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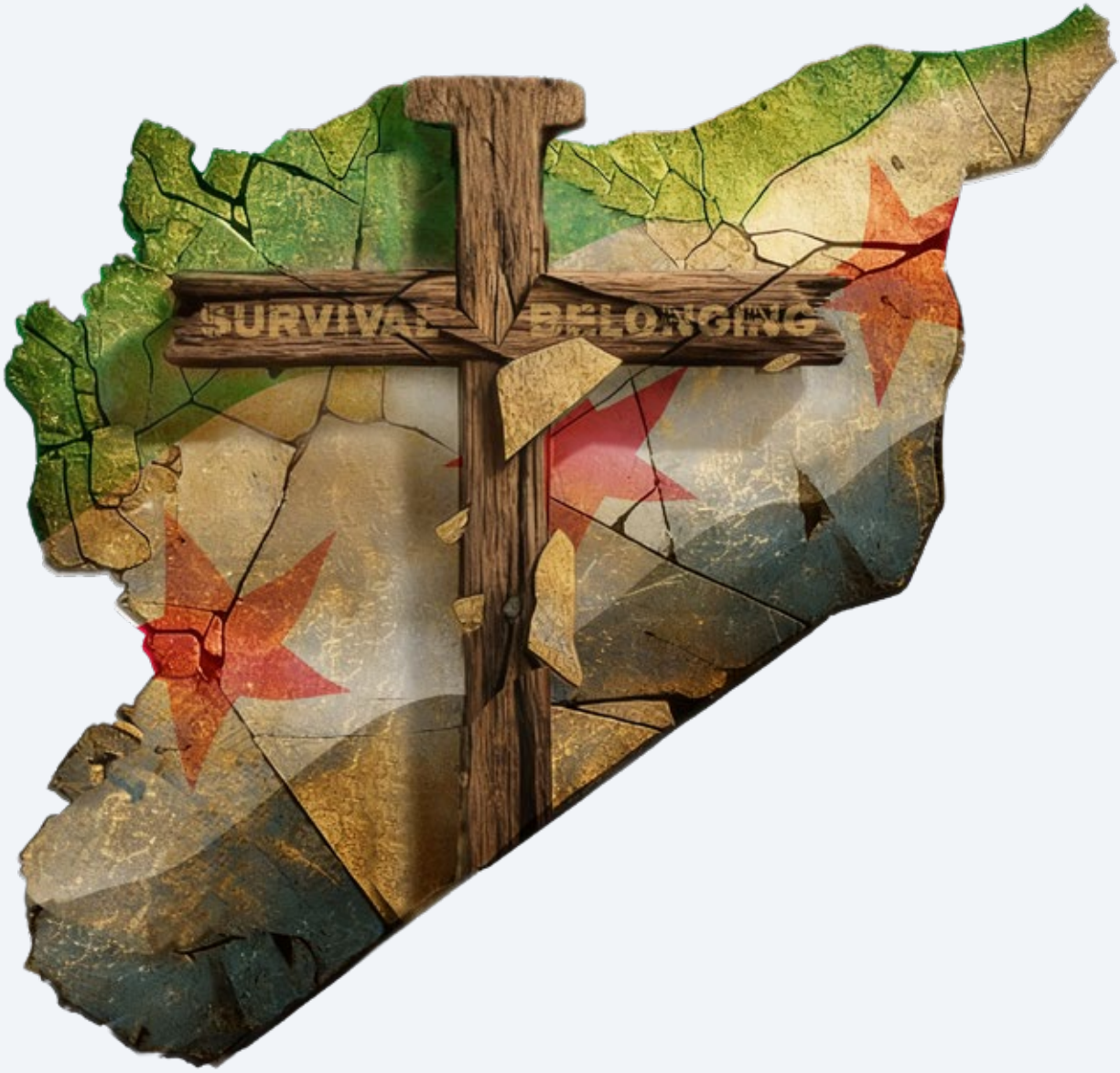

Between Survival And Belonging

Political, Social, and Security Perceptions of Christians in Transition-Era One Year Post-Assad

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Contents

A Introduction

The situation of Christian communities in Syria has long been shaped by the country's complex history of religious coexistence, authoritarian governance, and recent violent conflict. Before the civil war (2024-2011), Christians, estimated at 10% of the population, played a positively disproportional roles in education, culture, and the limited/controlled political space. The war significantly altered their demography and influence. Some Christian neighborhoods were targeted by extremist groups, or became a battle ground targeted by different sides, while others were drawn into alliances of survival with regime or foreign actors. Today, Christians in Syria live between existential fears, reluctant allegiance to the current regime, and ambivalence about a post-Assad future. The proposed research comes at a time of increased international focus on minority rights, transitional justice, and inclusive state-building, making it both timely and essential. In itself, the future of the Christians and their socio-political status, may be one of the most indicative compass of the path Post-Assad Syria is taking, and of how sustainable would the new system be on the long term.

B Review of Literature

A lot has already been recounted about the history of Christians in Syria and their relations with the Assad regime by past research and reports. The below in-depth desk review lays the groundwork for the analysis. The review covers the Christian historical relationship to state power and social roles, then explores how the 2011 conflict and subsequent years have reshaped political engagement, socio-economic conditions, and migration patterns. This review presents what is found in the literature and does not reflect the opinion of the authors.

B.1 Relationship between Syrian Christians and the Assads Pre-2011

Prior to the start of the Syrian war in 2011, Christians were largely seen as a small but influential minority in Syria - disproportionately present in commerce and professional sectors relatively to their population share[1].

Modern Syrian 'state formation' under the Ba'th regime, which presented itself as a 'secular' ideology that in theory guaranteed equality regardless of religion[2], relied on trading political security for minorities for limited political pluralism – Christians often occupied middle-class positions and institutional roles while political power remained concentrated in the Alawite-dominated security state. They also maintained visible church institutions, heritage sites and social services.[3]

Nevertheless, Syrian Christians seemed to have accommodated to the reality of a strong security-state in Syria – a significant percentage of Christian elites were loyal to the Assad regime, including its local leaders, to protect their community and properties – especially when threats of extremism were salient and an alternative political alliance carried existential risk – and gain socio-economic access. [4] In fact, many Christians were wary of Islamist challengers to the Assad regime, and saw the government, even with its repressive nature, as a guarantor of their presence and security[5].

[1] Open Doors International. (2018, April). Understanding recent movements of Christians from Syria and Irag to other countries across the Middle East and Europe. Retrieved from https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/04/2018/Understanding-the-recent-movements-of-Christians-leaving-Syria-and-Iraq.-Hope-for-the-Middle-East.pdf
[2] Similar to their previous significant contribution to Arab Nationalism, and to "Greater Syria" Nationalism, the Christians of Syria where heavily invested in the foundation of the Ba'ath party that ruled Syria for 60 years (from 1963 to 2024). Michel Aflaq: A Greek Orthodox Christian was the party's chief ideologue and intellectual founder. All of these contribution could be understood as Christian attempts to avoid equating the region with Islam and/or Islamic Nationalism. see John F. Devlin. (1991). The Baath Party: Rise and Metamorphosis. The American Historical Review, 1407-1396 ,(5)96. https://doi.org/2165277/10.2307
[3] Chatham House. (2018, October). Syria's Transactional State How the Conflict Changed the Syrian State's Exercise of Power. Retrieved from https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/2018-10-10-syrias-transactional-state-khatib-sinjab.pdf
[4] Tbid.
[5] U.S. Department of State. (2022). 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria. Retrieved from https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/2018-10-10-syrias-transactional-state-khatib-sinjab.pdf

B.1 This was reflected in mixed political engagement. Indeed, Christians were formally represented in some local governance structures but had limited independent political mobilization.[6]

Thus, informal arrangements and patronage networks anchored in the regime shaped Christian community strategies for security and social mobility. By the year 2000, when Bashar Al-Assad succeeded his father Hafez, demographic and economic pressures (urbanization, emigration, youth unemployment, economic stagnation) were already affecting minority groups.[7] Furthermore, the Ba'athist government enabled Christian communities to cultivate substantial presence in education (schools, universities), medicine, and culture.[8]

In terms of numbers and percentages prior to 2011, there is no consensus or even a general average agreed upon in the literature. In different references, Christians constituted between 7%[9], 8[10], 10%[11] (most sources), and 15% (one source)[12] of the population in the country.

