The same effect appears to remain in place during subsequent post-detention periods. When examining current levels of interest in public affairs in Figure 15, we find that 67.8% of male respondents still show “high” interest in public affairs, compared with 51% among female respondents. In parallel, just over 12% of male respondents reported “little” or “no” current interest in public affairs, while 27% of female respondents said the same.

But the gender factor here has another dimension: the greater interest shown by male respondents does not necessarily mean that they have greater public affairs engagement and activity than women.

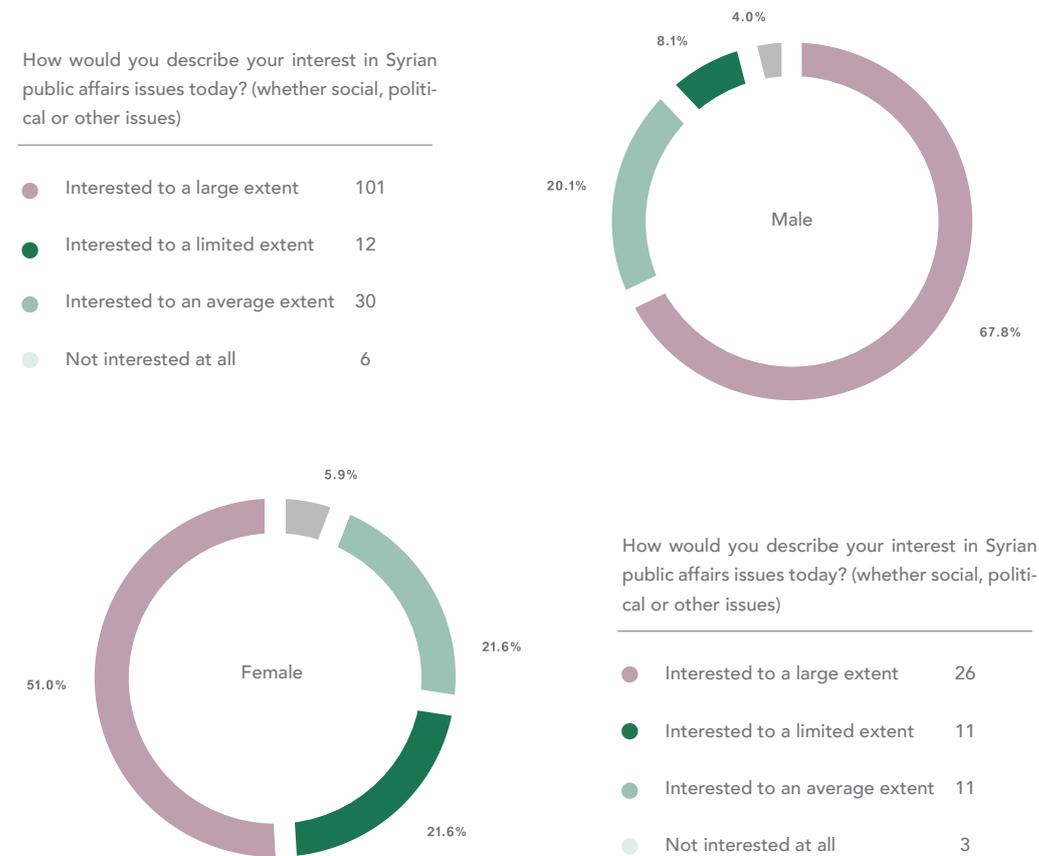


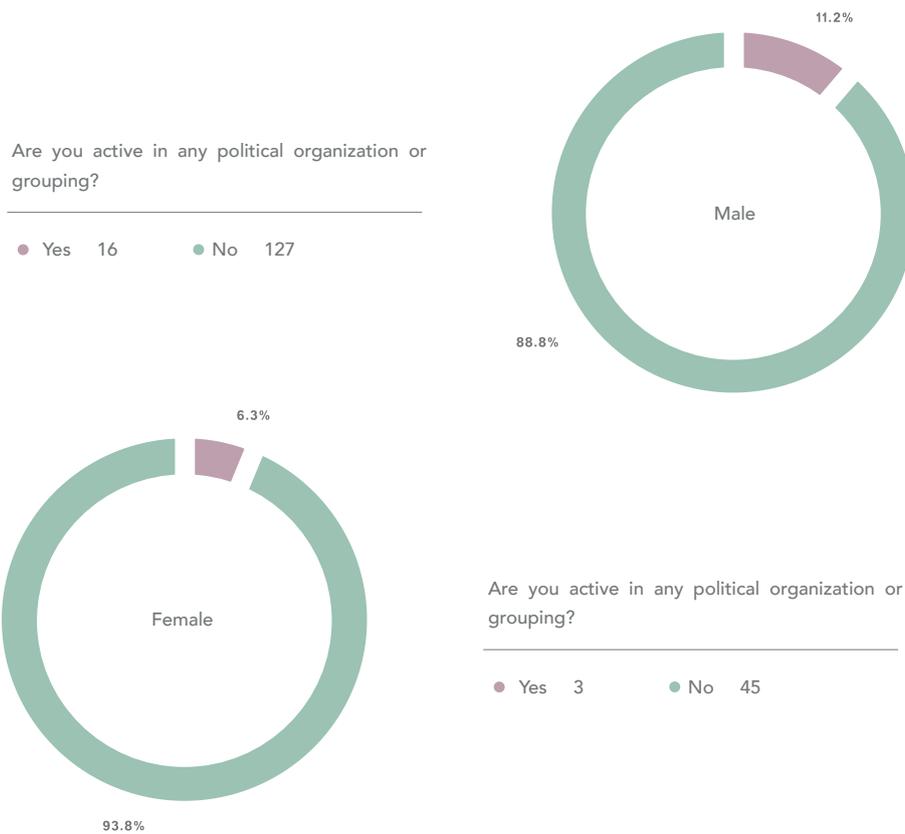
Figure 15 shows the distribution of respondents according to the variables of gender and their extent of interest in public affairs in Syria.

