

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

# Transparency of the Syrian Security Sector

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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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# Executive Summary

This working paper examines the importance of transparency for the provision of accountable and citizen-oriented security. Furthermore, it presents the awareness and knowledge of participants regarding the different roles, processes, and structures of security providers in Syria.

## Survey results

The survey results reflect a substantive lack of transparency of the Syrian security sector. At the same time, respondents found transparency to be more important for a functioning security sector than the speed of response, efficiency, and effectiveness of security providers. Two other characteristics, which are both closely linked to transparency, ranked among the three most important elements: accountability of security providers and democratic civilian oversight.

Respondents stated that they had limited knowledge of the terms *Civilian oversight* and *Good governance*, and both need transparency to function well. This lack of knowledge could be a challenge for civil society aiming to exercise an effective civilian oversight role in the future.

Fewer than half of survey participants were able to differentiate between the major security providers (e.g., the army, police, and intelligence agencies) in Syria before the war. Among them, the roles and responsibilities of different intelligence agencies were least known. Respondents had a clearer concept of the Syrian Armed Forces and the police.

Survey participants identified *Lack of communication with the public* as a very important deficit of Syrian security providers. This was more important to them than, for example, *Lack of competence* and *Lack of resources*.

## 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 how Syrians envisage an ideal security sector for post-war Syria. Transparency as a basis for accountability and civilian oversight is key in this regard. 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:

- » **Raise awareness of citizens and civil society**, with a special focus on women and youth, security sector reform, and security sector governance. Special attention should be given to civilian oversight and good governance.
- » **Conduct further research** on the functioning of the Syrian security sector, including roles and responsibilities of the institutions involved. Additionally, conduct research on different forms of oversight of the Syrian security sector before the war, with special emphasis on parliamentary and civilian oversight. Publish the results and inform civil society in particular of the conclusions. Review existing legislation regulating access to information in Syria.
- » **Support initiatives that train civil society organisations** on civilian oversight of security sectors. Prepare civil society for dialogue with security providers through capacity building and training programmes. Special attention should be given to organisations focused on women. In addition, train independent media organisations on investigative journalism. The media are an important part of civilian oversight; they contribute to revealing and denouncing human rights abuses and other mistreatment by security providers – even if coverage is only possible from abroad.

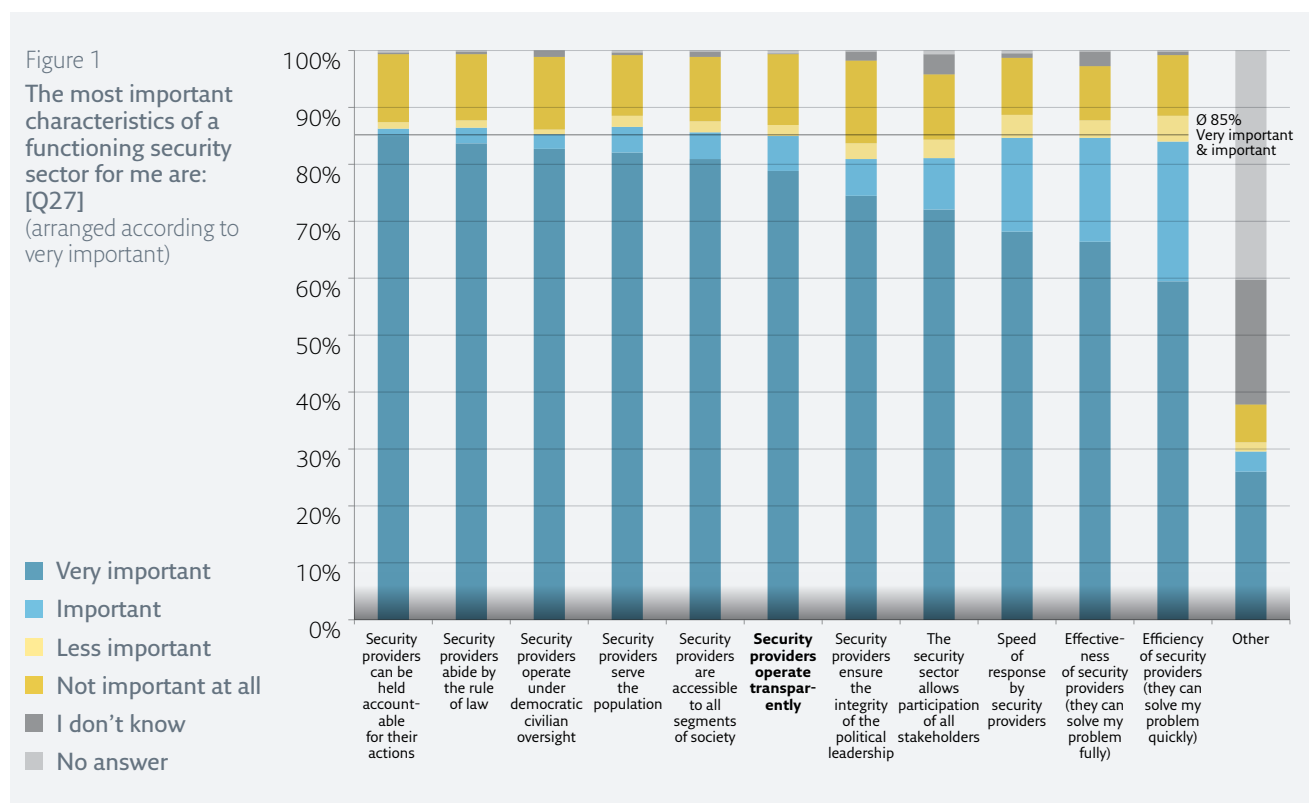
# Transparency of the Syrian Security Sector

