

SECURITY PROVISION AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN POST-WAR SYRIA:  
A SECURITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT AMONG THE SYRIAN DIASPORA IN GERMANY

# Insecurity and Injustice in Syria before and during the War

**Nora-Elise Beck & Lars Döbert**  
Berlin & Beirut  
2020

This security needs assessment aims to contribute to open access information on good governance and security sector reform in Syria. It was specifically designed to understand citizens' needs and identify entry points for citizen-oriented security sector reform efforts. It analyses how the Syrian security system would need to change in order for Syrians to feel safe and secure in post-war Syria.

The survey's online questionnaire consists of 63 questions in Modern Standard Arabic. Between March and August 2018, 619 Syrians living in Germany completed the questionnaire. They came from all 14 Syrian governorates. On average, participants were 29 years old (born in 1989).

This working paper is part of a series. For an overview of the survey's objectives, content, and participants, please refer to the Introduction to the Survey and Sample Group Composition, which may be found along with all other working papers by scanning the QR code or accessing the link below:



<https://www.lanosec.de/ssr-survey-syria/>

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Published in 2020 by Lanosec and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Berlin, Beirut.  
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This publication has been financed and supported by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. The views and opinions expressed in this publication are solely those of the original authors. They do not necessarily represent those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13457>

# Executive Summary

This working paper examines the most common and serious forms of insecurity and injustice before and during the war in Syria, comparing general perceptions with the personal experiences of Syrians who took part in this survey. It also looks at the responsibility of state security actors and non-state armed groups for violence and repression.

## Survey results

Survey participants perceived *Repression and violence by state security forces* and *Unfair rulings by justice institutions* as the most common and serious types of insecurity and injustice both before and during the war. The prevailing cause of insecurity and injustice before and during the war originated, therefore, from the state and its institutions. When comparing the situation before and during the war, these two categories saw only slight increases, while four other categories increased dramatically. The highest increment was evident in the category *Repression and violence by non-state armed groups*. The only category with a slight decrease was *Domestic violence*.

Perceptions strongly corresponded with personal experiences. Before the war, many survey participants indicated personally experiencing *Repression and violence by state security forces* and *Unfair rulings by justice institutions*. The third most important category was *Lack of access to justice institutions*. During the war, overall, more survey participants experienced insecurity and injustice themselves, especially through *Repression and violence by state security forces* and *Lack of access to justice institutions*. On average, more men than women expressed having experienced insecurity and injustice both before and during the war.

According to survey participants, Syrian state security forces were primarily responsible for violence and repression both before and during the war. During the war, respondents also perceived non-state armed groups to be responsible, but to a much lower extent. A remarkable variation is seen

with regard to different geographic areas and social surroundings, as survey participants estimated the level of violence and repression both before and during the war to be lower in their town or village than in their governorate or at the national level.

## Conclusions

Current political developments in Syria, and the likelihood that the regime will win the war militarily, limit the prospects for comprehensively reforming the Syrian security sector. However, it is important for international actors working in and on Syria to keep in mind which experiences Syrians had with insecurity and injustice, and how they envisage an ideal security sector for post-war Syria. Without taking this into consideration, long-term stability and peace will be doomed to fail. This, therefore, prompts several recommendations for further academic research as well as policy analysis and development:

- » **Call for an immediate halt to all kinds of repression and violence** carried out by state security forces and linked militias, as well as by other armed groups. Continue to advocate for a transformation of the security sector into one that respects human rights and operates on the principles of accountability, integrity, and the rule of law. Call for addressing corruption, favouritism, and bribery in all parts of society.
- » **Collect and document evidence and witness reports on grave human rights violations** by all parties to the conflict, with a special focus on state repression and violence before and during the war, especially in Syrian prisons. Syrian and international initiatives that aim to bring perpetrators to justice should be supported. In addition, further research should be conducted on the various kinds of discrimination that led to insecurity and injustice in Syria, in order to be prepared to advocate for equally and fairly distributed government services.

- » **Expand the research conducted in this survey through focus group discussions on the security needs** of Syrian women, girls, boys, and men. This holds especially true for domestic and gender-based violence. Support Syrians in developing short-, mid-, and long-term strategies for national reconciliation, allowing them to share their experiences and receive justice. Ideally, this should go hand-in-hand with a transitional justice process.
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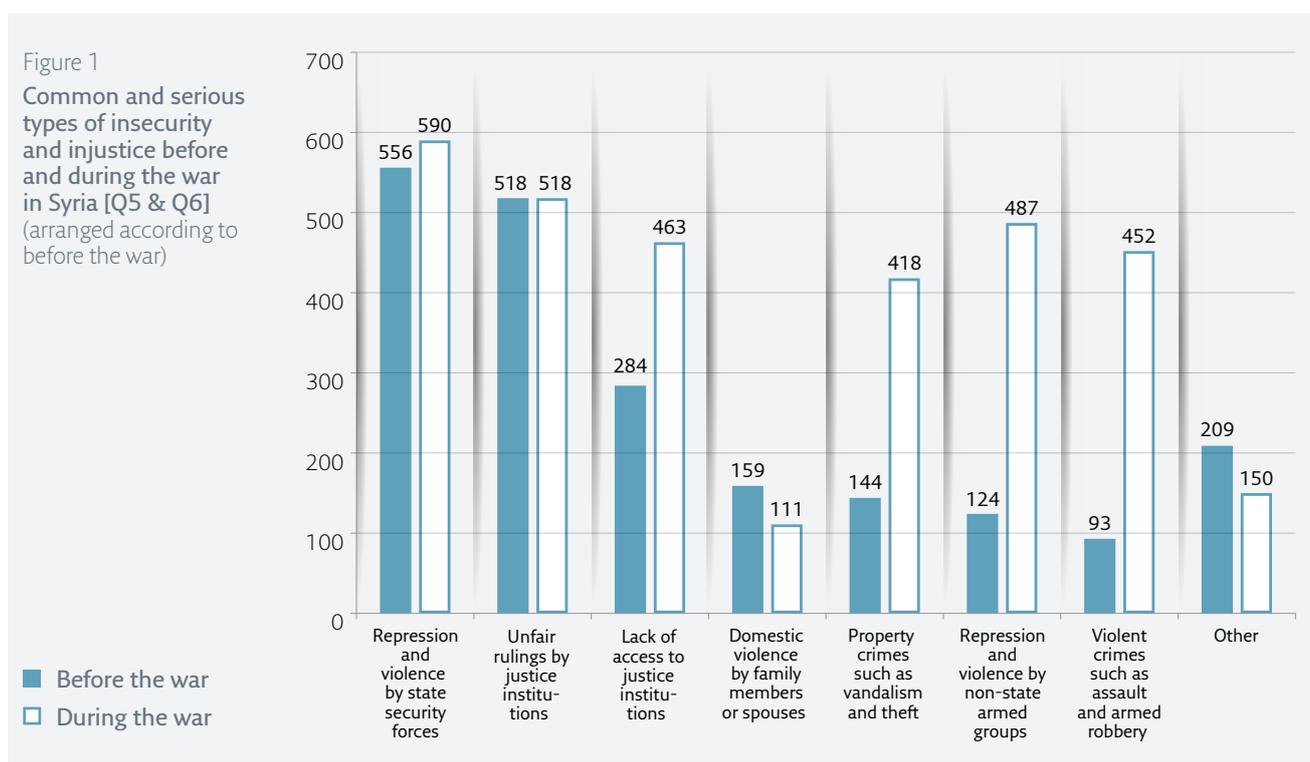
# Insecurity and Injustice in Syria before and during the War

Syrians felt unsafe and insecure, to different extents, in almost all living spaces before and during the war. While personal networks, such as family and the close community, were the main sources of protection (see Working Paper 1: Safe Spaces and Protection in Syria before and during the War), it was mainly the state that was responsible for insecurity and injustice. This paper examines the most common forms of insecurity and injustice before and during the war, comparing general perceptions with personal experiences. It further presents results regarding the actors responsible for repression and violence.