If we focus only on those within the study sample currently interested in public affairs, we find that despite the smaller percentage of females in that grouping, the tendency of female respondents toward engaging in civil frameworks is greater than among male respondents. Just under 40% of female respondents interested in public affairs said they are members or activists in civil frameworks, compared with just over 30% of male respondents.



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 Figure 16 shows the distribution of respondents interested in public affairs according to the variables of gender and activity within civil frameworks.

In summary, it can be said that there is a greater tendency among female respondents to engage in organized civil activities, if they are interested in public affairs, than among male respondents. However, the matter is different with respect to the respondents' engagement and activity within political frameworks, with a result of 11.2% among male respondents and 6.3% among the female respondents. It may then be extrapolated that men are more likely to participate in political frameworks than women.



.....
 Figure 17 shows the distribution of respondents interested in public affairs according to the variables of gender and activity within a political organization.

2. LIMITED BUT STABLE EFFECT OF THE AGE VARIABLE

Although the interviews divided respondents among four groups of “age at time of detention,” because of the small sample size the analysis phase reduced this to two groups: those detained at the age of less than 30, and those detained at an age of 30 or older. By making a comparison analysis on this basis, it appears that age has had little effect in determining the decisions made by survivors during the first period of their release; the percentage spans are similar. But the effects seem to appear later, as reflected in the data regarding respondents’ current relationship with public affairs.

What is the first important decision you have taken on your relationship with public affairs after your release from detention?



.....
 Figure 18 shows the distribution of respondents according to the variables of age and the first decision they made after their release.

Younger respondents appear to be somewhat more interested in public affairs currently; just under 68% said they are interested to a large extent, compared with 58% among the older group. Likewise, the percentage of those with no interest among the younger group was 1.7%, while it reached just over 8% in the older group.

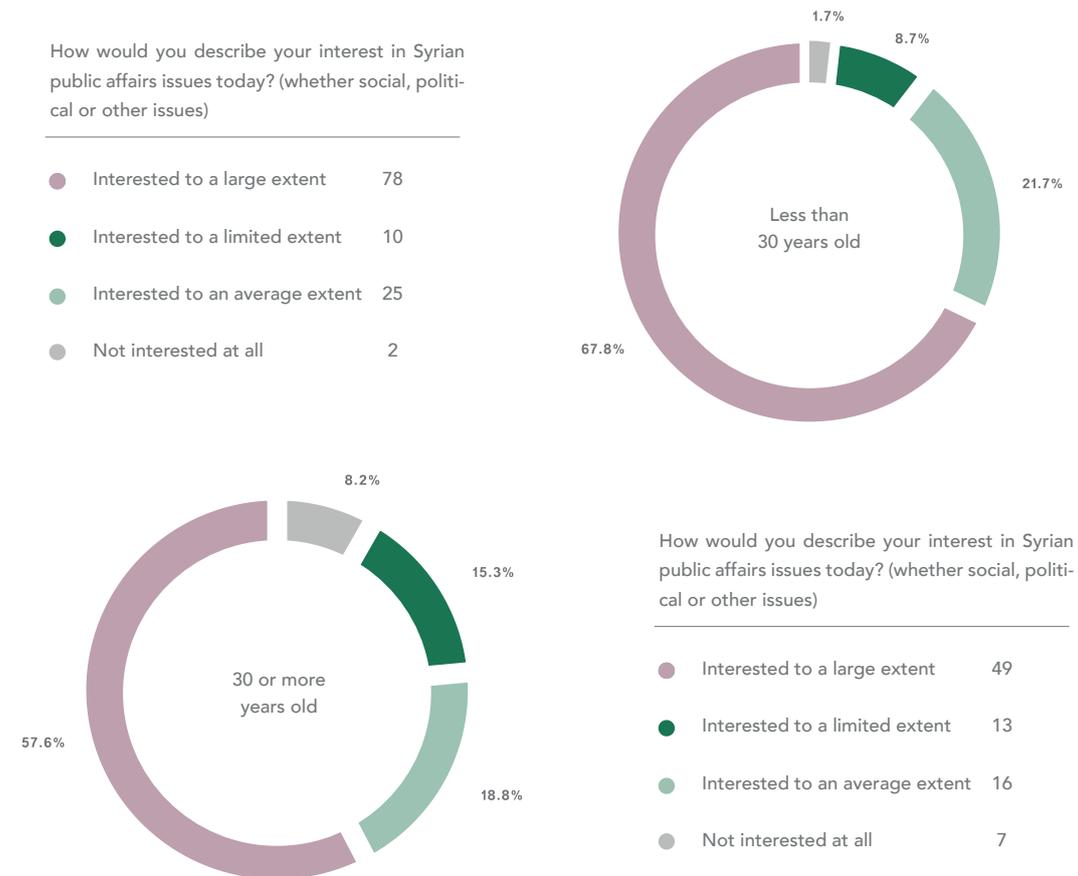


Figure 19 shows the distribution of respondents according to the variables of age and their extent of interest in public affairs.

The difference between the two age groups shrinks a little when it comes to those who are active in civil frameworks, but the ratio is similar; 34.5% among the younger group compared with 29.5% among the older group.