One important aspect of accountable security sectors, and thus of security sector reform, is transparency. It can be challenging, however, to find a balance between transparency and secrecy, for example regarding the operations of intelligence agencies. Nevertheless, transparency is not only crucial when it comes to public accountability, especially regarding budgeting, procedures, and structures of security institutions. It is also necessary for security providers to share information in order for civil society and the parliament to be able to exercise their oversight role.

## Transparency as an important characteristic for functioning security sectors

Survey participants rated the importance of eleven characteristics for a functioning security sector, with *Security providers operate transparently* addressing transparency (see Figure 1). All characteristics were regarded as fundamental for a functioning security sector, with an average of 85% of respondents rating the pre-defined elements (without *Other*) as very important and important (combined), and only 12% indicating that the variables were not important at all (for a complete analysis of Question 27, see Working Paper 7: Envisioning a Future Security Sector for Syria).

Survey participants prioritised overarching principles such as accountability, rule of law, oversight, and serving the population over other characteristics. *Security providers operate transparently* ranked in the middle when looking at very important answers, as well as when combining very important and important responses. This corresponds exactly with the average of 85% for very important and important answers for all variables. However, transparency is still more important to participants than, for example, the speed of response, effectiveness, and efficiency of the security providers.

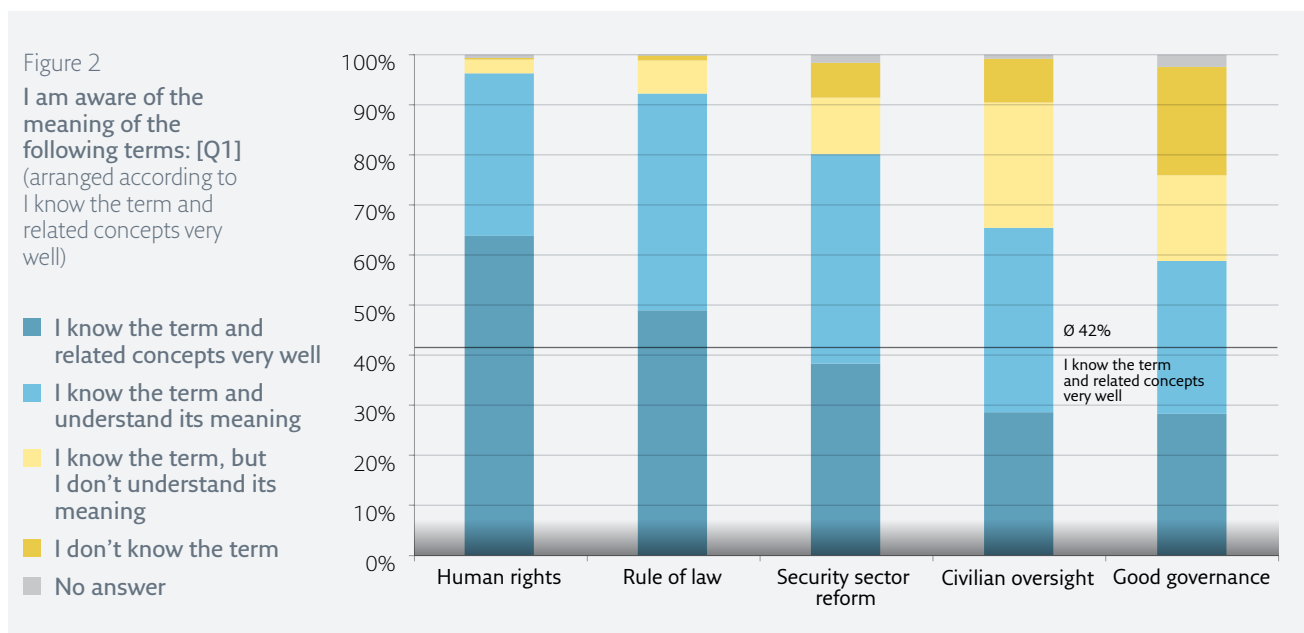


One of the main purposes of transparency is public accountability. The two characteristics, *Security providers can be held accountable for their actions* and *Security providers operate under democratic civilian oversight*, are directly linked to transparency and are among the three most important characteristics. Accountability means that security providers are bound by laws and may be prosecuted for their actions. However, the implementation of accountability - through, for example, investigation and prosecution - requires at least a minimum level of information. In that regard, transparency is crucial, especially to effectively oversee the security sector. Civilian oversight aims to ensure that citizens' perspectives are incorporated in internal and external security provision; it involves the active participation of civil society both in defining security policies and overseeing security providers. At least a minimum of information sharing by security providers is necessary for them to be able to do so.