## Common and serious types of insecurity and injustice before and during the war

Survey participants first selected the most common and serious types of insecurity and injustice in Syria before (Question 5) and during (Question 6) the war. Both questions included an open-ended section where participants could add new elements or express their thoughts and feelings.

Before the war (see Figure 1), the two most common and serious types of insecurity were *Repression and violence by state security forces* (90%) and *Unfair rulings by justice institutions* (84%). The least selected category was *Violent crimes such as assault and armed robbery* (15%). This means that the most dominant forms of perceived insecurity and injustice in Syria before the war were of a political nature; the state being responsible for both of them. Crimes such as robbery or murder seem to have been less of a concern to survey participants.



Box 1  
Personal experience  
with domestic violence  
before the war [Q5]

"The worst for me was the non-protection of the child, and the lack of special rights for children. When I was a child, my stepmother used heavy violence against me. Back then I thought a lot about suicide. My father did not care. [...] And this created inside me a weakness in the personality and great anxiety. Sometimes, I am violent, given what my father's wife has done to me. Even now I cannot be the man I want to be. In so many situations I cannot act. And so many times I cannot express what I feel inside. In so many situations I cannot defend myself or my daughter. I think the difference between Germany and Syria is that the school is a place that can help the child and even stop violence. The school in Germany forbids children to go back home if domestic violence is discovered, even if only to a small extent."

During the war, *Repression and violence by state security forces* reached 95%, and *Unfair rulings by justice institutions* 84%; both remaining the two most common and serious types of insecurity and injustice. These two categories showed the smallest or no increase due to their already-elevated starting point. In contrast, four other categories increased dramatically. For example, *Repression and violence by non-state armed groups* nearly tripled, meaning the state was no longer perceived as the sole repressive actor. Moreover, *Property crimes such as vandalism and theft* and *Violent crimes such as assault and armed robbery* significantly increased. One reason for this increase might be the disruption of public order during the war. Only *Domestic violence* recorded a decrease, of 30%. This could either be due to a shift in the relative perception of the severity of certain types of insecurity, or be linked to a decrease in factors facilitating the occurrence of domestic violence, for example because of the war-related absence of male household members (see Box 1 for a personal experience with domestic violence before the war).

Answers on insecurity and injustice during the war differed according to where survey participants had resided in Syria (see Table 1). On average, more participants from the Governorate of Damascus selected *Domestic violence* as a serious and common type of insecurity and injustice. Additionally, property crimes, violent crimes, and unfair rulings were more important for participants from the Governorate of Damascus than for participants from all other governorates, including Aleppo. It appears the level of crime was perceived as higher in the Governorate of Damascus than anywhere else. Participants from the Governorate of Aleppo, on average, selected *Repression and violence by non-state armed groups* more often than participants from all other governorates, including Damascus. This might be linked to the lengthy battle for Aleppo between 2012 and 2016.

Table 1: In your opinion, what have been the most common and serious types of insecurity and injustice during the war in Syria? [Q6] (pre-defined variables only)

	Governorate of Aleppo	Governorate of Damascus	Other governorates
Repression and violence by state security forces	96%	93%	97%
Unfair rulings by justice institutions	78%	87%	84%
Lack of access to justice institutions	71%	72%	77%
Domestic violence	13%	22%	17%
Property crimes	67%	70%	67%
Repression and violence by non-state armed groups	82%	76%	79%
Violent crimes	70%	77%	72%

However, participants from the governorates of Aleppo and Damascus suffered less from a *Lack of access to justice institutions* than participants from all other remaining Syrian governorates. It appears it was easier to access justice institutions in Syria's two largest cities than in other governorates. At the same time, participants from the Governorate of Aleppo selected *Unfair rulings by justice institutions* less often. This could be because judges operated differently there or dealt with different kinds of cases. Another possibility is that survey participants from the Governorate of Aleppo used alternative dispute resolution systems more often than participants from other governorates, including Damascus. In any case, it is worth conducting further research in this regard to obtain a better understanding of the functioning of the Syrian justice sector.

For Questions 5 and 6, nearly one third of participants made use of the open-ended answer section. Box 2 presents examples of participants' statements. Most statements presented personal stories of suffering, fear, and vulnerability, anticipating answers to Questions 7 and 8 on personal experiences with insecurity and injustice. No other questions in the survey produced as many written answers. Some participants added only a few words; others drafted a full page. The number of respondents making use of the open-ended answer section shows the willingness and need to speak about often-traumatic experiences.

Box 2  
Selected statements  
of survey participants  
on discrimination,  
corruption, lack  
of freedoms, and  
the absence of  
accountability and  
oversight before the  
war [Q5]

Different forms of discrimination (e.g., based on sects, ethnic groups, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, etc.)

"[There was] inequality between men and women; in particular husbands used domestic violence against their wives. The personal status laws support men to an extent for which there are no words. They even invented something called an honour crime. This is one of the worst manifestations of persecution and an insult to women's rights, in addition to hundreds of other forms of discrimination against women. So, how can I feel safe if I represent a piece of furniture in this country, no matter how important it might be? And I feel like this even though I am a working woman from an open-minded family. But the state and individuals control everything. My description of these issues does not even account for one drop of water in an entire ocean."

"Violence against homosexuals, religious minorities, and non-religious people."

"The ruling regime and its supporters continue to marginalise the Kurdish people in Syria and deny their existence and language. [...] The Syrian opposition behaved like the Syrian regime. [...] All Kurds in Syria are threatened by displacement, killing, ethnic cleansing, and demographic change in their areas by all parties to the Syrian conflict."

Corruption, favouritism, and bribery

"If I had been poor in Syria, I would not have had any rights."

"The security institutions controlled all decision-making processes in all government departments. They are corrupt institutions that protect corruption."

"If, in Syria, before the war, somebody attacked you and you went to the police to complain, you would have to pay a bribe. So, you shut up and were obliged to forget about the attack. If you did not, you would have become the attacker and ended up in prison [...]. And the catastrophe would have been even bigger if the attacker was the son of a person in charge. Then your family would not even have known where you were and how you were doing."

"There is complete disrespect for the most basic human rights. If you were against any political individual, it meant you were against a whole political organisation and maybe even against the state itself. Government department = bribery. Security department = torture to death."

**Lack of freedoms (e.g., freedom of expression, freedom of religion)**

"The inability to say the truth."

"It was not possible for any human being to express an opinion contrary to the opinion of the state without fearing for their life and that of their family members. The ruling authority did not allow citizens to say 'No! No, I don't want to!' The main problem here was the absence of a peaceful concept of freedom and human rights and an insufficient awareness of them."