B.2 Relationship between Syrian Christians and the Assad Regime after 2011

When the Syrian revolution began, activists attempted in vain to convince Christian Syrians to join the movement and let go of the Assaad regime. Indeed, most Christians were not pro-revolution – attributed by many to the government's rhetoric that continuously threatened that 'Assad's fall would result in the collapse of secularism in Syria', leaving room for Christian oppression by Muslim extremists.[13]

Christian communities faced a complex set of threats during the war: targeted violence by extremist groups (notably the Islamic State/Daesh and Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham in some areas), local insecurity, and the collapse of livelihoods.[14]

However, a closer look at Christian positioning reveals that the denomination cannot be attributed to a blanket support, or even a blanket opposition. Although some groups have long been supportive of the Assad regime, several individuals and groups actively supported the secular wing of the Syrian revolution notably in its first years. Others even sought to keep a neutral position during the war, seeking instead to protect Christian areas from violence.[15]

Another distinct layer also exists between religious leaders, who were typically allied with the Assad regime, and the Christian community itself, whose members sometimes opposed it. The latter became part of the "silent majority" – the segment of the Syrian population that did not vehemently support neither Assad nor the revolution. Nevertheless, many Christians were actively engaged in the opposition, even before the revolution began.[16]

Indeed, one of the loud opponents of the regime where the Assyrian Democratic Association and the Syrian Union Party, who although do not represent the larger Christian groups, were vocal in demanding increased political and cultural independence from a new government. Additionally, Chaldeans and Assyrians do not consider themselves Arabs, so their opposition to Assad should be understood vis-à-vis the Arab ethnic nature of the government and its failure to acknowledge other ethnicities in Syria.[17]

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6 "Op. Cit. 3
7 Ibid,
8 Ibid.
9 " Gussie, K. (2025, March 19). Syria: 'The few certainties that existed are now gone'. Retrieved from https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-03/syria-the-few-certainties-that-existed-are-now-gone.html
10 Open Doors International. (2018, April). Understanding recent movements of Christians from Syria and Irag to other countries across the Middle East and Europe. Retrieved from https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Understanding-the-recent-movements-of-Christians-leaving-Syria-and-Iraq.-Hope-for-the-Middle-East.pdf
11 " Alsaleh, A. (2021). Historical Dictionary of the Syrian Uprising and Civil War. United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; Sinjab, L. (2025, June 25). 'We're not safe here anymore'- Syria's Christians fear for future after devastating church attack. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c79q8p8qxldo; Besenyö, J., & Gömöri, R. (2015). Christians in Syria and the civil war. Hungarian Academy of Sciences; Carnegie. (2025, July 21). Regime Change and Minority Risks: Syrian Alawites After Assad. Retrieved from https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/07/syria-alawites-minority-postwar-post-assad?lang=en; Minority Rights Group. (2025, January). Syria. Retrieved from https://minorityrights.org/country/syria; U.S. Department of State. (2023). 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria. Retrieved from https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/syria
12 University of Notre Dame. (2022, August). Scholarly Analysis: Christian Responses to Persecution in Syria. Retrieved from https://ucs.nd.edu/learn/syria
13 Alsaleh, A. (2021). Historical Dictionary of the Syrian Uprising and Civil War. United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
14 Mroue, B. (2025, February 21). Syria's Christians mark a decade since a horrific IS attack and worry about their future. Retrieved from https://apnews.com/article/syria-christians-assyrians-attack-anniversarv-islamic-state-83185a04f26a56939609a55985a2ed3f
15 Besenyö, J., & Gömöri, R. (2015). Christians in Syria and the civil war. Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
16 Alsaleh, A. (2021). Historical Dictionary of the Syrian Uprising and Civil War. United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
17 Besenvo, J., & Gömöri, R. (2015). Christians in Svria and the civil war. Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Yet, others, such as some Syrian Armenians and Assyrians, either enlisted to join the government forces or accepted weapons from the regime to defend their villages from rebels and Islamists[18]. Thus, at a macro level, Christians opposition to the Syrian government remained microscopic. Because Christians enjoyed economic prosperity, religious freedoms, and disproportionate political participation in Syria, they were not eager to support the revolution and risk an Islamist system that would oppress them, which was the core element that moved Christian attitude towards the revolution. As sectarian incitement grew during the more than a decade of conflict, Christians were worried the opposition would seek revenge for the preferential treatment they received from the Assad government and thus didn't take the risk of wanting to entertain a post-Assad system.[19]

Hence, Christian leaders and communities continued to engage pragmatically with the regime, its militias, and local leaders[20]. To conclude, however, Syrian Christians, much like other religious groups in the country, are politically diverse and cannot be viewed as a single, uniform bloc. Their stance toward the regime is not easily categorized as entirely supportive or oppositional. Instead, their political attitudes are primarily influenced by concerns related to security and access to public services, which tend to vary over time and across different regions. For most Christians in Syria, the central dilemma was not about choosing between the regime and the opposition, but about finding ways to survive the dangers coming from both sides. On one hand, they fear the increasing power of radical Islamist groups within the opposition; on the other, they worry about the regime's declining ability to provide essential services and ensure security in their communities.[21]

In areas that became contested battle ground or taken by extremist groups, such as the ISIS and its various jihadist affiliates, Christian communities suffered abductions, killings, church destructions, looting and forced displacement perpetrated by all conflicting parties including pro-regime fractions. For example, in Raqqa, of 200,000 inhabitants only 3,000 Christians remained.[22]

Even where the regime retained control, although the regime attempted to project itself as protector of Christians amid an emerging narrative of Christian "flight", human-rights organizations reported targeted abuses and the conflation of Christians with regime loyalism.[23]

B.3 Relationship between Syrian Christians and the Assad Regime after 2011

Since the fall of the Assad regime and the ongoing power transition, high-profile attacks on Christian communities have had long-lasting impacts on the new government's relationship with the Christians. Fear of revenge attacks and renewed extremist violence is often cited in interviews with Christian clergy and community members. The same can be said about Syrian minorities in general, who now fear militia violence, lawlessness, and weak protection from the emerging authority.[24]

Indeed, on Christmas Eve 2024, hundreds of Christians demonstrated in Damascus after a video circulated online showing fighters setting fire to a Christmas tree in the largely Christian town of Suqaylabiyah near Hama.[25]

[18] University of Notre Dame. (2022, August). Scholarly Analysis: Christian Responses to Persecution in Syria. Retrieved https://ucs.nd.edu/learn/syria
[19] Zabad, I. (2017). Middle Eastern Minorities: The Impact of the Arab Spring. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis.
[20] UK Home Office. (2025, July). Country Policy and Information Note Syria: Religious minorities. Retrieved from hhttps://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6874e073b1b4ebc2c2e4654a/SYR%2BCPIN%2BReligious%2Bminorities.pdf
[21] European University Institute. (2018). The Future of Syrian Christians after the Arab Spring. Retrieved from https://cadmus.eui.eu/server/api/core/bitstreams/fce698ba-0ea80-5725-7bb-a46476f87956/content
[22] University of Notre Dame. (2022, August). Scholarly Analysis: Christian Responses to Persecution in Syria. Retrieved from https://ucs.nd.edu/learn/syria
[23] U.S. Department of State. (2022). 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria. Retrieved from https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/syria
[24] Mroue, B. (2025, February 21). Syria's Christians mark a decade since a horrific IS attack and worry about their future. Retrieved from https://apnews.com/article/syria-christians-assyrians-attack-anniversary-islamic-state-83185a04f26a5b939609a55985a2ed3f

Indeed, on Christmas Eve 2024, hundreds of Christians demonstrated in Damascus after a video circulated online showing fighters setting fire to a Christmas tree in the largely Christian town of Suqaylabiyah near Hama[25].

Although precise estimates vary and are contested, the literature agrees that Christian emigration and internal displacement have been substantially large-scale. Some targeted attacks against Christians and the broader effect of protracted insecurity since the war began reduced the Christian portion of the population to around 2%[26] to 3%[27]. This decline was driven not only by violence, but also by deteriorating economic conditions, loss of infrastructure, uncertainty about return, and the functioning of global diaspora networks enabling exit[28].

The post-Assad transition, and its consequent fragmentation of authority, raises questions about whether the accommodation strategies adopted by Christians during the Assad era will survive or if new forms of political participation are emerging. Indeed, the historical pattern of regime accommodation means that many Christian leaders and networks may still operate with relations rooted in patronage networks rather than rights-based citizenship. As transitions unfold, this legacy may hamper independent Christian political engagement or the formulation of new community strategies.

Furthermore, the literature on transitional justice in Syria is growing, but much of it treats minority protection as one component of a broader accountability agenda. Christian actors express divergent visions, some prioritize restitution, property rights, and local security guarantees, while others demand formal mechanisms for minority rights and representation in national political settlements. The literature review reflects a tension between communities that may prefer immediate local guarantees for security, autonomy, and property protection and those who are seeking strong central institutions that guarantee rights and national judicial remedies. A similar schism can be noted between younger Christians and older cohorts when it comes to expectations about the ideal constitutional order.