## Limited awareness of security sector governance

Security sector governance delineates how good governance principles are applied to state security provision.<sup>1</sup> Security providers should operate according to the rule of law and respect for human rights, which need to be ensured by effective oversight mechanisms, for example through civilian oversight. Security sector reform is the process that aims to achieve this. To be able to exercise an effective oversight role, all actors and groups need to be aware of their responsibilities. Security providers and line ministries need to share at least a minimum amount of information with civil society. At the same time, civil society needs to be aware of its oversight role and what it entails. All parties should not only know relevant terms and their definitions, but also be familiar with related concepts to use them in their daily work, operate according to international standards, and be able to oversee policies, procedures, and results.

The survey's first question focused on participants' knowledge of basic terms of security sector governance (see Figure 2). On average, 42% of the respondents indicated *I know the term and related concepts very well*. Knowledge of *Human rights* and *Rule of law* was above-average, while the three other terms *Security sector reform*, *Civilian oversight*, and *Good governance* ranked below average. It appears that survey participants have limited awareness of security sector governance and related concepts. If civil society is to be able



<sup>1</sup> For further information on security sector governance refer to the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (2015): *Security Sector Governance*, SSR Backgrounder Series, Geneva.

to play an effective role in civilian oversight, it must be aware of what the term means. The same applies to good governance. If citizens are unaware of the concepts related to good governance, they will have greater difficulty formulating clear requests and expectations for the government. In this context, it would be interesting to assess whether civilian oversight of the security sector existed in Syria before the war, and who took on this role, because there might be lessons learned for future civil society engagement. Further research should be undertaken in this regard. Terms and concepts need to be clear to all actors involved, and civil society needs to be empowered to fulfil this oversight role.

The results for *Good governance* and *Civilian oversight* differ according to sex and age groups (see Table 1). Overall, men indicated more often than women that they knew the terms and related concepts very well. These differences might be the result of an actual difference in the level of knowledge of both terms. At the same time, they might also be linked to varying levels of self-confidence when assessing knowledge.