**Absence of accountability, oversight, and control of state institutions**

"Lack of accountability of security agencies. The obligation to use 'wasta' [influential connections] to solve problems in general. The absence of diverse political opinions, and the abuse and torture of those people and their families who expressed a different political opinion. The sons and families of authority figures could have access to anything they wanted: money, land, real estate, even a girl against her will. Lack of responsible judicial justice to hold criminals accountable [...]. Absence of administrative control and transparency [...]."

Regarding insecurity and injustice before the war, three additional categories came up in the open-ended answer section. The largest group (26%) indicated different forms of discrimination, based on sects, ethnic groups, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and other factors. The second-largest group (24%) dealt with all forms of corruption, favouritism, and bribery. The third-largest group (24%) expressed concerns regarding the lack of freedoms, such as freedom of expression and freedom of religion. All three categories together grant insights into how survey participants perceived their lives in Syria before the war. They express the pressure Syrians experienced in their daily lives. A further 8% described detailed examples of violent repression, including arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, political detention, and ill-treatment in prisons (including torture, killing, etc.). Other statements concerned the absence of a clear legal framework, an independent judiciary, and mechanisms of accountability and oversight.

During the war (see Box 3 for selected statements), the participants' focus in the open-ended answers shifted to different forms of violence (killing, robbery, rape, kidnapping, persecution, displacement, blackmailing, artillery fire, and airstrikes) carried out by state security forces as well as non-state armed groups (44%). Violent repression, such as arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, political detention, and mistreatment in prisons (including torture and killing) ranked second (16%). 13% wrote about the lack of freedoms. It appears that, with the increase of violence in the country, other types of insecurity and injustice, which were perceived as important before the war, suddenly took a backseat to the violence caused by the outbreak of the armed conflict.

Once hostilities stop and the war ends, violence linked to warfare should decrease. However, dealing with the types of insecurity and injustice mentioned before the war requires deep changes in the functioning of the Syrian state. To eliminate discrimination and corruption in all government institutions, including the security sector, and to grant freedoms for Syrian citizens, the political will for comprehensive long-term reforms

needs to exist. In addition, there would need to be a national dialogue to start a reconciliation process for Syria. The current political developments leave nearly no hope for advancements in any of these areas.

Box 3  
Selected statements  
of survey participants  
regarding violence and  
repression during the  
war [Q6]

"Systematic targeting of civilians and the isolation by the government; the psychological horror for children and sick people; forced displacement by the government."

"State authority no longer existed. This allowed the spread of groups with local authority. In general, these groups were more repressive than the repressing state."

"The appearance of warlords and the Shabiha militias [state-sponsored militias] that gained more and more power; and the exploitation of citizens."

"Chaos in all parts of the country; exposure to kidnapping and blackmailing by groups linked to the generals close to the president and his family in one way or another; armed groups that do not belong to the government but are supported by the president's regime; destruction of civilian property in a systematic way by the highest authority in Syria."

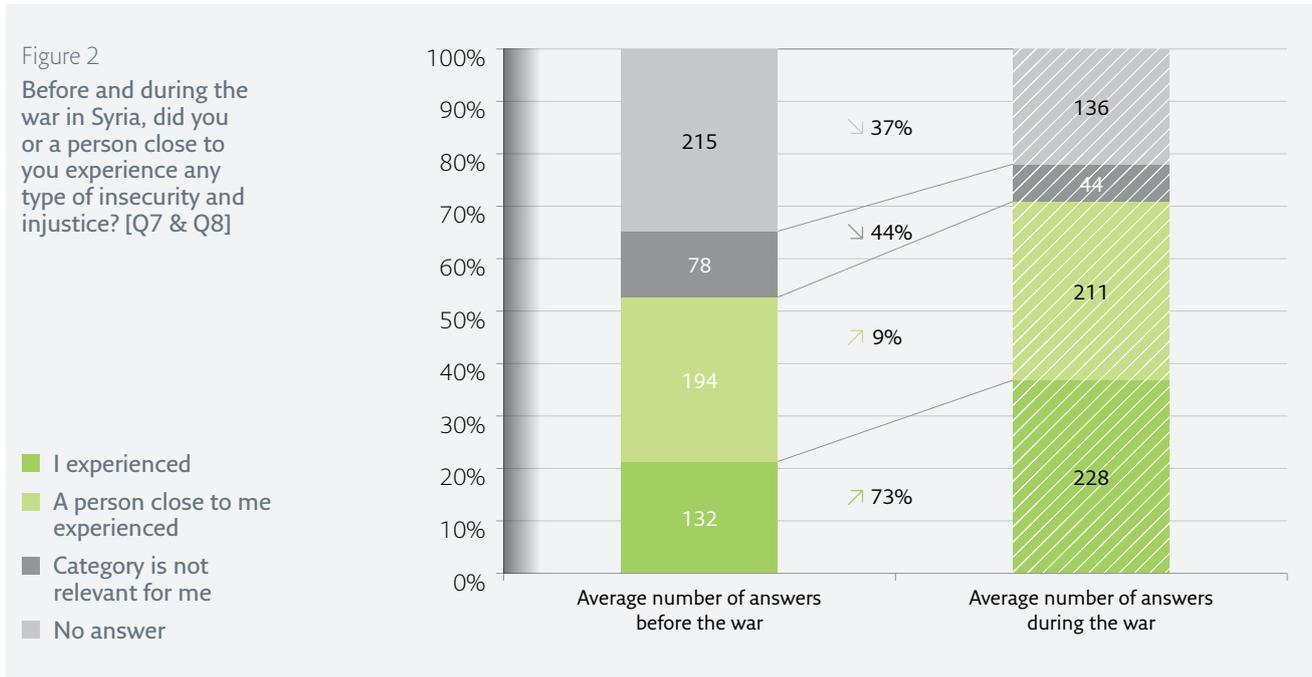
"In times of war, everybody has their own laws. All make their own laws and enforce them violently, regardless of whether they are good or bad laws. During the war, the country turned into a jungle. The logic of the weak and the strong rules. There is no space for dialogue in any way. In war, there is only the logic of war."

"Countless things. [It was] enough that they killed my 23-year-old brother under torture in Sednaya prison. He was a university student. He did not carry weapons that day. But he requested freedom, justice, and equality. So they killed him with sheer barbarism. Only that."

## Personal experiences with injustice and insecurity before and during the war

After stating their perceptions of the most serious and common types of insecurity in Syria before and during the war, survey participants indicated which of these types they had experienced themselves, or a person close to them (Question 7 before and Question 8 during the war). It is important to note that asking about personal experiences with insecurity and injustice is a taboo for many Syrians. Not all Syrians are used to speaking freely about what happened to them or their loved ones in Syria. Many survey participants were afraid of potential persecution for sharing their experiences and thoughts, even though they no longer live in Syria. They were either afraid of Syrian intelligence surveillance in Germany or of persecution of family members and friends still living in Syria. For this reason we offered two ways to opt out of answering Questions 7 and 8: either by selecting *No answer* or *Category is not relevant for me*. Many survey participants used these two options. Especially before the war, on average, more than one third of all participants selected *No answer* and 13% selected *Category is not relevant for me*. *No answer* responses should not be interpreted to assume that there was less insecurity and injustice before the war. It primarily means that survey participants did not want to answer the question.