Indeed, the existing research reflects fears and high-level aspirations but lacks community-level data, based on denomination, location, wartime experience, and age, about preferences for types of transitional justice mechanisms and acceptable security arrangements.

B.4 Literature Gap

It's important to note that a gap in the body of research was noticeable in the below areas:

- It's very difficult to find denomination-disaggregated work that looks at the different Christian groups and their demographics. Much of the existing writing treats "Christians" as a single category. However, Christian communities in Syria are diverse in denomination (Orthodox, Catholic, Syriac, Armenian), geography (Damascus, Aleppo, Khabur valley, coastal towns), socio-economic status, and diaspora linkages. Thus, there is a lack of analysis for internal diversity and for community insights.
- There is also a tendency to homogenize "minorities" overall, underplaying denominational differences among different religious groups and the local context of different regions.
- Quantitative data on Christian socio-economic losses during and post-conflict (income, business closures, emigration rates, etc) is patchy. Many accounts are qualitative or anecdotal; and socioeconomic surveys disaggregated by religious affiliation and location are difficult to find.
- It's very difficult to find detailed mappings of political attitudes among Christians inside Syria and in diaspora – though understandably so.

[25] Minority Rights Group. (2025, January). Syria. Retrieved from https://minorityrights.org/country/syria
[26] Gussie, K. (2025, March 19). Syria: 'The few certainties that existed are now gone'. Retrieved from https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/03-2025/syria-the-few-certainties-that-existed-are-now-gone.html
[27] University of Notre Dame. (2022, August). Scholarly Analysis: Christian Responses to Persecution in Syria. Retrieved from https://ucs.nd.edu/learn/syria
[28] Open Doors International. (2018, April). Understanding recent movements of Christians from Syria and Iraq to other countries across the Middle East and Europe. Retrieved from https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/04/2018/Understanding-the-recent-movements-of-Christians-leaving-Syria-and-Iraq.-Hope-for-the-Middle-East.pdf

C Research Scope & Methodology

This report aims to address the gap found in the literature by examining the evolving realities and projected trajectories of Christian communities in Syria in the aftermath of the regime transition and the establishment of the new order. The report explores their political engagement, socio-economic conditions, fears and aspirations, migration patterns, and perspectives on future governance. By employing qualitative and quantitative research tools, including key informant interviews, focus group discussions, media monitoring, and social media analysis, this report captures diverse voices from various Christian denominations and regions inside Syria and in diaspora communities. Leveraging the researchers' extensive academic background, field experience, and access to networks within Syria and the region, the study will provide actionable policy recommendations to support inclusive governance and minority rights protection.

The research reached out to a diverse pool of interlocutors from within Syria in different key Syrian locations such as Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, and Hasaka, and to Syrian diaspora communities. These included religious leaders from various denominations (Orthodox, Catholic, Evangelical), local civil society actors, academics, community organizers, journalists, and youth activists. Special attention was given to include voices from underrepresented or marginalized Christian communities, internally displaced persons, and refugee returnees. Diaspora interlocutors in Lebanon, Jordan, and Europe will also be approached to provide comparative insights into evolving perceptions, intentions to return, and experiences of political participation from exile.

① Research Questions

Under the general umbrella of ***"Exploring the Future Perspectives for the Christians of Syria post-Assad Regime"***, the project addresses the following research questions:diaspora – though understandably so.

- **a** What are the different visions of a post-Assad Syria held by various Christian groups (denominational, generational, regional)?
- **b** What are the key concerns and expectations Christian communities hold regarding transitional justice and security?
- **c** What are the current and expected migration intentions among Syrian Christians?
- **d** How are Christian actors engaging (or disengaging) with future political processes?
- **e** What policy approaches can best support their inclusion in the post-conflict social contract?

② Methodology

This report adopted a mixed-methods approach to provide both depth and breadth in understanding the situation of Syrian Christians. Primary data was gathered through 12 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with clergy, local leaders, activists, and analysts. Additionally, 3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted during October 2025 with diverse segments across age, gender, and denomination. A short online survey targeting diaspora Christian communities was used to supplement qualitative findings. Social media discourse and regional media content was monitored to assess representation and sentiment. Secondary data included the review of academic studies, NGO reports, and policy briefs. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and secure data handling, was strictly observed.

Focus Groups Discussions (FGD) took place during October 2025 in Damascus (18 October), Latakia (19 October), and Aleppo (29 October). FGDs brought together in Damascus 11 participants, in Latakia 6 participants and in Aleppo 13 participants, all representing different age groups, genders, and Christian denominations from a specific locality.

The discussion was facilitated by a trained moderator and guided by a semi-structured questionnaire focusing on perceptions of security, expectations for political participation, migration intentions, and hopes for a post-Assad future. To ensure openness, the FGD were conducted in neutral and trusted venues, with strict guarantees of confidentiality. Each session lasted approximately 120 minutes and used participatory tools such as ranking exercises and scenario-based prompts to encourage dialogue. The targeted composition of the participants helped capture generational and denominational differences, while also highlighting shared concerns and priorities. Data from this FGD was triangulated with Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and survey findings to enrich the overall analysis.

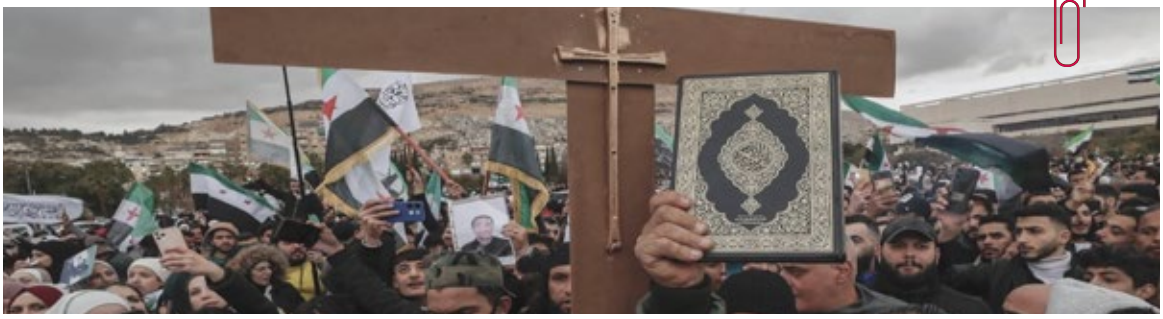
Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted with 13 community leaders, such as a parish priest or a local NGO coordinator, who have direct insight into the concerns and needs of Christian families. The interviews were conducted between mid-October and end of November 2025 and followed a semi-structured format, allowing flexibility to explore themes such as political participation, security perceptions, migration pressures, and inter-communal relations. Interviews typically lasted 45–60 minutes and were conducted in the participant's preferred language (Arabic, English, or French). To foster trust, informed anonymity, consent and assurances of confidentiality were emphasized, especially given the sensitive nature of the subject. The targeted and strategic selection of interlocutors, balancing clergy, civic actors, academics, and youth representatives, provided diverse yet authoritative perspectives. Insights from KIIs served as a cornerstone of the qualitative analysis, complementing findings from FGDs and surveys.

An Online Questionnaire was used to gather the feedback of Syrian Christian activists living abroad, and who were not accessible for the KIIs. Microsoft Forms was used to reach the people online and collect their answers. Altogether 26 Christian activists were targeted and gave their answers to questions that paralleled the themes used in the FGDs and KIIs in order to triangulate the information and give the analysis more reliability.

Social media - Media Analysis: Inclusion of relevant Syrian, regional, and international news coverage. Conducting an effective social media analysis on Christians in Syria was particularly challenging due to various obstacles and ongoing restrictions, especially on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. However, it was possible to monitor a selection of well-known pages and accounts tracking comments related to Christians across different periods and incidents. This approach helped identify some patterns of discourse and perceptions, affecting Christian communities in Syria.

D Data Collection

The fall of the Assad regime, referred to in the discussions as "al-suqu'" (fall) or "al-ta'rīr" (liberation), generated a new wave of emotional responses that directly influenced migration intentions. For some, the moment was terrifying. One participant admitted: "The minute the regime fell, I thought: we are finished. I was afraid of dying." Another described the moment as a mixture of disbelief and joy, recalling: "I couldn't believe it... I was extremely happy, beyond imagination." Yet these reactions quickly gave way to caution informed by lived experiences under extremist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra or ISIS. Participants recalled kidnappings, ransom demands, and exposure to extremist indoctrination, leading to a persistent sense of fragility even after the regime's fall.



In this emotionally tense environment and based on the input of the different tools used including the Focus Group Discussions, the Key Informant Interviews, the Online Survey and the media monitoring, the following thematic extractions are put together.