.....
 Figure 20 shows the distribution of respondents interested in public affairs according to the variables of age and activity within civil frameworks.

Finally, the span carries generally for those who reported activity in political organizations: 11.5% of respondents from the younger group compared with 7.7% of the older group.



Figure 21 shows the distribution of respondents interested in public affairs according to the variables of age and activity within any political frameworks.

Limiting the age variable to only two categories may not fulfill the full purposes of the analysis—it does not demonstrate the full differences in effects, since some respondents were detained under the age of eighteen, and some were over sixty. But measuring the full effects requires a larger sample and different indicators; the most we can demonstrate here is a general indication that older former detainees are slightly more likely to isolate themselves from public affairs post-release.

3. FLUCTUATING EFFECT OF THE EDUCATION LEVEL

Regarding the first decision respondents made after their release from detention, the effect of education appears to be moving in more than one direction. Most who decided to isolate from public affairs were those with low education, where the percentage reached 32%. But “most” is relative; the result among those with high education was 30%, only a slight drop. The percentage among average-educated respondents was just over 18%.

It seems that average-educated respondents were least affected by the detention experience in terms of an increase in public affairs engagement, as almost 57% made that their first decision upon release; that figure was just over 51% among those with high education, and 36% among those with low education. Again, this fluctuation may be due to the small size of the sample and does not fully reflect the reality of the situation, but it provides signals that can be verified by studying a larger sample.

What is the first important decision you have taken on your relationship with public affairs after your release from detention?



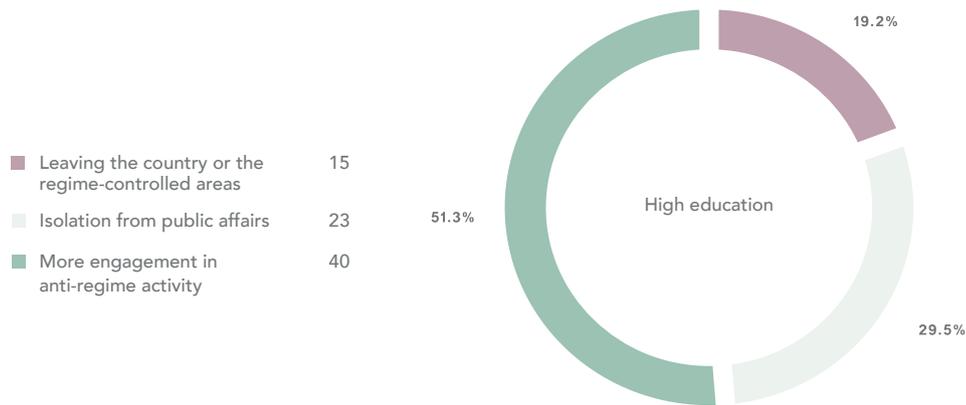
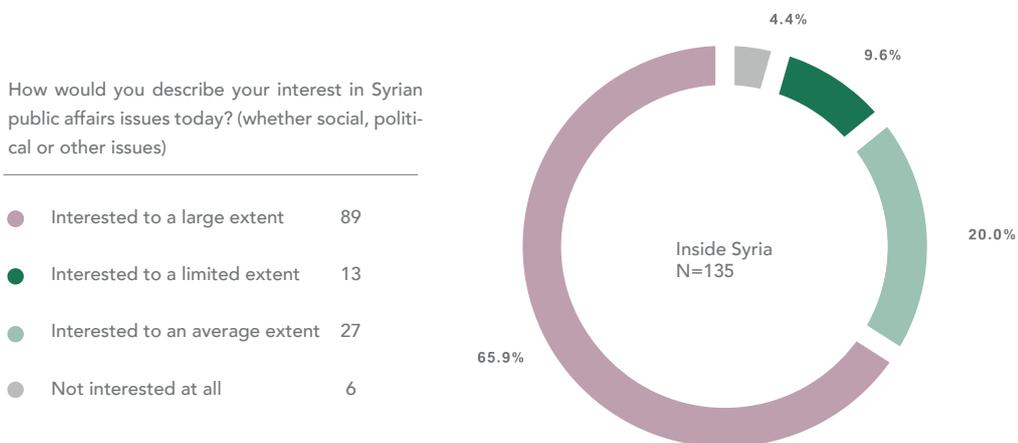


Figure 22 shows the distribution of respondents according to the variables of the level of education and the first decision the respondents made after their release.

4. SURVIVORS ABROAD ARE SLIGHTLY LESS INTERESTED BUT MORE ENGAGED

In our sample, about one-third of respondents currently reside abroad, while the remaining two-thirds are distributed throughout different regions inside Syria—the vast majority of them residents of opposition-controlled areas in the north. When linking respondents’ place of residence with the extent of interest and engagement in public affairs, we note that both groups are interested in public affairs “to a large extent,” with a slightly greater percentage among respondents living inside Syria, nearly 66%, compared with just under 59% among those who live abroad.