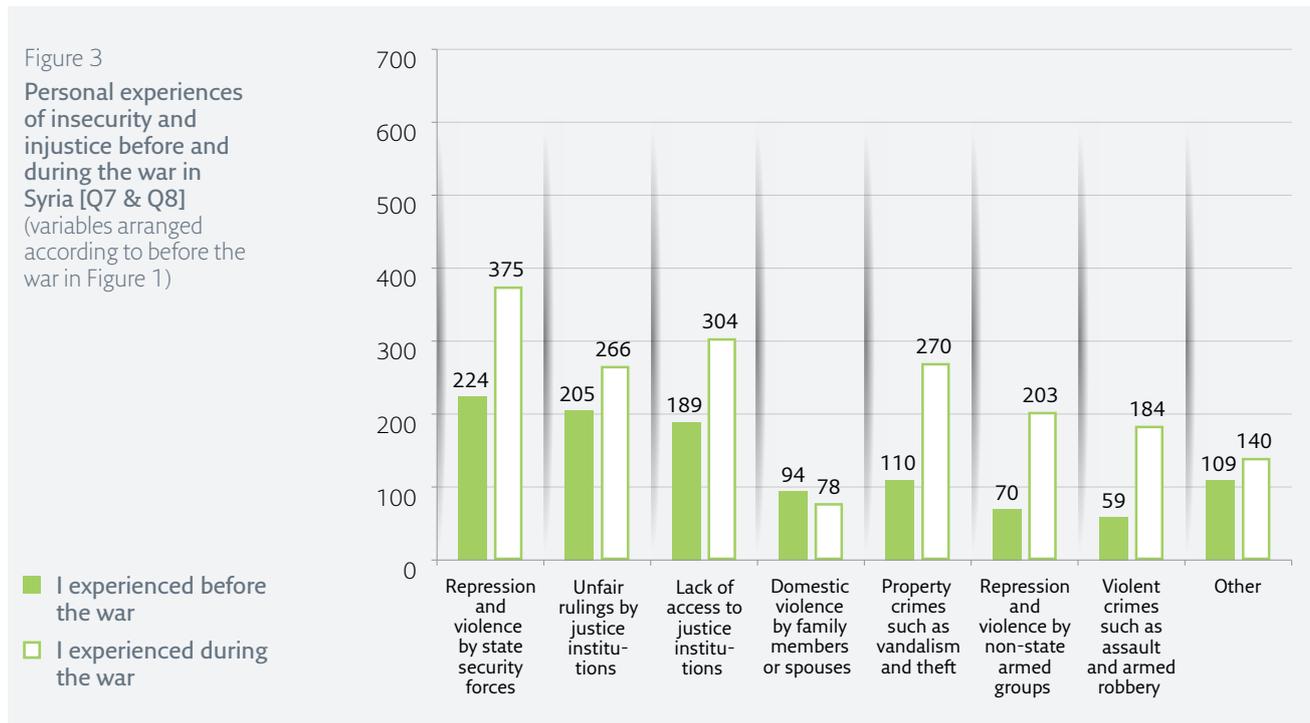
Questions 7 and 8 were both single-answer questions: only one of the following could be selected: *I experienced*; *A person close to me experienced*; *Category is not relevant for me*; or *No answer*. The logic



behind this approach was to understand the intensity of a person's experience of injustice and insecurity. Which of the forms of insecurity and injustice did survey participants experience themselves, and which ones did people close to them experience? Based on the results presented in Figure 2, three observations can be made. First, more participants overall stated that they had experienced insecurity and injustice during the war, either personally or through someone close to them (53% before the war and 71% during the war). Second, more participants had not only experienced injustice and insecurity via hearsay but had personally experienced it (increase of 73%). Third, the number of *No answer* and *Category is not relevant for me* responses decreased for Question 8 (during the war). This could mean that more survey participants were willing to share their experiences during the war. Another possibility is that in comparison to what survey participants experienced during the war, the experience of injustice and insecurity before the war did not seem worth categorising due to a relativisation of past experiences.

Before the war (see Figure 3), survey participants themselves mostly experienced *Repression and violence by state-security forces* and *Unfair rulings by justice institutions*. The third most serious and common type of insecurity and injustice was *Lack of access to justice institutions*. Relatively few survey participants experienced *Violent crimes such as assault and armed robbery*, or *Repression and violence by non-state armed groups*.

During the war, more survey participants experienced insecurity and injustice in person. Personal experiences with *Repression and violence by state security forces* increased by 67%. Due to the outbreak of war and the political instability in the country, the general level of violence increased, making people more likely to personally experience violence and repression. Those who personally experienced *Lack of access to justice institutions* increased by 61%. An explanation for this could be the general dysfunction of government institutions due to the war. Alternatively, more survey participants could have tried to access already-overloaded courts. Another option is that the judiciary was further politicised during the war in order to deal with opponents and political activists. It is also possible that participants from rebel-held areas were prevented from, or refrained from, addressing government courts. The highest increase, of 145%, can be observed in the category of *Property crimes such as vandalism and theft*. Again, the collapse of state authority in many regions may be a reason for the dissolution of law and order structures. Only the numbers for *Domestic violence* dropped by 17% from before the war to during the war. One explanation for



this decrease could be that all other types of insecurity and injustice increased dramatically and, in direct comparison, domestic violence seemed less of an issue. It could also be that the perpetrators spent less time at home, for example because they were serving in the army or fighting for opposition armed forces. Perhaps different living conditions also had an impact on domestic violence. Internally displaced persons, for example, who stayed in camps might have lived closer together with other Syrians, increasing the level of surveillance and observation, and thus, decreasing opportunities for violent behaviour against spouses or other family members.

Women and men appear to have had different experiences of insecurity and injustice before and during the war (see Table 2). On average, more men than women stated that they had experienced insecurity and injustice, both before and during the war. During the war, experiences with most types of insecurity and injustice increased for men and women (with the exception of *Domestic violence*).

The biggest difference between the experiences of men and women can be observed in the category *Repression and violence by state security forces*. Before the war, only 8% of all participating women experienced such violence and repression, compared to 40% of all participating men. Similarly, during the war, more men reported experiencing *Repression and violence by state security forces*. However, women recorded a much higher percentage increase of 400%, compared to a 58% increase for men. This can be linked to a general increase of repression and violence, or to the fact that men were more absent from home and, thus, women had to be in more direct contact with government institutions, including the security forces.

When looking at *Domestic violence*, on average, slightly more men than women indicated they had been exposed to domestic violence before the war. However, there might be a significant number of unreported cases; especially, but not exclusively, for women; as respondents might be reluctant to share their experiences due to the taboo nature of the topic in society. During the war, the number of men who experienced domestic violence dropped. This could be linked to the fact that men spent less time at home, serving either in the army or in opposition forces, or having fled from Syria, thus lowering their risk of being exposed to domestic violence. In contrast, the number of women who indicated they had experienced domestic

violence increased. It might be that the overall increase of violence in the country led to a deterioration of living conditions for women. Varying opinions of women and men could be the result of different needs and perceptions of security and safety potentially caused by stereotypical gender roles in society. Validating these hypotheses through further research is highly recommended.