D.1 General Perceptions of the Current Regime: Tough Realities and Future Uncertainty

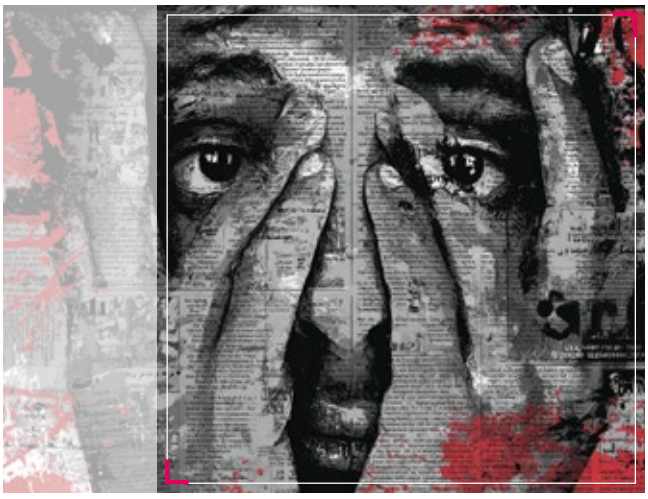
The data collected revealed significant fragmentation in how Syrian Christians interpret the present political reality and imagine the country's future after the Assad regime. While some trends were widely shared, particularly economic despair, fear of instability, and deep uncertainty about what comes next, other perspectives varied significantly across generations, social backgrounds, and personal experiences during the war.

Across all participants, the economic crisis was described as the most pressing concern shaping current attitudes toward the regime and its alternatives. Focus group participants repeatedly used terms such as: "high living expense", "deteriorated livelihood" and "lack of opportunities" and described an environment where daily survival overshadows political positioning.

The perceptions of Syria's present and future among Christian communities are characterized by uncertainty, cautious observation, and nuanced assessments of political, economic, and social conditions. Many respondents described the current situation as ambiguous and unstable. One participant summarized this sentiment as a form of "schizophrenia," noting that moments of optimism are often quickly replaced by despair due to ongoing violations, leading to a lack of sustained confidence in the present or clarity about the future. Another explained that "the present is foggy," emphasizing contradictions in daily life and the constant state of anticipation, where hidden processes and unpredictable forces complicate participation and decision-making.

Security and economic dimensions of life in Syria elicited mixed evaluations. While some considered the previous regime to provide stronger security, the current period was seen as offering modest economic improvements, creating limited optimism. Yet, incidents of uncontrolled factional violence, such as clashes in certain neighborhoods with local militias, continue to provoke fear and highlight uneven enforcement of law. In one case, complaints were evaluated primarily according to sectarian affiliation rather than legal standards, signaling broader societal concerns regarding predictability and impartiality in governance.

Regarding the position of Christians in society and the state, many noted a dual reality. While authorities may externally require engagement with Christian communities, internally there is a persistent sense that Christians are not actively sought for governmental or institutional roles. Many expressed apprehensions about assuming visible positions in the event of regime change, fearing accountability or reprisals for past alignments. One participant remarked, "Christians are the winning card for the current authority, and they are the swing vote," reflecting concerns about political vulnerability and instrumentalization by the state.



Recent experiences with the new authority were mixed. Some recalled initial joy and relief, quickly overshadowed by fear and concern over new leadership and exclusionary policies directed at women and minorities. Others described the removal of certain sanctions as providing limited economic relief and some optimism, though this remained tempered by broader social and political challenges. Persistent concerns included the potential for religiously motivated violence or ideological marginalization.

Freedom of expression under the current regime was another point of divergence. Some participants perceived

an expansion of public discourse, observing that forums previously unimaginable are now possible, with one stating, "This meeting could not have happened before." Others emphasized that expression remains limited, confined to narrow circles, and constrained by social norms and external labeling, such as accusations of being old-regime leftovers, "fulul" or "awainiyyeh." Self-censorship remains prevalent, reflecting a lingering mentality of cautious speech cultivated under decades of authoritarianism.

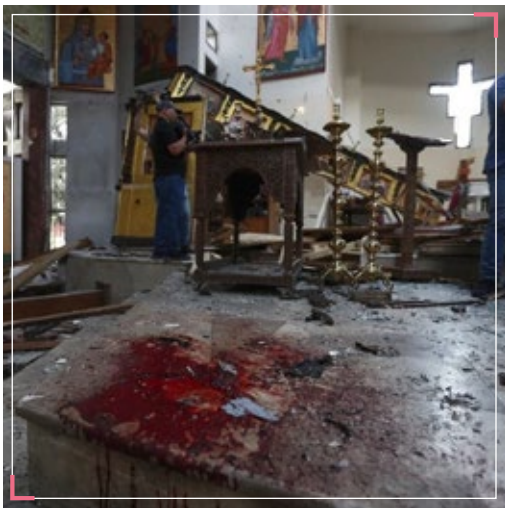
Economic grievances and governance concerns heavily shaped perceptions. Participants highlighted the gap between political slogans and reality, noting high living costs, limited employment opportunities, and the perceived ineffectiveness of political actors. One expressed, "The political program is pre-prepared to serve external agendas, and those currently in power are not statesmen in the true sense." Others pointed to the persistence of clientelism, lack of meritocratic representation, and ideological exclusion of women and minorities, warning that these practices are likely to have long-term social and individual consequences.

Finally, perceptions of democracy and civic life were mixed. Some participants observed potential in reduced corruption and weakened authoritarian practices compared with previous periods, but many expressed skepticism about the absence of genuine democratic norms, legal accountability, and political inclusion. One participant emphasized, "I care less about the Christian reality than about civil democracy in the country… Power should come from the people, and the current authority is failing in this regard."

The Christian community's perceptions of the current regime are characterized by caution, conditional optimism, and pervasive concern over security, governance, and inclusion. While some opportunities for civic engagement and economic improvement exist, these are tempered by fears of exclusion, ideological control, and uncertainty about both present stability and future governance. Overall, the general Christian perception of the current regime is characterized by deep ambivalence, shaped by cycles of fear, pragmatism, historical memory, and economic exhaustion. While many still view the current authority as a bulwark against extremist alternatives, trust in its governance capacity has significantly declined. The future is overwhelmingly perceived as uncertain, with widespread doubts about political inclusion, rule of law, and the durability of post-Assad security arrangements. Christians do not see a clear political horizon, and this uncertainty, rather than ideological commitment, is what continues to shape their cautious stance toward the old regime and towards any alternatives.

D.2 Security and Transitional Justice: Rule by Gangs and Failure of State Building

Security and transitional justice emerged as central concerns for Christian communities in Syria, shaping their assessments of the current environment and their expectations for a post-Assad transition. Across all focus groups, participants consistently emphasized that security constitutes the foundational condition for any political change. While many expressed disillusionment with the current regime, they also conveyed a pragmatic reluctance to jeopardize what some described as "the minimum level of stability left." The collective memory of Iraq's collapse after 2003 and Syria's own experience with extremist actors reinforced what one participant called "a fear that any sudden change will open the door to chaos."



The theme of justice and security in Syria reflects deep-seated mistrust toward formal institutions, alongside pervasive fear of arbitrary violence. Many participants described the judicial system as heavily biased and dominated by the current authorities, who are perceived to prioritize their own affiliates and individuals with militant backgrounds. One participant noted, "There is no real transitional justice; there is a list of people who should be killed, enforced by gangs

without accountability, while the authorities turn a blind eye to murder." Others emphasized that arrests and detentions often occur outside the judicial system, and accusations of affiliation with the former regime are used to justify arbitrary punishment. As one participant explained, "If someone wants to harm you now, all they need is a photo of you with the old flag."

Concerns extended to the future of armed actors, both regime-affiliated, opposition groups or local militias. Participants emphasized the need to rebuild a unified, professional national army that is depoliticized and detached from sectarian loyalties. Many referenced the proliferation of militias as a source of continuing insecurity. One participant described the situation bluntly: "What we have now is a model of rule by gangs—this cannot build a state." Fears of forced conscription further shaped Christian perceptions of insecurity, with some participants explaining that military service had been a major driver of displacement and continues to be linked to anxiety about the future. Another added, "There is no safety; before, at least if someone died, they would call them martyrs. Today, they just say they're gone."

While some administrative improvements, such as traffic management, dedicated complaint offices, and voluntary civic engagement, were acknowledged, these were seen as insufficient to establish a fair and accountable state. One observer described the state as moving toward a "police state," highlighting the heavy reliance on security forces and volunteers from a single sect. Another remarked, "Any country built on the concept of quick mobilization 'fazaa' cannot provide real security," citing examples from the massacres in the coastal region and in Suwayda as evidence of the dangers posed by armed militias acting with impunity.