Table 1: I am aware of the meaning of the following terms: [Q1]

Variables: Civilian oversight & good governance

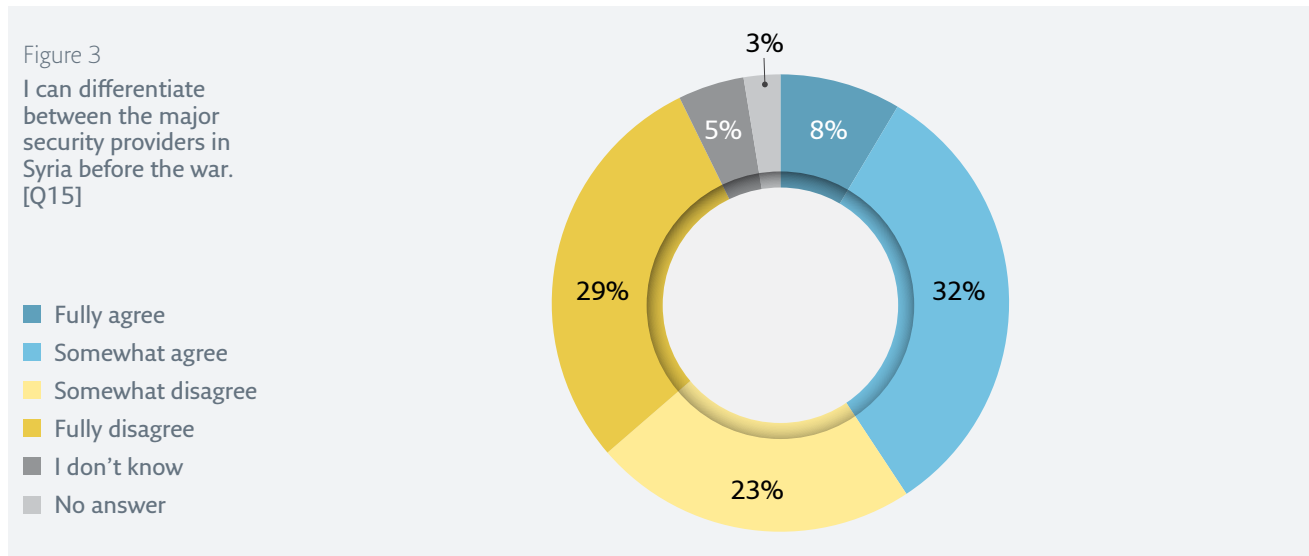
	Civilian oversight			Good governance		
	I know the term and related concepts very well	I know the term and understand its meaning	Combined	I know the term and related concepts very well	I know the term and understand its meaning	Combined
<b>Sex</b>						
Men	31%	38%	69%	31%	31%	62%
Women	15%	25%	40%	11%	27%	38%
<b>Age</b>						
Born after 1997	23%	29%	52%	13%	16%	29%
1995-1997	17%	35%	52%	21%	26%	47%
1991-1994	24%	38%	62%	22%	25%	47%
1986-1990	31%	40%	71%	34%	37%	71%
1980-1985	35%	36%	71%	35%	32%	67%
Born before 1980	48%	34%	82%	38%	42%	80%

The same applies to age groups. From participants born after 1997 to participants born before 1980, knowledge gradually increased. It appears that younger participants were not as familiar with central concepts of security sector governance. It could be that the technical nature of the terms *Good governance* and *Civilian oversight* lowers the probability of being exposed to them at a younger age.