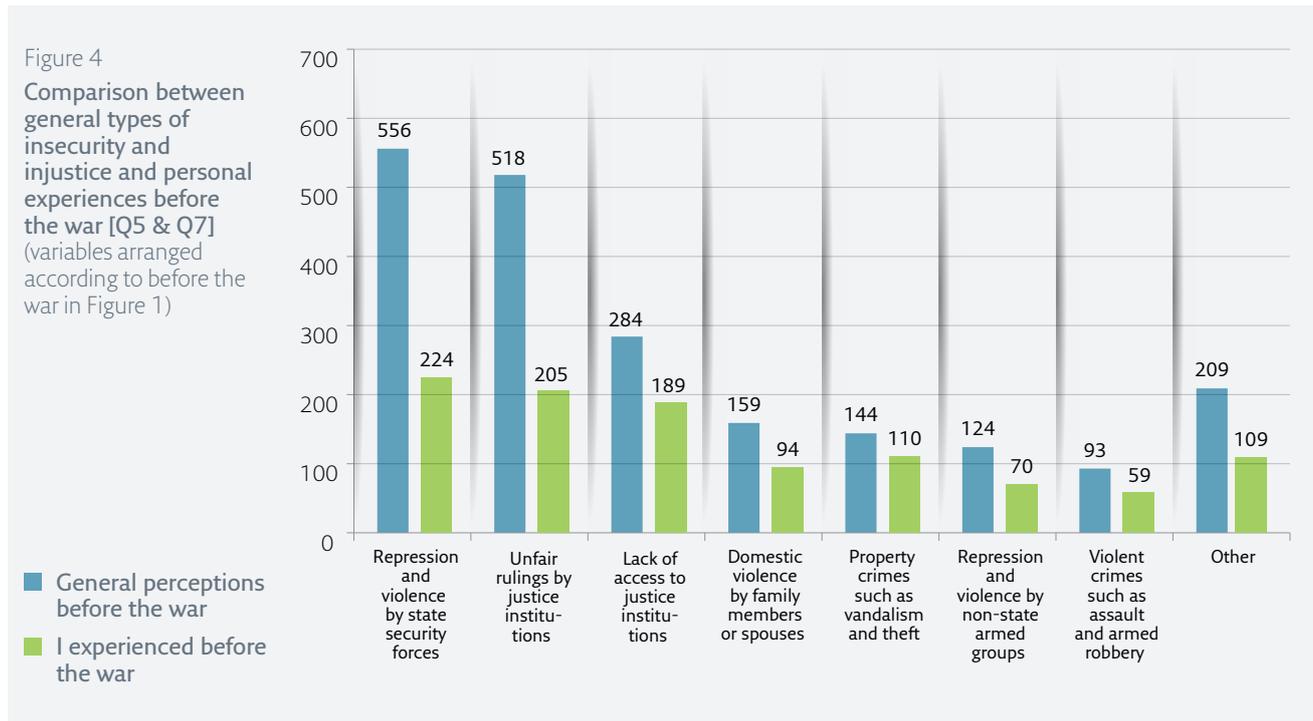
Table 2: Before or during the war, did you or a person close to you experience any type of insecurity and injustice? [Q7 & Q8]  
Value: I experienced

		Before the war	During the war	Change
Repression and violence by state security forces	Men	40%	63%	+57%
	Women	8%	40%	+400%
Unfair rulings by justice institutions	Men	35%	45%	+28%
	Women	17%	25%	+47%
Lack of access to justice institutions	Men	33%	51%	+54%
	Women	15%	35%	+133%
Domestic violence	Men	15,3%	12%	-21%
	Women	14,7%	16%	+9%
Property crimes	Men	18%	45%	+150%
	Women	16%	32%	+100%
Repression and violence by non-state armed groups	Men	13%	35%	+169%
	Women	3%	20%	+566%
Violent crimes	Men	10%	31%	+210%
	Women	4%	17%	+325%
Other	Men	19%	23%	+21%
	Women	9%	17%	+89%

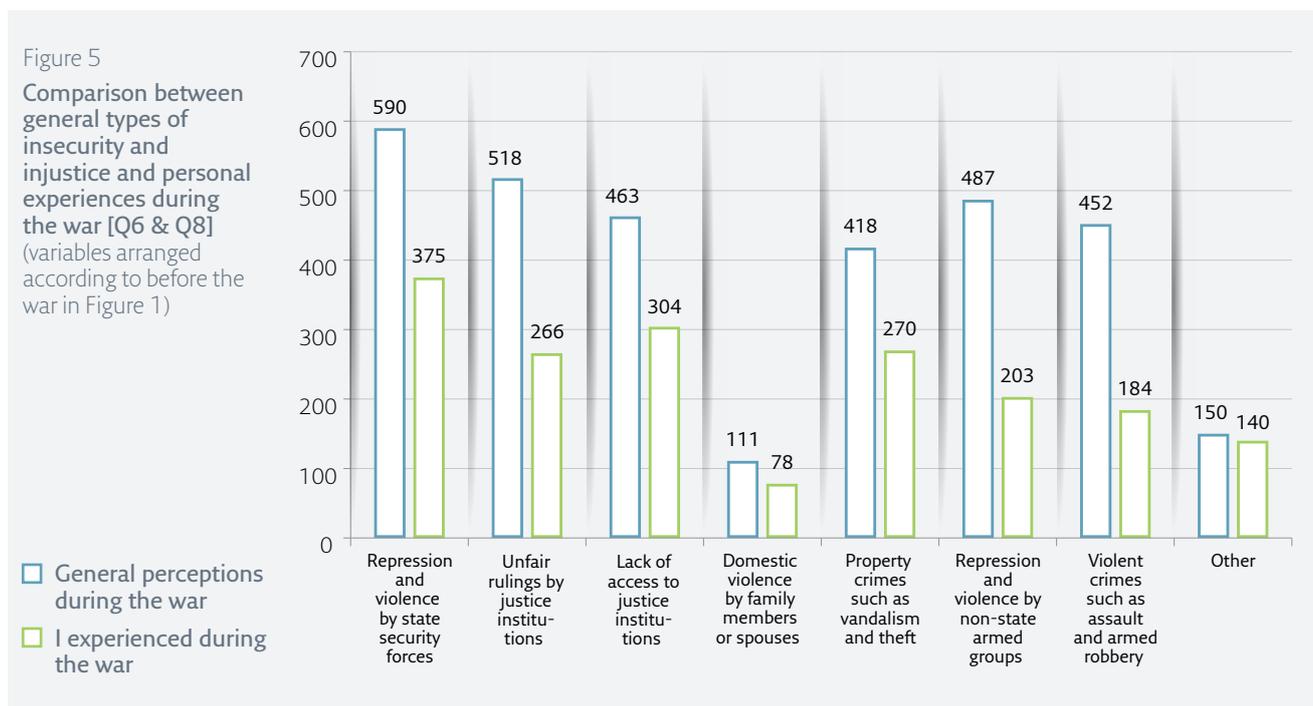
## Comparing perceptions of insecurity and injustice with personal experiences

Data collected on perceptions (Questions 5 and 6) and personal experiences (Questions 7 and 8) of insecurity and injustice allow for comparisons of the periods before (Figure 4) and during (Figure 5) the war.