Economic and social security concerns were intertwined with governance and justice. One participant explained, "There is selective justice, applied mainly to the defeated; past injustices against communities like those in Idlib continue to shape perceptions of insecurity." Others recalled widespread kidnappings, extortion, and killings, noting that the threat often stems from factional or sectarian actors rather than centralized state authority. The prevailing sentiment was that the current authorities lack the capacity or willingness to enforce accountability consistently, even as some previously marginalized areas experienced minor improvements in daily administration.

A recurring theme was the apprehension that Christians are facing indirect retaliation or collective punishment in the aftermath of regime change. Participants worried that segments of society perceive Christians as aligned with the government, which could expose them to targeted violence or exclusion. One participant described this as "the fear that we will be treated as the losing side, even if we were never part of the fight." These concerns were strongest in areas where Christians coexist closely with Sunni Muslim communities and where wartime grievances have accumulated. Participants stressed that Christians, because of their small numbers and limited political leverage, would be particularly vulnerable in any period of institutional vacuum or political score-settling.

Inter-communal relations played a significant role in shaping perceptions of both security and justice. Participants noted an erosion of trust within mixed communities and expressed concern about the rise of sectarian rhetoric. Some described Christian neighborhoods in Damascus or Aleppo becoming increasingly empty between 2013 and 2018, driven partly by fear of communal tensions in a broader environment of lawlessness and instability. These anxieties were linked to uncertainties about how majority communities might approach reconciliation, accountability, or power-sharing in the future. While some noted instances of positive engagement with Muslim families, others highlighted the direct threat from extremist currents, emphasizing that "society often acts on emotion rather than reason," which has deepened mistrust. Foreign fighters unfamiliar with local Christian communities exacerbate the sense of vulnerability. The emergence of religiously motivated actors is seen as facilitated by the current environment, with one participant observing, "The ideology has always been in their minds, but now they have the opportunity to implement it."

Despite these concerns, participants articulated conditions under which they would feel more confident about a political transition. These included strong international guarantees, credible mechanisms to protect minority rights, meaningful Christian representation in transitional bodies, and the development

of a civic and secular state structure. Some argued that reconciliation, rather than punitive justice, should be prioritized, though they acknowledged that societal readiness for reconciliation remains weak. As one participant put it, "The idea of reconciliation is essential, but the culture for it does not exist yet."

Fear and social mistrust remain pervasive. Many participants described a constant state of vigilance, with one noting, "Security is zero… it feels like living in a jungle." The threat of armed groups, extrajudicial punishments, and personal harm continues to shape daily behavior, including choices about clothing and mobility. As one explained, "We have always considered our dress according to the neighborhood; now, even in our own streets, I fear wearing what I want." Men similarly modify their attire for safety, illustrating the daily manifestations of insecurity.

In summary, perceptions of security and justice among Christian communities reveal a combination of systemic failures, selective enforcement, and persistent fear. While certain administrative improvements exist, the absence of genuine transitional justice, coupled with ongoing threats from armed groups and social mistrust, fosters a climate of insecurity. Daily life is marked by caution, limited freedom of expression, and self-regulation in personal choices, illustrating the profound impact of weak institutions and the enduring legacy of conflict on civil life. Overall, the discussions reveal a community that views security as the essential lens through which all political processes are evaluated. Their fears reflect not only past violence but also a broader loss of confidence in institutions, armed actors, and social trust. Transitional justice, in their view, cannot succeed unless it is accompanied by credible security guarantees, equitable political arrangements, and robust institutions capable of protecting all citizens. The Christian perspective expressed in the focus groups underscores the necessity of designing a transition process that prioritizes stability, prevents retaliation, and rebuilds trust across communities—conditions they see as indispensable for Syria's future.

D.3 Emigration: "The Suitcase is Behind the Door."

Migration remains one of the most transformative dynamics shaping the Christian presence in Syria. Participants across all focus groups described migration not only as a historical pattern but as an existential issue that has reshaped community structures, altered demographic balances, and redefined the prospects of future generations.

Compulsory military service under the Assad regime emerged repeatedly as a critical driver, particularly among younger Christian men. What had once been tolerated as a civic burden came to be viewed as a direct threat to survival. Participants described delaying marriage, education, and career decisions in order to avoid conscription, while others noted that the possibility of military enlistment had made migration "an urgent and non-negotiable decision." For some, the sense of urgency has since diminished; one young participant explained that what had been "a mandatory decision because of the draft" is now less pressing: "There is thinking about travel to see the world, but not migration."

Participants born after 2000 described a sense of urgency tied to fears of "missing the window" for migration. One participant described the current situation as a stark departure from earlier periods of relative stability: "Previously, it was a stage of stability, but now the matter has become more serious for making a decision to leave." Another highlighted that the motivation for considering migration has shifted from educational opportunities to general discomfort with the social and political environment, noting, "The problem is not the authorities but the country itself." Others weigh the need to secure a future for their children, reflecting both personal and familial motivations: "I think about my children and creating new opportunities for them, especially after fourteen years of suffering and living through another kind of hardship." One woman explained that she feared raising a family under these conditions: "I don't want my children growing up with people who learn that the Christian is an infidel 'kafir'."

A minority of participants described newfound openness and commitment to remaining in Syria once immediate threats receded. Others cited emotional, social, or professional roots that tie them to their communities, even if the future remains uncertain. One participant said he found "joy in the challenge of

working in a difficult field," adding that his decision not to migrate is "firm and lasting—unless we face forced displacement." Another participant who had previously sought every opportunity to leave remarked that "after the liberation, my perspective changed; now I think of staying." Another who had once been determined to migrate explained that he is now reconsidering: "After spending half our lives in war, maybe we should give the country a chance." Others indicated they would stay only if the country stabilizes, with one father noting: "My children are abroad. I can go anytime, but I will do it if the situation worsens." Yet these sentiments coexist with renewed fears triggered by events such as the massacres in Suwayda and the attacks on coastal communities. A participant described losing people he knew personally: "I read their names on obituary papers. Death is very close." For him, the massacres resurrected the urgency of migration, turning it into "a basic necessity."

Historical patterns of migration show regional variation. In Aleppo, Christian communities migrated early, driven by both political and security concerns: "We had fifty friends in Aleppo; now only three remain. The community was cohesive and church-oriented, so it acted early out of fear for the future". In contrast, many from Damascus, which unlike Aleppo did not witness sever fighting inside the city, delayed their decisions, often leaving only when mandatory military service became unavoidable. The conscription issue was repeatedly cited as a key driver of youth migration: "I'm afraid to raise children in this country… I don't want my kids to grow up learning that being Christian is wrong," explained one observer, reflecting the deep intertwining of security, ideology, and migration.

Several participants highlighted major waves of migration tied to conflict escalation. The largest was in 2015, though Aleppo experienced an early exodus starting in 2013. Participants noted that initial obstacles included the lack of passports or financial means, yet the first available opportunity triggered widespread departures. Subsequent waves were influenced not only by security concerns but also by economic pressures, as one participant remarked: "After the factions left Eastern Ghouta in 2019, the immediate security threat decreased, but a severe economic factor prompted a new wave of migration."

Across all discussions, participants highlighted the devastating demographic consequences of sustained Christian emigration. One participant captured this fear Incidents of sectarian intimidation, such as a Christian student crying because she feared being pressured to convert, amplify these anxieties. Many participants described the departure of friends, relatives, and entire families as creating a profound sense of isolation and weakening of communal resilience.

Overall, the narratives reveal that migration is not merely an individual choice but a complex calculus involving generational expectations, family responsibilities, regional differences, security considerations, and economic realities. The interplay of past trauma, social change, fear of renewed violence, and the desire for stability continues to drive emigration decisions among Syrian Christian communities, with patterns reflecting both historical legacies and contemporary crises.

D.4 Constitutional and Legal Protection Framework: Citizenship and Rule of Law

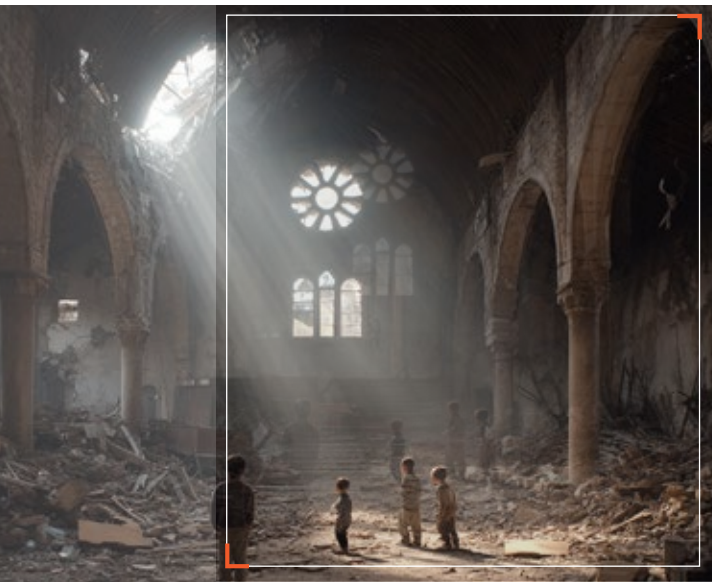
The discussion around constitutional and legal guarantees centered on the necessity of true citizenship, equality among Syria's diverse communities, and the effective implementation of laws that protect these rights. While citizenship is formally enshrined in the Syrian constitution, participants stressed that the key challenge lies in its application. As one observer noted, "The problem is in implementation, not in what is written," emphasizing the need for instilling the principles of citizenship from childhood. Another highlighted that a properly constructed constitution, developed through an inclusive and balanced

process, could secure rights for minorities: “A correct constitution in a proper council, drafted carefully without phrases that could be sectarian, ensures my rights as a Christian. I have no guarantee if the constitution is drafted by one group only.”