How would you describe your interest in Syrian public affairs issues today? (whether social, political or other issues)

Interested to a large extent	38
Interested to a limited extent	10
Interested to an average extent	14
Not interested at all	3

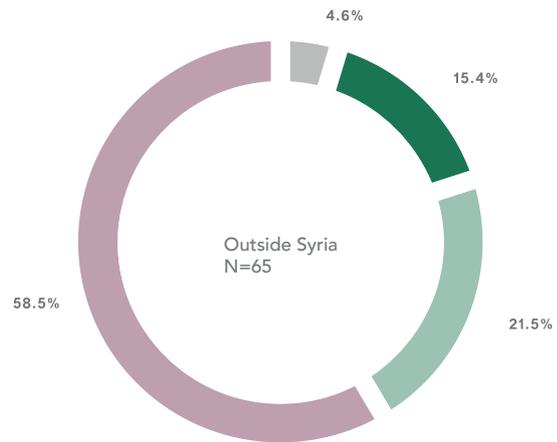


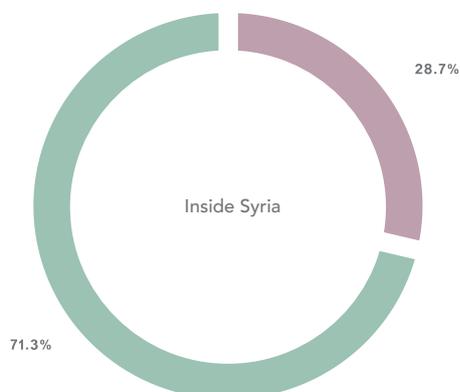
Figure 23 shows the distribution of respondents according to the variables of place of residence and the extent of interest in public affairs.

It is not surprising that the respondents at home follow public affairs more closely. But it is interesting that a large percentage of those abroad remain cognizant of public affairs to this extent. The matter can be linked to the fact that 75% of respondents residing abroad said that their departure was a result of their detention experience; that is, the decision to leave Syria was not entirely personal or voluntary as much as it was a forced departure.

Perhaps the most striking point is related to the rates of organizational engagement related to public affairs among those inside and outside the country. The results indicate that while the percentage of respondents abroad who engage in civil frameworks is less than those who do not, that percentage is higher than that of those who reside in-country (which did not exceed 29%). Consequently, are we to understand that survivors who reside abroad are more engaged in public affairs than survivors who live inside the country?

Are you active within any civil, humanitarian or cultural organization or network?

Yes	37	No	92
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Are you active within any civil, humanitarian or cultural organization or network?

● Yes 25 ● No 37

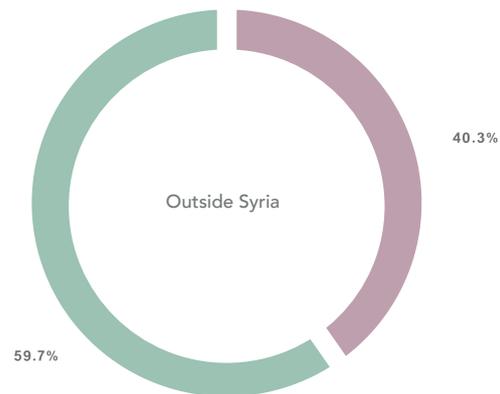


Figure 24 shows the distribution of respondents interested in public affairs according to the variables of place of residence and the practice of any civil activities.

Of course, the above percentages must be understood within the context of the social and political fragmentation Syria is going through, where about a third of the entire population is taking refuge in other countries, and most civil and political frameworks, especially those classified as opposition, operate from outside the country and are active among Syrian refugees. Consequently, there may simply be more opportunities to participate in activities, whether civil or political, for a Syrian refugee in Turkey than a Syrian living in-country.

SECOND: THE DIFFERENCES IN DETENTION EXPERIENCES AND THEIR IMPACTS ON THE SURVIVORS' RELATIONSHIP WITH PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Several factors related to the nature of the detention experience are involved in determining the quality and depth of the experience impact on survivors and their relationship with public affairs, including the background (reason for detention) and duration of detention, the degree of torture, psychological experiences inside the detention facility, and others. Data on the sample of this study made it possible to investigate the impact of two of the aforementioned factors: the background and duration of detention.

1. THE IMPACT OF DETENTION BACKGROUND

In detention background, we distinguish between those detained for engaging in anti-regime activities, and those detained randomly or without a reason related to anti-regime activities. However, it should be noted that those of the latter group are not necessarily not involved in anti-regime activities. Many respondents

reported that they had indeed engaged in anti-regime protests, but that their detention was not related to those activities, or that these activities were not known by the security services. This becomes more understandable if we acknowledge that detentions were sometimes carried out on suspicion, or because the person belonged to a specific family or residential area. Sometimes detention took place collectively and randomly, as when the security services stormed areas of demonstrations during the first years of the protest movement and simply detained most of the men they encountered.

On this basis, we can see that those detained for opposition activities seem to be more resistant to the impacts of the detention experience, as about 61% of them said they decided to engage in more opposition activity, while the percentage of that first decision among those detained for other reasons did not exceed 39%.

What is the first important decision you have taken on your relationship with public affairs after your release from detention?

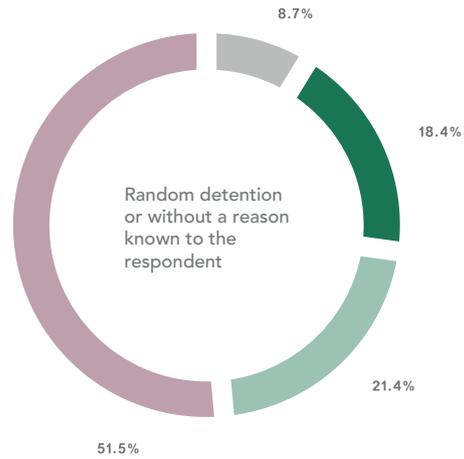


Figure 25 shows the distribution of respondents according to the variables of detention background and the first decision the respondents made after their release from detention.

Therefore, those detained in connection with anti-regime activities are collectively less likely to move away from public affairs than those detained for other reasons, by about 22%. A similar margin appears in respondents' expressions about their interest in Syrian public affairs issues today—in fact, the margin increases to about 25%. More than 76% of those detained because of their anti-regime activities expressed their interest “to a large extent” in public affairs, compared to just over 51% of those detained for other reasons.