Before the war, general statements on the levels of insecurity and injustice strongly corresponded with what survey participants personally experienced, except for the two categories *Repression and violence by state security forces* and *Unfair rulings by justice institutions*. These categories reached the highest numbers of results in both Questions 5 and 7 and recorded the biggest disparities. It appears many participants thought *Repression and violence by state security forces* and *Unfair rulings by justice institutions* to be the most common and serious types of insecurity and injustice, without having experienced such things themselves. This indicates high levels of fear of repression and unfair rulings among survey participants before the war. According to the results, this fear was rather based on hearsay or on experiences of relatives and friends than on personal experience.



During the war, more survey participants have not only personally experienced insecurity and injustice, but have also perceived an increase in the general levels of insecurity and injustice, with the exception of *Domestic violence*. Differences between perceptions and personal experiences diminished in comparison to the survey’s findings before the war. Again, the most common types of insecurity and injustice were *Repression and violence by state security forces* and *Unfair rulings by justice institutions*. At the same time, two other categories, rated as the least common and serious types of insecurity and injustice before the war, now recorded the biggest disparities: *Violent crimes such as assault and armed robbery*, and *Repression and violence by non-state armed groups*. A possible conclusion is that the widespread loss of state authority and public order seem to have facilitated the rise of crime and the appearance of new armed actors. The intensity



of both types of insecurity and injustice was new to survey participants and might have sparked fear without being based on personal experiences.

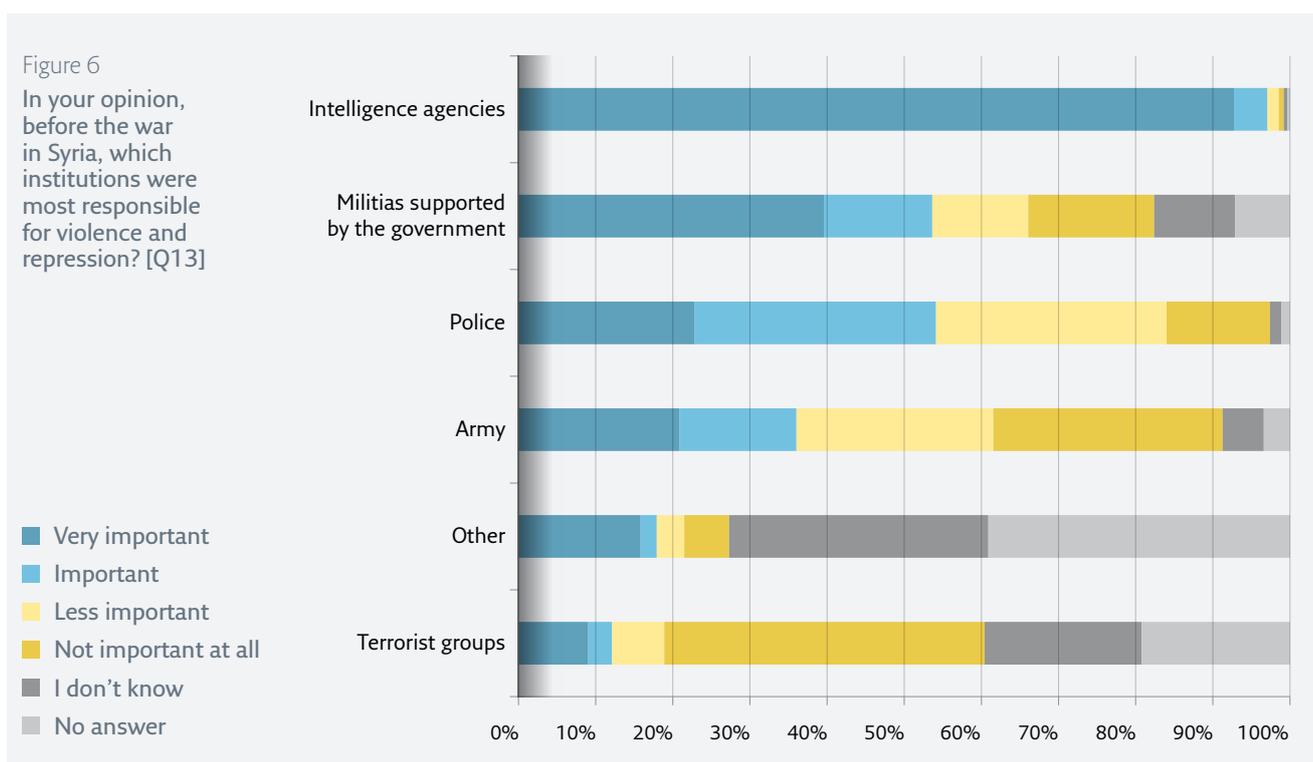
## Actors most responsible for repression and violence before and during the war

The most common type of perceived and experienced insecurity and injustice before and during the war was *Repression and violence by state security forces*. Which institutions were the most responsible for repression and violence in Syria before (Figure 6) and during (Figure 7) the war?

According to Figure 6, nearly all survey participants indicated that the Syrian intelligence agencies were most responsible for repression and violence in Syria before the war (see Box 4 for selected statements on violent repression). Regarding the army, they had mixed opinions: 21% stated that the army was highly responsible for repression and violence, while 30% said that they did not play a role in that regard. Terrorist groups were rated as least responsible for repression and violence.

Answers differed based on the area of residence of participants. 45% of participants from governorates other than Damascus and Aleppo attributed high importance to militias supported by the government for repression and violence, in comparison to survey participants from the governorates of Damascus (31%) and Aleppo (36%). It seems the government used its militias more frequently and/or more violently outside the governorates of Damascus and Aleppo.

During the war (Figure 7), three state actors, or those supported by the state, were seen as most responsible for repression and violence in Syria. The overwhelming majority of survey participants still attributed the highest responsibility to Syrian intelligence agencies, directly followed by militias supported by the government. The army also played a much more significant role, with an increase of 269% for very important and a decrease of 89% for not important at all answers. In comparison, repression and violence by the police doubled, yet they ranked only sixth place of the most responsible institutions for violence and repression,



**Box 4**  
Selected statements of survey participants on violent repression before the war [Q5]

"The absence of a civil state that protects its citizens from the armed groups that control the Syrian state under the name 'intelligence agency' and 'Syrian army.' Syrian citizens [would become] very afraid when they [saw] a military uniform, because it was not created for their protection, but for their repression. This is what Syrians suffered from the most."