Concerns about the influence of security institutions on judicial independence were raised, with calls for clear separation of powers and measures to prevent extremist individuals from occupying state positions. One participant argued for structural safeguards, stating, “There must be a decision to prevent any extremist from holding positions within the state.” Similarly, the removal of religious requirements for the presidency was seen as a critical step toward creating opportunities for Christian leadership, with the observation that, “Abolishing the requirement for the president to be Muslim ensures Christians a chance for leadership.”

Legal measures to combat sectarianism were also emphasized. Participants stressed the importance of laws criminalizing sectarian speech and any acts of discrimination. One argued that citizenship must be coupled with accountability: “Citizenship must come with a law that criminalizes sectarian discourse and any acts of inequality.”

Participants consistently called for democracy, justice, and equality. A modern democratic framework with separation of powers and genuine press freedom was highlighted as essential: “I aspire to a modern democracy with separation of powers. Authority belongs to the people and is not based on quotas. Real press freedom and protection for journalists must be ensured.” Others focused on inclusive citizenship, emphasizing that all communities should enjoy equal rights within the nation: “I demand true citizenship, where I have the same rights as any other citizen, equal partners in the homeland.”



Finally, the composition of state institutions, particularly security forces and the Ministry of Defense, was identified as a key concern. Ensuring representation of all societal components was seen as essential for both fairness and stability, coupled with the call for decentralization of administrative and economic power: “The constitution must guarantee that the security forces and Ministry of Defense include all components of Syrian society and are not dominated by one group. Administrative and economic decentralization is also critical.”

Overall, participants highlighted that constitutional and legal guarantees are not only about formal provisions but require effective enforcement, inclusive institutional design, and societal commitment to equality and the rule of law. These elements are viewed as essential to securing both minority rights and broader democratic stability in Syria.

D.5 Role of the Christian Religious institutions and leaders: Citizens not Sectarian Clans

The role of church leaders and religious institutions in shaping the future emerged as a critical theme. Participants emphasized the importance of separating religion from state politics to safeguard the Church from misuse by political authorities. One observer expressed concern about potential exploitation, stating, “I want to keep religion separate from the state to protect the Church; I do not want this role to be used negatively by political power.”

Several participants highlighted the lack of a strong, politically engaged religious leadership that can represent the community effectively. One argued, “There is no influential religious authority; we did not engage in serious political work before. I want a political council to represent me, not a church council.

The interference of clergy in the recent parliamentary elections was harmful. We want a political representative, not a religious one." This sentiment was echoed by others who noted that even community leaders are often constrained by Church authority, limiting the ability of the laity to influence social and political affairs. As one participant noted, "No religious figure represents me. I need a representative who is not necessarily Christian."

Regarding the expectations from church leaders, participants called for clarity, courage, and unity of purpose. It was emphasized that religious leadership should uphold the truth without fear, and that Christian teachings should address all members of society, not only Christians. One participant stressed, "Church leaders should be united, clear in their stance, and uphold the truth without fear. Testimony is part of our history, and the Christian message should reflect Gospel values towards everyone." Similarly, there was a call for freedom from fear and sectarian bias: "Church leaders should speak freely and not deal with others based on preconceived notions."

Criticism was also directed at the Church's perceived inability to influence public affairs effectively. One observer recalled, "When the church was attacked, our bishop spoke, but no one responded. The voice of church leaders should be unified, strong, balanced, courageous, and rational." Another noted that while religious leaders currently provide representation in the absence of other voices, it is "the best possible, but not fully aspirational."

Participants stressed that the Church should focus on non-political support, emphasizing education, psychological assistance, and social cohesion. As one noted, "The Church should avoid politics and concentrate on supporting people educationally and psychologically, guiding them rather than leaving them solely to formal curricula." However, there was also skepticism about the Church's current capacity to resist extremism or influence outcomes, with one participant concluding, "I will not ask anything of the Church today because they lack the ability to resist or influence."

Overall, the consensus indicates that while church leaders are vital symbols and providers of guidance, their role must be carefully balanced between spiritual leadership and political disengagement. Their effectiveness depends on unity, courage, and a clear commitment to societal values rather than sectarian or political interests.

D.6 Role of the International Community: Protection, Support, Sovereignty

Participants expressed a range of expectations from the international community, emphasizing both practical support and the protection of Syria's sovereignty. A recurrent demand was for assistance with migration, reflecting concerns over personal safety and uncertainty about the country's future. One participant stated simply, "Real help with migration is needed," while another emphasized the urgency of removing power from groups perceived as oppressive: "Pull the authority from the extremists."

Many participants underscored the importance of respecting Syria's right to self-determination without imposing foreign agendas. One remarked, "I want the international community to leave the country to determine its own destiny, without setting agendas that serve its own interests through the current authorities." Similarly, there was a desire for a fair and just governance system: "I hope for a just authority that treats everyone equally."

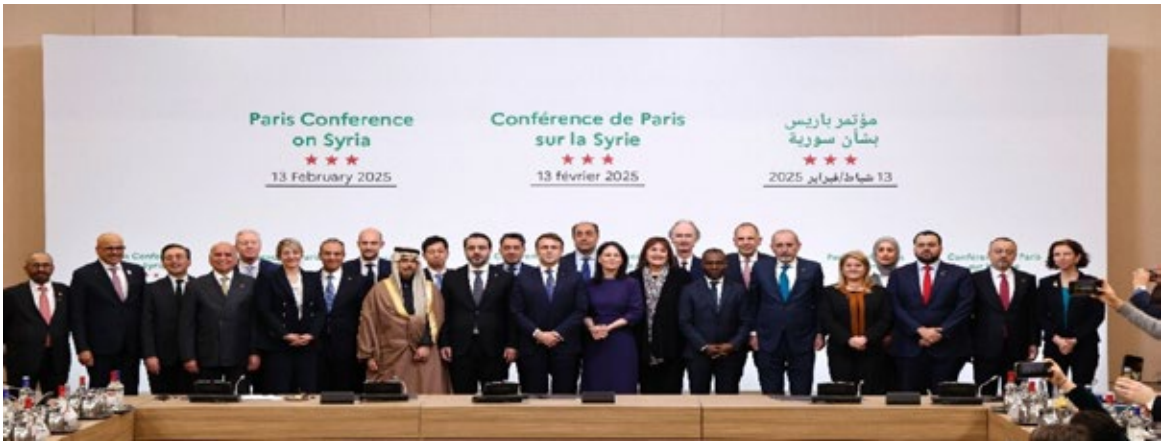
Several participants framed their demands in moral and ethical terms. One participant addressed the international community directly: "Fear God in us! This country has the right to live; leave it alone," reflecting frustration with what is perceived as performative international engagement. Others highlighted the broader geopolitical dimension, noting that international interventions often serve outside interests rather than Syrians themselves. One participant expressed a sense of cynicism: "Everything happening on the international stage serves Israel."

Education and the protection of future generations were also a concern. One observer emphasized, "The international community should intervene in education and training; the new generation is receiving

dangerous instruction that needs rehabilitation." Pressure and accountability were similarly called for, particularly regarding international political influence: "Greater pressure is needed because politics should not come at the expense of the Syrian people. What is this global game that allowed the world to agree on one person?"

Finally, there was a clear call for the consistent application of human rights: "The international community should implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for everyone, without exception." This reflects a desire for international norms to serve as a safeguard in a context where domestic justice and security systems are perceived as inadequate or biased.

In summary, participants' expectations of the international community revolve around three key axes: protection of human rights, support for safe migration, and respect for Syria's sovereignty and fair governance. They seek a combination of moral accountability, practical assistance, and genuine international engagement that prioritizes the needs of Syrians over external interests.