How would you describe your interest in Syrian public affairs issues today? (whether social, political or other issues)

Interested to a large extent	53
Interested to a limited extent	19
Interested to an average extent	22
Not interested at all	9



How would you describe your interest in Syrian public affairs issues today? (whether social, political or other issues)

Interested to a large extent	74
Interested to a limited extent	4
Interested to an average extent	19
Not interested at all	0

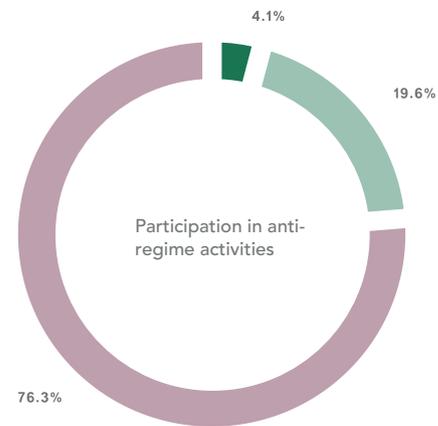


Figure 26 shows the distribution of respondents according to the variables of the detention background and the extent of interest in public affairs issues today.

However, the differences between the two categories of detainees narrow when it comes to activity within civil or political frameworks today. The largest percentage of the participants in such frameworks remain among those detained for their opposition activities, but with a margin that narrows to 5%; civil framework engagement percentages reached approximately 35% among those detained for their activities, compared with about 30% among those detained for other reasons.

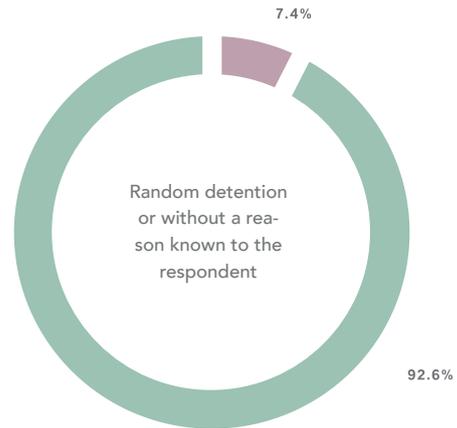


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 Figure 27 shows the distribution of respondents according to the variables of detention background and civil framework activity.

The impact with regard to respondents' activity in political frameworks remains within a 5% margin, although the percentage of activists in these frameworks decreased about 10% compared with civil frameworks. The percentage of political activists was approximately 12% of those detained in connection with anti-regime activities and approximately 7% among those detained for other reasons.

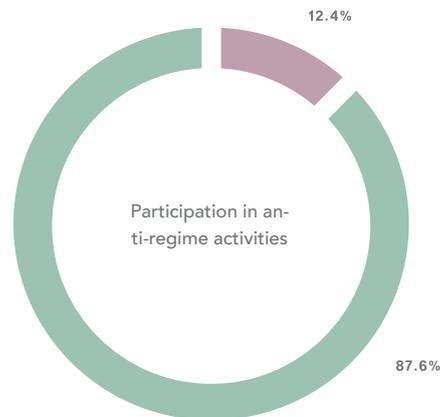
Are you active in any political organization or grouping?

● Yes 7 ● No 87



Are you active in any political organization or grouping?

● Yes 12 ● No 85



.....
 Figure 28 shows the distribution of respondents according to the variables of the detention background and activity within civil frameworks.

2. THE IMPACT OF THE DURATION OF DETENTION

The comparative analysis of the impact of the duration of detention variable shows that a longer detention period is more likely to divert the survivors from public affairs. Those who were detained for more than three years showed a greater tendency toward both isolating from public affairs and leaving the country, by a large margin over those detained for less time. While the percentages of those who decided to further engage in activity after being released was about 57% among those detained for less than three years, the percentage barely exceeded 37% among those detained for longer periods.

What is the first important decision you have taken on your relationship with public affairs after your release from detention?