## Knowledge of Syrian security and justice providers

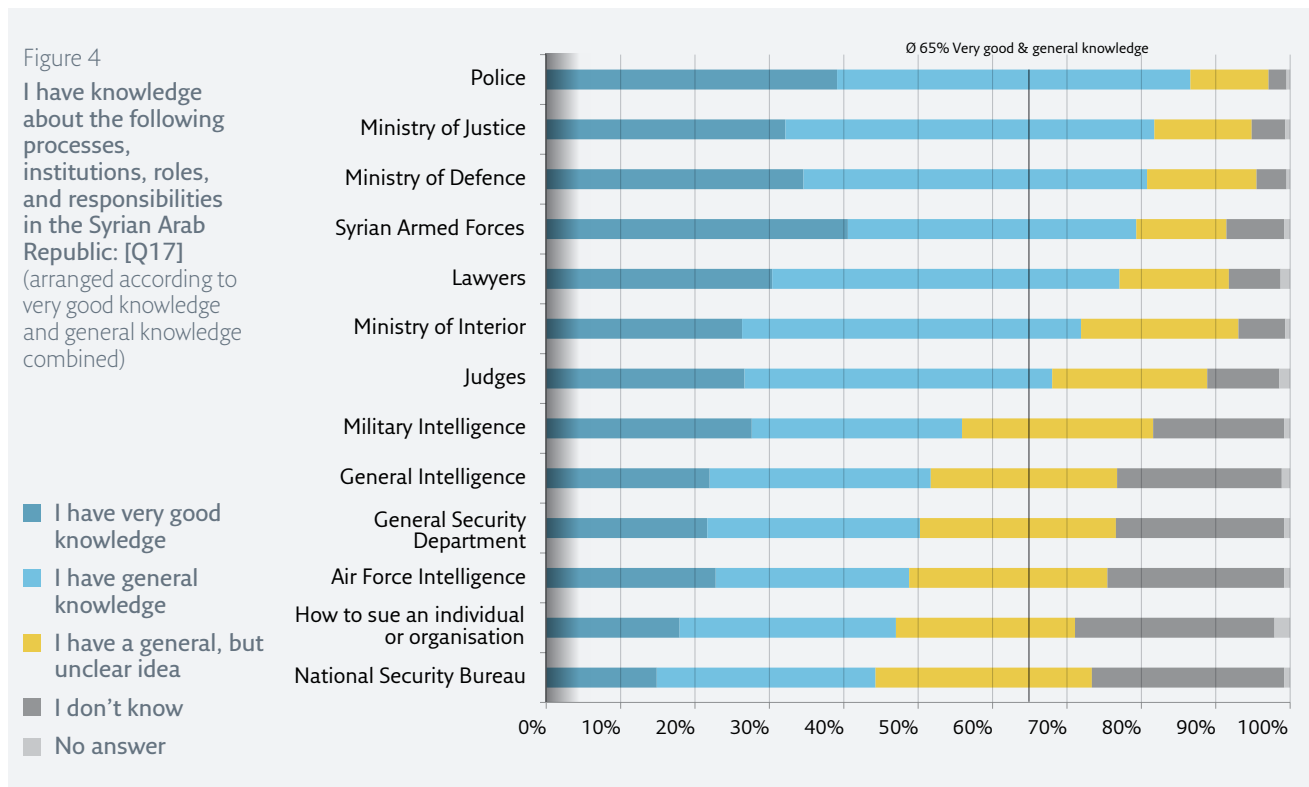
Before survey participants rated their knowledge of individual processes and institutions in the Syrian Arab Republic (Question 17), they were asked about their general knowledge of the major Syrian security providers, such as the army, the police, and intelligence agencies before the war (Question 15).

Overall, only 8% of respondents were fully able to differentiate between major Syrian security providers (see Figure 3). Many more negated the statement: 52% for fully disagree and somewhat disagree answers



combined, meaning a majority were unable to differentiate between the major security providers. These results indicate that the majority of respondents had a rather limited knowledge of the security sector and its actors. One conclusion could be that the different tasks carried out by security providers were unclear, and therefore it was not possible to distinguish one from the other. Furthermore, this lack of knowledge might be linked to a fragmentation of the security sector, with too many institutions having similar mandates, which results in overlapping responsibilities and a difficulty in differentiating between the various actors.

In Question 17 (see Figure 4), respondents rated their knowledge of how 13 different institutions or processes in the Syrian Arab Republic functioned. Institutions and processes presented in this question belonged to three categories: security providers, ministries, and the justice sector. For the analysis in this section, the values *I have very good knowledge* and *I have general knowledge* together represented a degree of understanding, while *I have a general, but unclear idea* was regarded as a lack of knowledge.



The results are mixed for the first group of answers regarding security providers. Around three quarters of survey participants indicated having knowledge of the police and Syrian Armed Forces. In contrast, about half of the survey participants lack knowledge of the five main intelligence agencies: Military Intelligence, General Intelligence, the General Security Department, Air Force Intelligence, and the National Security Bureau. Of course, this is partly linked to the nature and secrecy of their work. However, it might also indicate a lack of transparency, for example in terms of an unclear distribution of mandates among the different intelligence agencies. It appears that survey participants could not distinguish between their purposes and areas of operation.

Among the group of ministries, survey participants had the least knowledge about the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Interior. Interior ministries are often those that cover the biggest variety of responsibilities; not only are they responsible for most internal security providers, but also for migration and civil administration. It is therefore not surprising that the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Interior were less clear. Results for the justice sector are also varied. How to sue an individual or organisation was as unclear to participants as the roles and responsibilities of intelligence agencies. The roles and responsibilities of lawyers were better understood than those of judges.