D.7 Monitoring Social Media Trends

Through an overview monitoring of the most widely used social media platforms in Syria, notably Facebook and Instagram over the period of this research (Agust-December 2025), and more intensively during the three weeks starting in mid-November, focusing on topics and news related to Syrian Christians, recurring patterns of interaction and commentary have become apparent. These patterns are detailed below, categorized by the identity of the commenters/content creators.[29]

A broad trend among Sunni posts, views Syrian Christians positively, praising their organization, sophistication, and patriotism. This is more evident in urban circles. For example, positive references are often made to Christian initiatives such as decorating specific areas for Christmas, celebrating Saint Barbara's Day, organizing a music concert, or undertaking a community initiative like cleaning a street or organizing a national conference. These positive views can be understood in two different ways: Direct and Sincere Comments that appear genuine and well-intentioned, expressing appreciation without any hidden or indirect agenda; or Indirectly Critical Comments that express a positive view of Christians primarily to indirectly criticize the Druze, Alawites, and Kurds, framing these other groups as disruptive and less patriotic compared to the Christians, according to the commenter's perspective.

Another trend emphasizes the long-standing relationship with Christians and the principle of equality within one nation, with or without necessarily expressing a positive opinion of Christians. This viewpoint is arguably the closest to the concept of citizenship, even if expressed in a spontaneous, popular manner based on good neighborliness and historical ties, often without direct reference to the formal concept of citizenship, rights, duties, and the rule of law.

[29] The perceived religious, sectarian, or ethnic background, which is inferred from the participants' names, profile pictures, or the content of their comments

A third trend carries a high sectarian charge. These posts refer to the Christians' supposed previous alliance with the regime and claim that Christians did not suffer what Sunni Muslims endured under the former authority. This premise is used to categorize Christians as being lesser in rights than the Sunni majority. According to this same hypothesis, the Sunnis, as a whole group, are placed in the category of opponents to the previous regime and the group that was the most, or even only, victim of its wrongdoings.

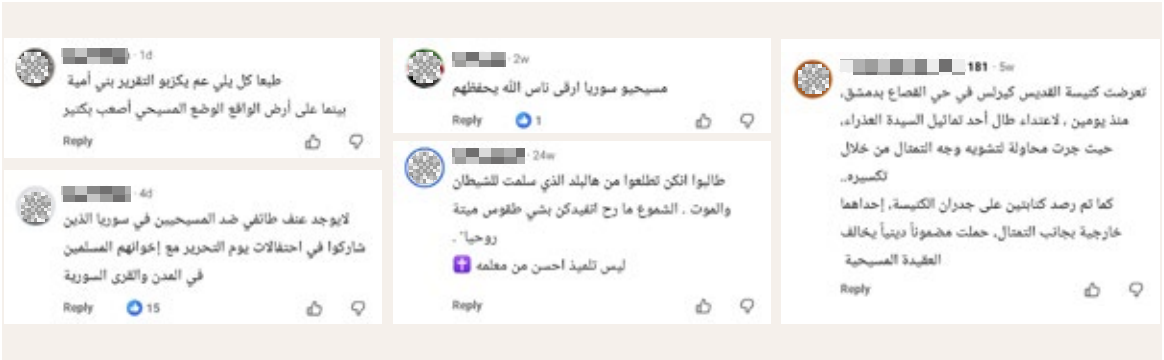
The majority of posts by Druze, Alawite, and Kurdish individuals appear to come from people who hold a strongly oppositional stance toward the current Syrian government, with no hope for a positive future under its rule. Within this framework, their comments on matters related to Christian affairs are extremely negative. They generally do not attack Christians as a whole, though they may criticize certain Christian representatives within the current government. Instead, they focus on attacking the governing authority and expressing the impossibility of enjoying individual freedoms and of respecting the richness of Syrian diversity under its rule.

Posts and comments expressed by Christians can be divided in different general trends. A main trend emphasizes rights and focuses on stability. These posts sometimes include expressions of gratitude for the fall of the former regime and cautious optimism regarding the new authority's governance. They also include demands for various rights and complaints about isolated transgressions.
Strongly dissenting voices against the current authority are rare among local Christians, especially from accounts where the owners' identity is explicitly disclosed. It is noticeable that there are voices expressing loss of hope for the future, demanding that doors for emigration be opened, and urging the Church to raise its voice in demanding that the authorities respect Christian rights.

As for the expressions of Syrian Christians living abroad, they appear to include more strident voices emphasizing the Islamist nature of the current rule, asserting that Christians have no future in Syria under this authority. In rare cases, according to the sample monitored by this study, this may be accompanied by a positive retrospective view of the former regime's era for the purpose of comparison with the current situation.

Overall, the monitoring linked these expressions to specific subjects, including, but not limited to: the bombing of the Mar Elias Church in Duwayla - Damascus, Christian activities with a national dimension, religious Christian celebrations, meetings between the clergy and government figures (including al-Sharaa himself), the role of a few Christian individuals who hold official positions with the current authority, "individual incidents" involving the assassinations of Christian individuals due to alleged involvement in repression under the previous regime, and incidents or measures affecting sectors in which Christians widely participate, such as restaurants, cafes, and bars.

The monitoring showed that the views of social media reflect to a large extent the division visible in society, and no guided /one way trend is identified. This seems to be reflection of the new regimes' unwillingness or inability to control the rhetoric over the social media and guided in one direction in favor or against a specific debate, notably relevant for this research, the presence and role of the Syrian Christians in the transitional period.



E Analysis

Triangulating the data collected from the different sources including secondary literature review, and primary interviews, focus group discussions, survey and media monitoring, it is safe to say that the current status of the Christians of Syria post-Assad is very precarious. Together with all the Syrian people regardless of any religious belief, affiliation or region, the Christians of Syria suffer from: poor economic conditions; lack of stability and even lawlessness in some cases; dysfunctional state institutions; widespread destruction of infrastructure, public and private buildings keeping people in a displaced status; and the general tendency towards radicalization. All these factors make living in Syria currently very difficult and the means of livelihood very limited, which is to a large extent counterbalancing the hope in a better future and the tolerance of a transitional period that may prove to be too long to endure. As a result, emigration among Syrians still remains very high and those who are outside and have visited regularly in 2025 have not yet found proper livelihood that can withstand their permanent return.

Furthermore, the situation of the Syrian Christians specifically, paralleled by similar tendencies among other minorities, tend to be much more difficult for several reasons. In any instability and transition turmoil, it is the weaker link that pays the higher price, and in Syria today the Christians and other minorities are the weaker link, and as a result the negative effects of the abovementioned factors are multiplied. The general perception as long-term Assad supporters and anti-revolution make the Christians more vulnerable for retaliations, unlawful killing and exclusion. This perception has been refuted by most participants in both the interviews and the focus group discussions; however, it is still noticeable in the general, and social media, perceptions grounded in the numerous vocal positions by church leaders over the past 50 years, notably in the years of the revolution. Removing this stigma will require significant planning, coordination and collective effort by the community. Moreover, emigration similarly affects the Christian community more than other communities, since the percentage of educated middle class category among Christians tends to be higher than other communities, and it is this category that is most frustrated in poor economic transitions, and that has the highest chances of success abroad. Tendency towards radicalization is pushing away large numbers of Syrian from all denominations including Sunni-Arabs from participation and putting them in confrontation with the new regime, but once again these numbers are naturally larger among all minorities and this reluctance to engage in public life affects Christians disproportionally. The most dangerous sign detected with regards radicalization, is the loss of natural social cohesion in historically mixed communities and cities, where the demographic changes have brought more radical people while the more moderate historically coexisting communities are decreasing in numbers.

A significant debate about the role of clergy was visible in the discussions, with the previous harmful relations with the Assad regime in mind, and the general sectarian policies promoting sectarian classification and segregation, the opinions today are divided. Some participants still aspire to unifying and active role of religious leaders and looking at them as carriers of the voice and of the concerns of the community. Others are much more reluctant about this role and refuse to be dealt with by the state as members of a sect/clan/ or community and prefer to be treated as equal citizens. As such regardless of if they are wary of the previous positions of the religious leaders or if they are more secular by conviction, many participants have expressed the refusal of any mediatory role between the citizen and the state, and reject any segregation of citizens based on religious affiliations.

Some regional distinctions could be noticed notably when looking at past experiences and current realities, and this is very understandable in the general perspective of things. The capital Damascus clearly has more control and visible presence of the state institution and security forces and this reflected positively on the perceptions and aspirations of the Christians there. Aleppo that has witnessed what could well be the most drastic demographic change and Christian exodus, presents a more optimistic reality in term of social cohesion, but a more pessimistic one in terms of state protection, radicalization, and emigration. Finally, Latakia appeared to be the most strongly affected by all the destabilizing factors, and thus participants reflect the most problematic situation. This said, any dealing with the Christians of Syria needs to take this regional background into consideration but no significant differences were

clearly visible through the data gathered, and although small Assyrian/Syriac groups took different choices and joined the SDF and linking their political choices to it, the majority of the Christians regardless of the denominations shared of the opinions presented in this research.