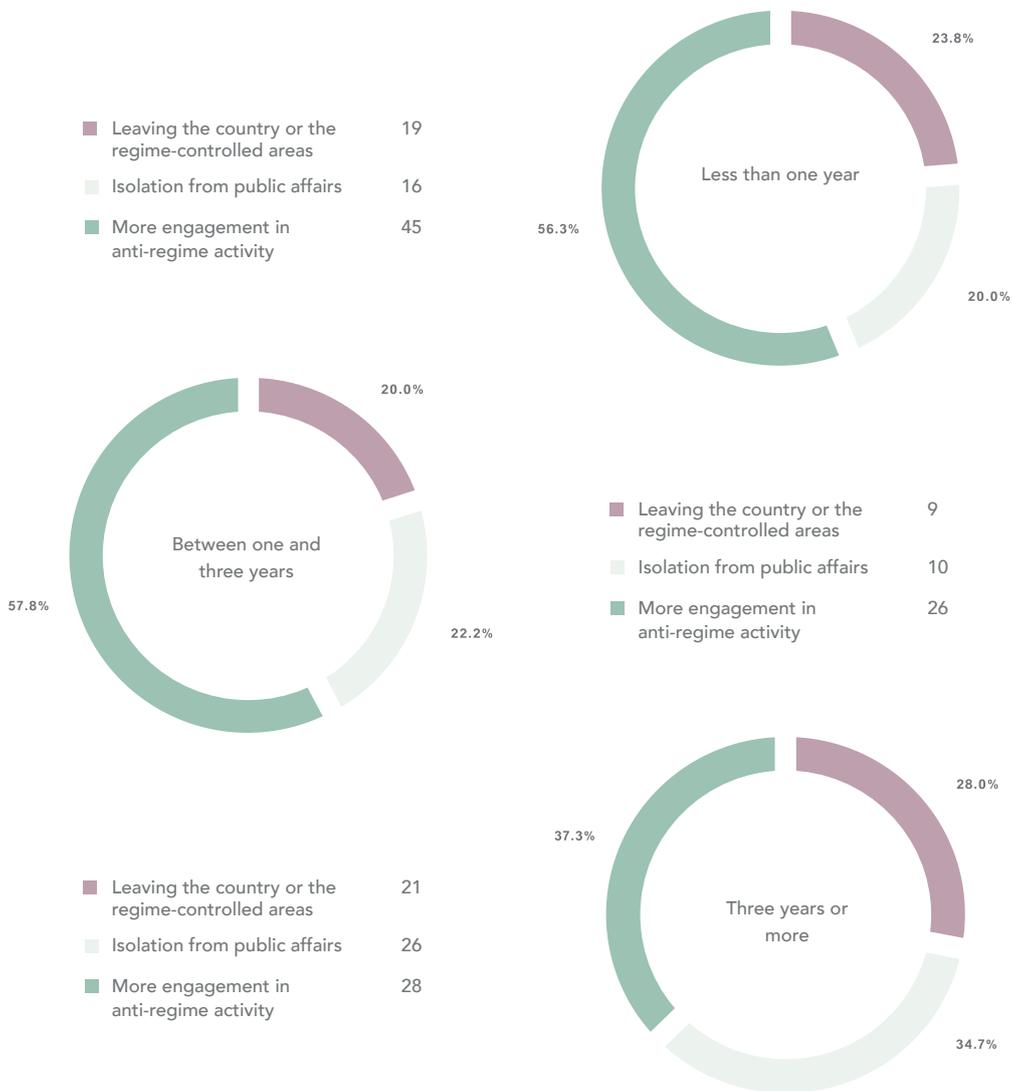


Figure 29 shows the distribution of respondents according to the variables of the duration of detention and the first decision the respondents took post-release.

Subsequent indicators confirm the aforementioned conclusion. We notice, for example, that 42 of the 75 respondents who spent more than three years in detention showed less interest in Syrian public affairs issues today—56%—while more than 68% of the 125 respondents who spent less than three years in detention remain greatly interested in Syrian public affairs.