Table 2: I have knowledge about the following processes, institutions, roles, and responsibilities in the Syrian Arab Republic: [Q17]

Value: I have very good knowledge

	Share of all participants	Sex		Area of residence		
		Men	Women	Governorate of Aleppo	Governorate of Damascus	Other governorates
Police	39%	40%	35%	43%	34%	41%
Ministry of Justice	32%	33%	27%	37%	29%	32%
Ministry of Defence	35%	36%	25%	40%	26%	37%
Syrian Armed Forces	41%	43%	23%	42%	32%	44%
Lawyers	30%	30%	36%	35%	29,3%	29,4%
Ministry of Interior	26%	28%	12%	31%	22%	27%
Judges	27%	27%	21%	32%	22%	27%
Military Intelligence	28%	28%	25%	30%	26%	28%
General Intelligence	22%	23%	16%	23%	21%	22%
General Security Department	22%	23%	15%	24%	17%	23%
Air Force Intelligence	23%	23%	19%	24%	20%	24%
How to sue an individual or organisation	18%	19%	12%	21%	16%	18%
National Security Bureau	15%	16%	8%	14%	13%	16%

Table 2 presents the results of this question according to respondents' sex and area of residence. It shows that, on average, again fewer women than men indicated having very good knowledge. The only exception to this was the category of lawyers. This difference may be due to the nature of the sample group, as, on average, more divorced women than men participated in the survey (see Introduction to the Survey and



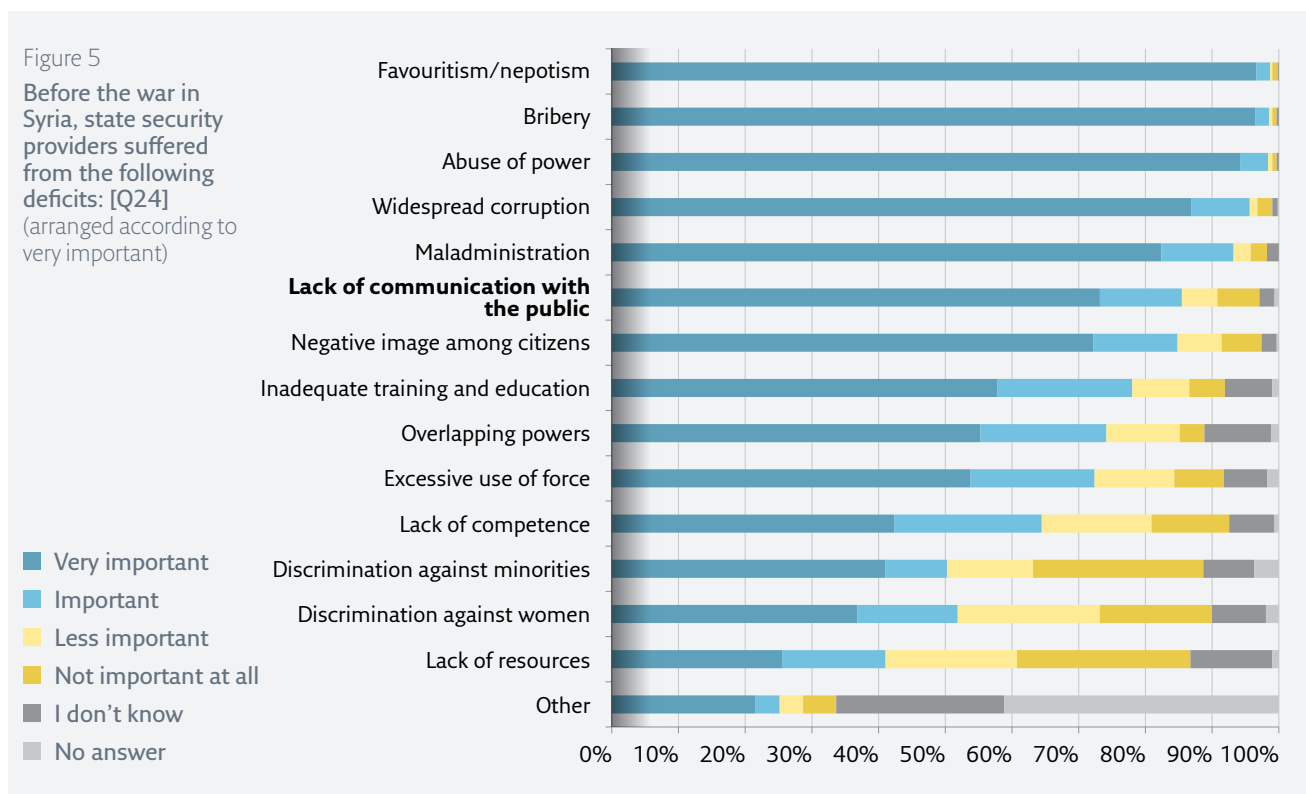
Sample Group Composition). Women and men are not treated equally under Syrian personal status laws. For example, Muslim women need to address the justice system if they want to get divorced, while men do not. This could explain why in this survey women have more knowledge about lawyers than men. The difference between both sexes was also highly significant for the Syrian Armed Forces: 43% of male participants stated having very good knowledge about roles and responsibilities of the armed forces, compared to only 23% of female participants. This could be explained by the obligatory military service for men.