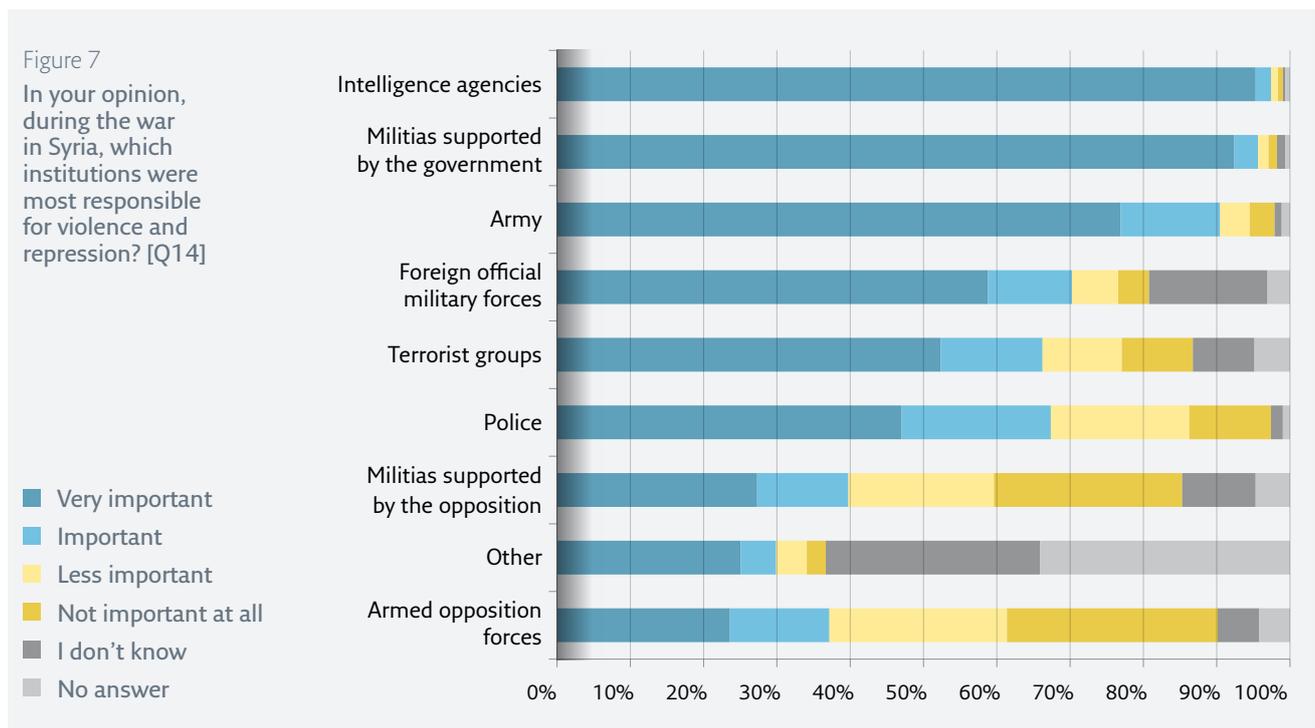
"I am from Hama. The regime destroyed Hama and killed its people in 1982. Since then, our parents and grandparents told us their stories. And we always lived in insecurity and fear of the Syrian secret services."

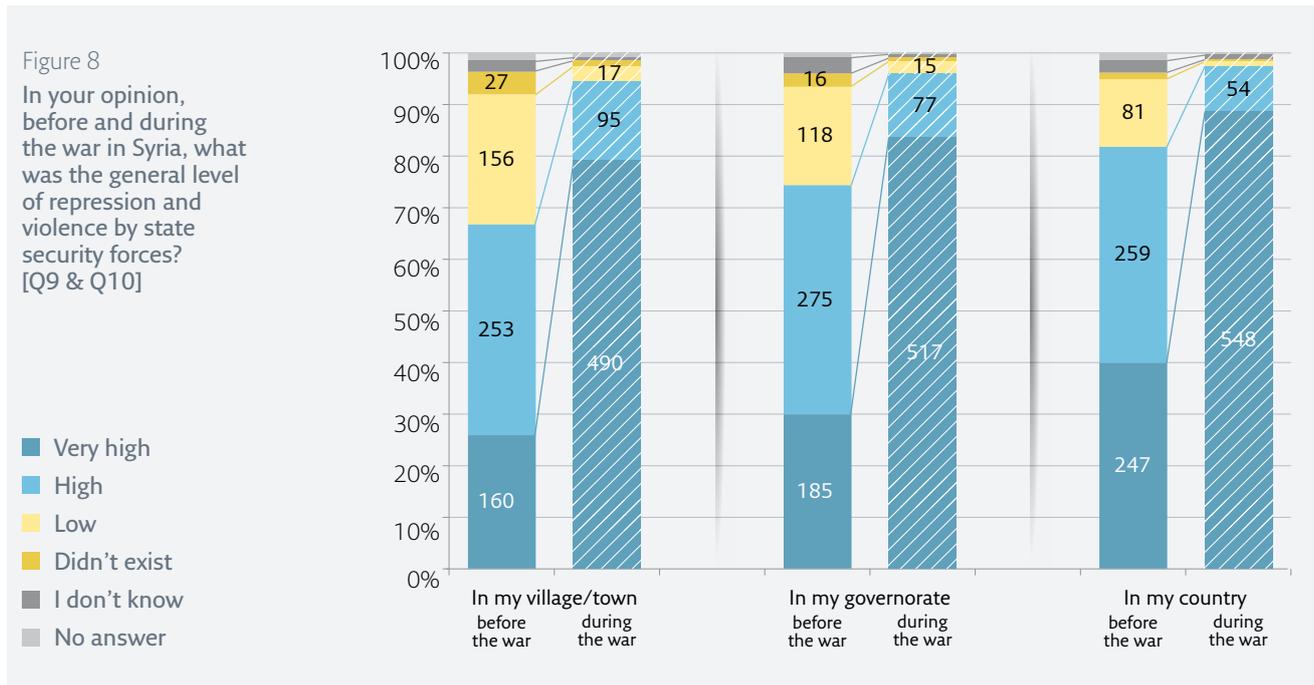
"Syria is not a state of law. It's a state of theft. In Syria, human beings do not have any value. [...] One of my children and my two brothers were killed by the criminal government forces."

behind terrorist groups and foreign official military forces (for further information on the police, refer to Working Paper 9: The Syrian Police). By contrast, armed opposition forces and militias supported by the opposition showed mixed results. Both categories ranked last when taking a separate look at the answers very important or important, as well as when combining both answers. An explanation for this could be that all survey participants live outside of Syria and, therefore, many of them support the opposition. Furthermore, the perceived danger posed by terrorist groups grew immensely during the war, with an increase of 479% for very important answers.

## The general level of repression and violence by state security forces and non-state armed groups

The previous sections show that state security forces in particular were responsible for violence and repression. This section looks at repression and violence by state security forces, and non-state armed groups, before and during the war from a different angle. It takes three levels of geographic scope, ranging