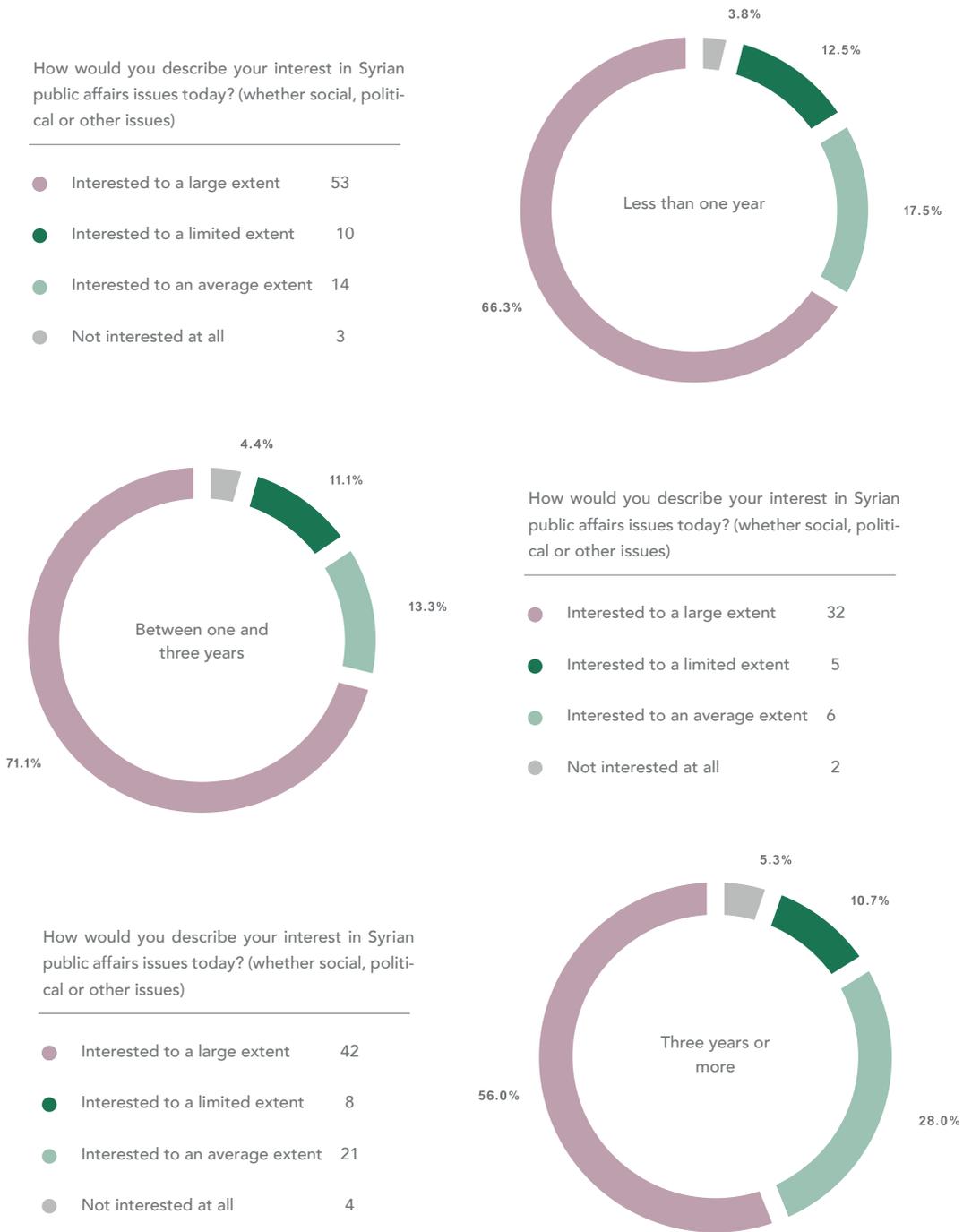


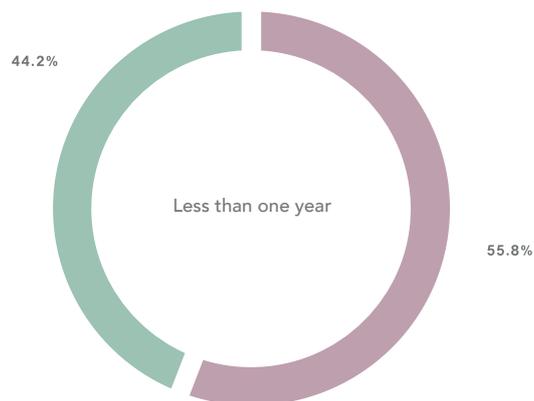
Figure 30 shows the distribution of respondents according to the variables of the duration of detention and the extent of interest in public affairs.

It should be noted here that “more than three years” may include people who have spent six, seven, or more years in detention. Many Syrian detainees left behind small children and returned to find young adults. Thus, the cost of detention in many cases is a whole life stage, preventing survivors from ever fully returning to what they were. The change in the public affairs relationship here is one facet of larger changes affecting the survivors’ perceptions and lifestyle. The matter remains in need of further investigation through a larger research sample and more focus on this aspect.

The impact of the duration of detention is more evident when examining the level of respondents’ activity within civil frameworks. We can see a curve with a stable direction; more than half of respondents detained less than a year (56%) said they were active in civil frameworks. This contrasts with approximately 26% among those who spent one to three years in detention, and only 11% among those detained for more than three years.

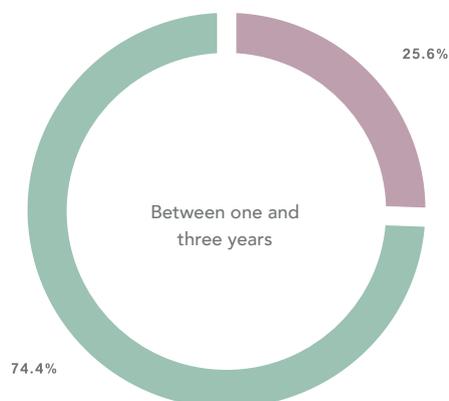
Are you active in any organization or network that works in the civil, humanitarian or cultural field?

● Yes 43 ● No 34



Are you active in any organization or network that works in the civil, humanitarian or cultural field?

● Yes 11 ● No 32



Are you active in any organization or network that works in the civil, humanitarian or cultural field?

● Yes 8 ● No 63

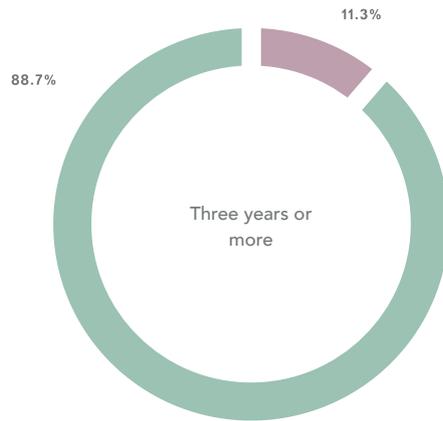
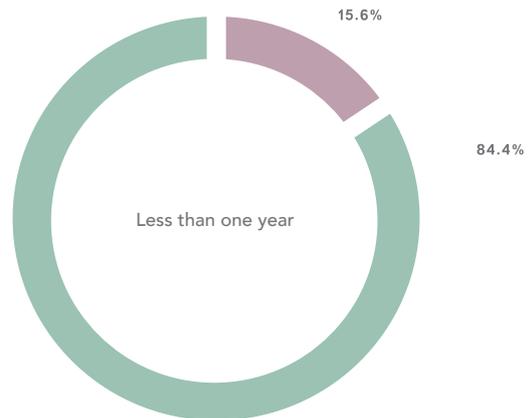


Figure 31 shows the distribution of respondents who showed interest in public affairs according to the variables of the duration of detention and the level of activity within civil frameworks.

The impact of detention duration continues along the same margin for respondents active within political frameworks, taking into account the lower percentage of these respondents' activity overall. We note that about 16% of those detained under one year said that they engaged in political activism, and 7% of those detained for one to three years, while the percentage did not exceed 6% among respondents who were detained for more than three years.

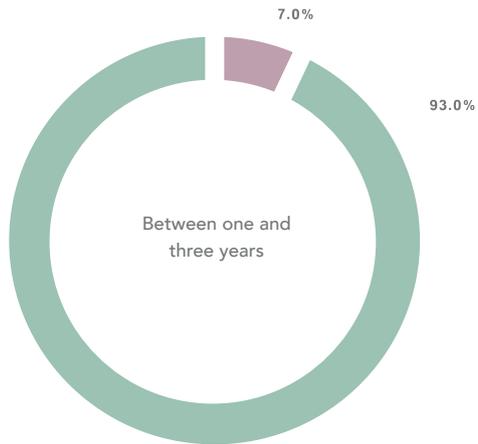
Are you active in any political organization or grouping?