In addition, when looking at the area of residence of survey participants, respondents from the Governorate of Damascus were below average for very good knowledge in all categories, despite having lived in, or close to, the capital. Differences are especially significant between governorates regarding knowledge about the Ministry of Defence, and less notable for knowledge about the five intelligence agencies. The reason why answers differ according to the area of residence is unclear. It would be interesting to gain further knowledge through focus group discussions with participants from those areas. During these focus group discussions, other socio-economic factors potentially influencing knowledge of different state institutions could be identified.

## Lack of communication with the public as an important deficit of security providers

The answers to Question 24 shed further light on the reason why survey participants were often unable to differentiate between security providers and had limited knowledge about their roles and responsibilities. In this question, survey participants rated 14 potential deficits of security providers in detail (Figure 5); among these were *Lack of communication with the public* (for a complete analysis of this question, refer to Working Paper 3: Assessing Security Providers in Syria before the War).

The pre-defined deficits belong to three groups: (1) discriminatory practices; (2) deficits linked to transparency and the image of the security providers; and (3) institutional deficits. Discriminatory practices, such as



favouritism/nepotism, bribery, abuse of power, and widespread corruption ranked highest. Institutional deficits; for example, a lack of resources and competence; were least important, with the exception of maladministration.

*Lack of communication with the public* was among the top third of most important deficits. Apparently, security providers did not communicate enough with the public, if at all. One could assume that security institutions had contact with citizens mostly for surveillance and information collection, rather than reaching out to them proactively for citizen-oriented purposes, such as asking about their needs or informing the public about their work. Survey participants felt unsafe and insecure both before and during the war, and perceived state security providers - above all intelligence agencies - as most responsible for violence and repression (see Working Paper 1: Safe Spaces and Protection in Syria before and during the War, and Working Paper 2: Insecurity and Injustice in Syria before and during the War). In light of that, it is even more surprising that *Lack of communication with the public* was a more important deficit for respondents than *Excessive use of force*. Consequently, increasing transparency of the security sector should be a priority for any reform process.

# 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. Transparency as a basis for accountability and civilian oversight is key in that regard. Without taking this 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:

- » Raise awareness of citizens and civil society, with a special focus on women and youth, regarding security sector reform and governance. Special attention should be given to civilian oversight and good governance, as these are crucial in order for civil society to exercise its role in civilian oversight effectively. Only when citizens understand these concepts can they actively contribute to reforms and ensure their needs are met.
  - » Conduct further research on the functioning of the Syrian security sector, including the roles and responsibilities of institutions involved. The current security sector clearly lacks transparency, especially when it comes to the roles and responsibilities of intelligence agencies. This will pave the way towards security sector reform if a political window of opportunity opens. Such knowledge can also inform and support international trials dealing with grave human rights violations carried out by Syrian security providers.
  - » Conduct research and publish the results on different forms of oversight of the Syrian security sector before the war, with special emphasis placed on parliamentary and civilian oversight.
  - » Review existing legislation regulating access to information. In case such legislation is lacking, call for the development of an access to information law based on international standards.
  - » Support initiatives that train civil society organisations on civilian oversight of security sectors. Include results of research on different forms of oversight before the war as mentioned above. Such organisations need to be aware of their roles and responsibilities in order to be able to assume an active role. Prepare civil society for dialogue with security providers through capacity building and training programmes. Particular attention should be given to women's organisations.
  - » Train independent media organisations on investigative journalism. The media are an important part of civilian oversight, contributing to revealing and denouncing human rights abuses and other mistreatment by security providers – even if coverage is only possible from abroad.
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