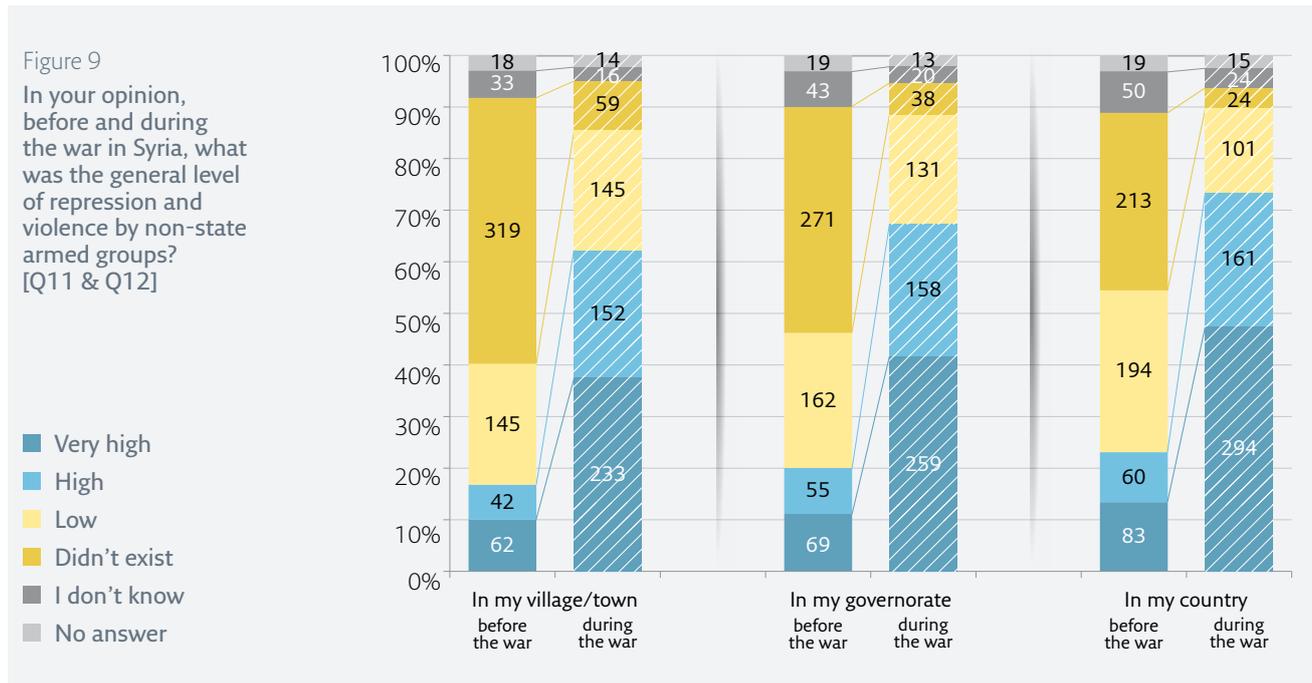


from hometown to the governorate as a whole, then to a national level, into consideration. This shows the opinions of survey participants on how close violence and repression executed by these two central actors came to their lived realities and who was responsible for them.

Before the war (see Figure 8), one quarter of survey participants indicated a very high level of state repression and violence in their village or town, while two thirds reported at least a high level. The level of repression and violence at the governorate and national levels was even higher. During the war, the levels of state repression and violence escalated in all areas. For example, three times more participants indicated a very high level of state repression and violence in their village or town. Again, the levels of repression and violence by state security forces were even higher at the governorate and national levels.

Table 3: In your opinion, what was the general level of repression and violence by state security forces before and during the war? [Q9 & Q10]  
Values: Very high & high

	Before the war						During the war					
	Governorate of Aleppo		Governorate of Damascus		Other governorates		Governorate of Aleppo		Governorate of Damascus		Other governorates	
	Very high	High	Very high	High	Very high	High	Very high	High	Very high	High	Very high	High
In my village/town	38%	36%	20%	45%	25%	40%	80%	16%	80%	13%	78%	16%
In my governorate	42%	36%	25%	45%	28%	47%	84%	13%	84%	11%	83%	13%
In the country	46%	38%	36%	46%	40%	41%	89%	10%	87%	9%	89%	8%



The answers differed based on the area of residence of survey participants (see Table 3). Before the war, survey participants from the Governorate of Aleppo indicated a higher level, on average, in all three categories than participants from the Governorate of Damascus or other governorates. During the war, the perception of the level of state violence and repression aligned itself among all participants.

Figure 9 presents the level of repression and violence by non-state armed groups. Before the war, this level was relatively low in all areas. In contrast, during the war, these numbers were nearly four times higher.

Comparing the levels of repression and violence by state security forces (Figure 8) and non-state armed groups (Figure 9), three conclusions can be drawn. First, the level of repression and violence by state security forces was always perceived as higher than that of non-state armed groups. Second, survey participants always indicated a lower level of repression and violence in their direct surroundings (in my village/town) than on the governorate and national levels (state security forces and non-state armed groups before and during the war). It appears that, however bad the situation might have been in their village or town, survey participants were still convinced that it would be even worse outside of their familiar surroundings. Third, the levels of repression and violence by state security forces and non-state armed groups significantly increased during the war, reflecting the overall deteriorating security situation in Syria.

# Recommendations

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Current political developments in Syria, and the likelihood that the regime will win the war militarily, limit the prospects for comprehensively reforming the Syrian security sector so as to turn it from an oppressive regime-protecting sector into one that provides security in accordance with the needs of Syrian citizens. However, it is important for international actors working in and on Syria to keep in mind how Syrians envisage an ideal security sector for post-war Syria and what kind of experiences they had with insecurity and injustice. Without taking the security needs of citizens into consideration, any future approach for peacebuilding and establishing stability in Syria will be doomed to fail in the long run. This, therefore, prompts several recommendations for further academic research as well as policy analysis and development:

- » Continue to call for an immediate halt of all kinds of repression and violence carried out by state security forces and affiliated militias, as well as by other armed groups. Syrians will not be able to feel safe and secure if repression and violence continue to be daily occurrences.
- » Issue a strong call for the integration of principles and standards of international treaties signed by Syria into national policies and legislation, such as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); and the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC).
- » Continue advocating for a transformation of the security sector into one that respects human rights and operates on the principles of accountability, integrity, and the rule of law. Security sector reform should not be side-lined as a utopian objective in political negotiations with the Syrian authorities and their international allies. The results of this survey demonstrate the dire need for reform of the justice and security sectors, without which a trusting relationship between citizens and the state will not be achieved. This includes training of all members of the security institutions on human rights in law enforcement, based on regional and international best practices.
- » Continue to advocate for addressing the issues of corruption, favouritism, and bribery in all parts of society that were a major source of insecurity and injustice before and during the war. Support the establishment of multi-sectoral working groups to develop joint strategies on how to fight corruption in all state institutions, in the economy, and in civil society.
- » Collect all legislation relevant to the security sector. Once collected, review the existing legislation and identify any areas violating human rights, permitting repression, and justifying inappropriate violence.
- » Conduct further research on all kinds of discrimination (e.g., based on sects, ethnic groups, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) which have led to insecurity and injustice in Syria, in order to be prepared to advocate for government services, including those provided by security institutions, and ensure they are being distributed equally and fairly to all Syrians.
- » Continue to collect and document evidence and witness reports on grave human rights violations by all parties to the conflict, with a special focus on state repression and violence both before and during the war, especially in Syrian prisons. Support Syrian and international initiatives to bring perpetrators to justice and to apply the principle of universal jurisdiction.
- » Conduct further research, including focus group discussions, on the security needs of Syrians and explore gender-based differences. Furthermore, additional research needs to be conducted on domestic violence and the experiences of women, girls, boys, and men in this regard.
- » Develop training programmes for different age groups and educational backgrounds on civic education, freedoms, and human rights, with a special focus on the freedom of expression. These programmes should involve marginalised and/or discriminated groups in society. Not expressing opinions was a source of protection for survey participants before the war. There needs to be a societal acceptance and respect of the other. Engaging in dialogues with all parts of society contributes to peaceful coexistence, be it inside Syria or within diaspora communities in their current host states abroad. Working with diaspora communities opens up an area of action for international actors that could already be utilised.

- » Support Syrians in developing short-, mid-, and long-term strategies for national reconciliation, allowing them to share their experiences and attain justice. This should go hand-in-hand with a transitional justice process that includes compensation, the prosecution of perpetrators, and institutional reform to prevent any further abuse.