● Yes 12 ● No 65



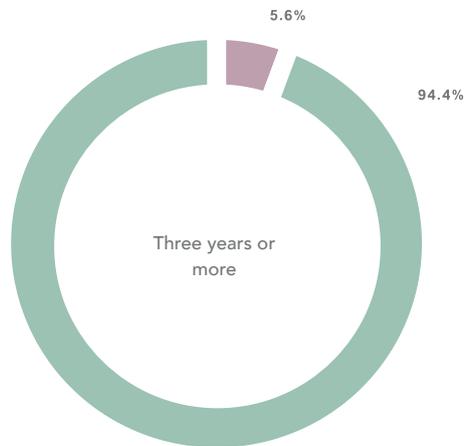
Are you active in any political organization or grouping?

● Yes 3 ● No 40



Are you active in any political organization or grouping?

● Yes 4 ● No 67



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Figure 32 shows the distribution of respondents who showed interest in public affairs according to the variables of the duration of detention and the level of activity within political frameworks.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The vast majority of sample respondents were not interested or active in public affairs before the outbreak of the protests in 2011. The protests turned the scene in Syria and pushed the majority of the sample respondents to shift from being uninterested in public affairs to engaged activists.
- Most of those engaged in public affairs issues after 2011 remained largely interested even after their detention experience. More than half of the surviving respondents said that upon their release from detention, they decided to become more engaged in peaceful, or even armed, activism against the regime. Comparing the levels of interest in public affairs among respondents pre-2011 with those today suggests that the percentages have completely reversed; today's Syria has gone from an uninterested majority to a very interested majority. This could be an important component for investment by donors, civil society program makers, and all those seeking justice.
- In general, about a third of respondents interested in public affairs said they are currently active in civil frameworks. This is not a small percentage, but it does suggest that the majority are still outside organized collective action, trending instead toward individual activities and behaviors such as engaging in political discussions with their milieu or posting and commenting on social media. Thus, civil society organizations and victims' associations should increase their access and communication with the organizationally inactive segment, working to integrate them into frameworks, encouraging them to form associations and gatherings, and raising awareness about the role of victims and their associations in achieving justice. Decision-makers should support these efforts.





- It was also clear that the respondents in our sample preferred working within civil frameworks rather than direct engagement in political activism. Less than 10% of respondents said that they operate within political frameworks. The study assumes factors that move respondents away from the field of political action, such as the hard conditions in the country, international interventions, displacements, and other factors. So, this one-third can also be viewed as potential political activists at any time in the future, as the political scene in Syria changes. Accordingly, political forces and active parties within Syria must take this indicator into consideration and work to involve survivors more in political activism and raise awareness of their role in building the future of Syria and the importance of their engagement.
- The correlational analysis shows the emergence of several factors determining the type and extent of detention experience effects on respondents' relationship with public affairs. In terms of gender, men showed a higher degree of interest in public affairs, while women interested in public affairs were more willing to participate in activities and were more engaged in civil frameworks. Thus, civil society organizations should first work on awareness programs and combat the societal narrative that reveres the male survivor and shatters the female survivor. It should also invest in the energy and strong motivation of engaged female survivors with empowerment programs and employment priorities.
- The impact of the place of residence, inside or outside the country, emerged as a factor. While respondents residing in Syria seemed more interested in



public affairs, respondents living abroad were more active. Here appears the effect of the population dispersion and the deportation of political and civil life outside the country, which made participation opportunities—civil or political—more readily available to a Syrian refugee living in Turkey, for example, than a Syrian living in regime-controlled areas. Thus, there is a need for work by victims' associations and civil society to enhance participation and engagement of survivors living inside Syria in public affairs, and provide them with both opportunities and the necessary tools to engage in the struggle.

- It also seems that people detained at a younger age were more interested in public affairs today, and those with higher education were more involved in civil and political frameworks. There was also a clear impact of the duration of detention, as those respondents detained for longer periods were both less interested and less engaged. Finally, those detained in connection with opposition activities seem to be more resistant to the impacts of the detention experience. Therefore, civil society should allocate different support and empowerment programs for each of these groups, to ensure their return to their active lives. Also, decision-makers should provide resources to work on reparation for this group.
- With regard to respondents' perceptions about the handling of the detention issue itself, most expressed a great general dissatisfaction with the performance of forces and organizations affiliated with the Syrian opposition addressing the issue of detainees. The majority of respondents evaluated those organizations' performances negatively in providing support and assistance to detainees or their families, human rights efforts in prosecution and attempts to apply justice, and the political effort to bring detainees' issues to the negotiation table. Therefore, it is recommended that civil society organizations work to increase aid and compensation programs allocated to victims and their families. Likewise, political forces and institutions should review their performance in this regard, work on more victim representation regarding their demands, and establish transparent channels of communication with both survivors of detention and victims' associations. Finally, the global community should work to establish and strengthen more international litigation and accountability pathways. Organizations working in this field should increase pressure to achieve accountability, and necessarily increase communication with the victims and their associations.
- With regard to potential solutions to the issue of detainees in Syria, the perceptions of the vast majority of respondents converged on one demand as the highest priority: to reveal the whereabouts of detainees and allow international organizations to access them. The demand for fair trials for all detainees emerged as the second priority. As a third priority, perceptions agreed upon the demand for material and moral compensation for detainees and their families. Decision makers and others working on this issue should take these demands and their order of priority into consideration.