In terms of expectation from the new regime, the request seem to be unanimous to a large extent, and can be summarized in a democratic secular/civil state based on rule of law and equality among citizens, with a legal framework (constitution, laws and policies) that recognize, appreciate and promote Syria's diversity as a richness and develop the proper mechanism to manage this diversity in a positive, constructive way. No mention of federalism or special privileges or even positive discrimination could be noticed, "one Syria for all its citizens" could well be the summative slogan.

A deep underlying concern, visible in all three regions covered, and expressed by several participants in different ways, is the concern about social cohesion in its deep sense. Many worried that the problem in not in the government institutions or in who is ruling the country alone, but it is much deeper than that and it is enshrined in the mentality of the Syrian people from all denominations, and in the dismantling of the social fabric and social contract. After 50 years of dictatorship and 14 years of war, Syria lack today the most basic social institutions, leaderships and mechanisms of citizenry in their broader and most basic sense. From syndicates, unions, clubs, municipalities, community-based organizations, civil society organizations, to political parties all these tools need to be created and re-invented to suit the Syrian context. Citizens' awareness, democratic education, acceptance of the other opinion and beliefs, and equipment with skills, are required traits of civic agents/leaders who know how to and are able to utilize the abovementioned mechanisms in the aim of achieving a stable, democratic and inclusive Syria.

F Conclusion and Recommendations

One year after the fall of the Assad regime, the situation in Syria remains very precarious and the new stabilization and state building process is facing significant delays and hurdles making the transition period difficult on all Syrian, and more so on vulnerable groups including the Christian communities. Still perceive for a large extent as former Assad supporters, suffering from lack of security, state services, high percentage of emigration, the tall of the transitional period is weighing more heavily on the Christians who are still in Syria, leaving them with different choices all equally dreadful. The easiest choice seems to be to leave everything behind and migrate to any place that offers better opportunities and gives them the right to be treated as equal citizens, and this seems to be the choice taken by most young people. The second potential choice is to play it safe, remain in Syria and cause the least trouble possible in the hope of being able to survive and maybe eventually benefit from the fruits of the transition when ripe. This choice may resonate with many Christians who accustomed themselves to be subjects/clients in a rentier state rather than responsible and active citizens, but it relies on many factors that are out of their control and it is being serious challenges by the worsening situation, and the end of transition still far in the horizon. Finally, the most difficult choice and the one that the least number of Christian seem willing to take, is to willingly stay, get engaged in all levels of the transition process, and be part of the forces pushing in the right direction and pressuring the different stakeholders to ensure a proper transition into a stable, economically viable, democratic and inclusive Syria.

Thus, in accordance with this reached conclusion, national, regional and international stakeholders willing to be engaged in Syria in anyway should be focusing on the third choice which is the most difficult, but also the most beneficial to the Christian communities in the present and the future, and simultaneously the most adequate for Syria in general contributing to advancing the country in the right / desired direction. The following recommendations and support venues can be identified:

- Awareness raising and capacity building on citizenship and civic activism on all levels, including community organization, advocacy, leadership, accountability, environment, etc… resulting in grassroot initiatives, community initiatives and mobilization in different fields of public interest.

- Awareness raising and capacity building on pluralism, accepting the other, and the skills of dialogue, debating, argumentation, active listening, empathetic listening, etc… rediscovering the beauty of Syria's ethnic, cultural, linguistic, geographic and religious diversity.

- Awareness raising and capacity building on transitional justice, reconciliation, memory healing, addressing grievances, learning from the past, etc…

- Awareness raising and capacity building on interfaith dialogue, and learning about the other Syrian faiths, breaking stereotypes, intercommunal exchange, and exploring common values, concerns and interests, etc… reconnecting the historical ties and forging the way towards a common inclusive national identity, while engaging religious leaders as partners in this process, as builders of bridges.

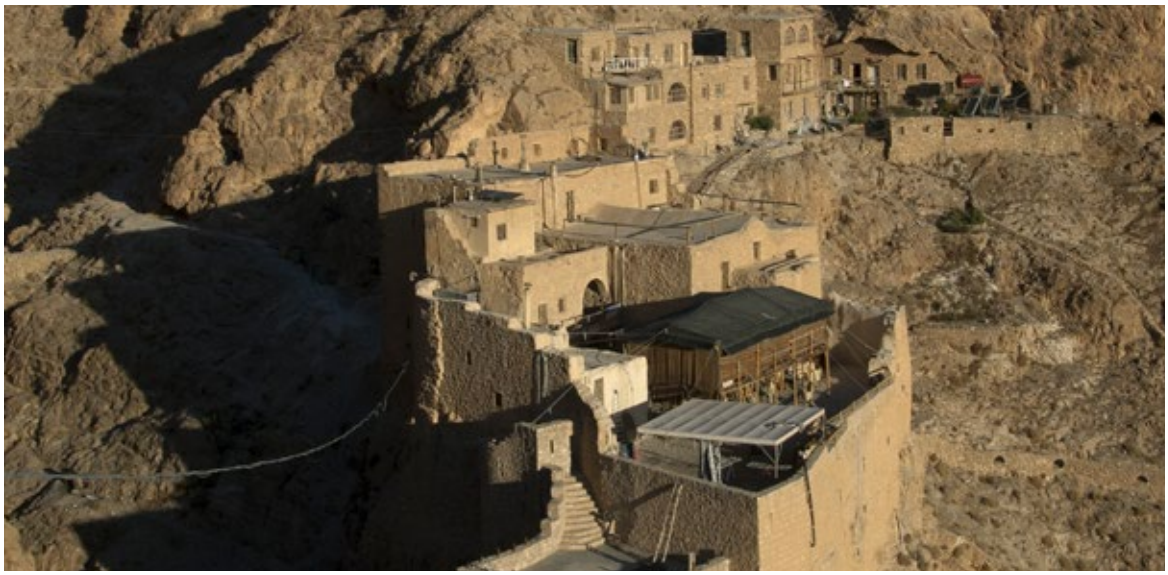
- Financial support and capacity building for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), entrepreneurial initiatives, and business innovation in different cities and rural areas simultaneously, to ensure economic livelihood that is not reliant on government support.

- Financial support and capacity building to preserve and revive the historical – pre-Assad regime – physical and oral heritage of Christians in specific and minorities in general, in Syria, highlighting their role in the different fields of economy, culture, education, sciences, patriotism, arts, etc…

- Supporting local, national, regional and international advocacy efforts/pressure for a healthy transitional period that is not prolonged unnecessarily, and that is grounded in basic concepts of inclusive citizenship, democracy and human rights to be reflected in constitutional guarantees, election processes on all levels and in the functioning of government agencies.

- Supporting local, national, regional and international advocacy efforts/pressure for a proper and transparent vetting, restructuring and training of the new Syrian security forces and armed forces, while pushing for strict disarmament (DDR) process for all armed groups on all the Syrian territories.

In all of the above recommendations, it is noticeable that there is nothing specific targeted towards the Christians alone or that serve their interests as a community. The reason for that is very clear, it is an assumption by the authors, reinforced by the findings of this research, that the Christians of Syria will thrive, if Syria is stable and democratic for all its citizens, and not matter what is done to support the Christians strictly, will not succeed if Syria as a whole is not stable and democratic. Thus, the recommendations above identify the different paths and venues where the Christians can and should lead. It is only by being engaged and even leading these public sphere venues that the Chrisitan of Syria can survive and thrive. The Christian of Syria should not be forced to choose between survival and belonging, as it is only through belonging, integrating and engaging on all levels that they can survive.



Appendices

Appendix 1: About the Authors

Elie Al Hindy (Author - Project Lead)
Dr. Elie Al Hindy is an Associate Professor and Chairperson of the Department of Security and Strategic Studies at the American University in the Emirates. He holds a PhD in Government and International Relations from the University of Sydney and has over two decades of academic and civil society experience. He previously served as Executive Director of the Adyan Foundation, Director of the Middle East Institute for Research and Strategic Studies (MEIRSS), and President of alef – act for human rights, where he led research initiatives on pluralism, minority rights, and regional politics. His publications include work on civil society, interreligious dialogue, human rights, and religious minorities in SWANA region. Dr. Al Hindy has conducted fieldwork and training in over 15 countries, including within conflict and post-conflict settings across the SWANA region. Fluent in Arabic, English, and French, he maintains deep connections with academic, religious, and civil society networks in Syria and Lebanon.

Roger Asfar (Senior Researcher - Analyst)
Roger Asfar is the Syria Country Director and a Researcher at the Adyan Foundation, where he leads preparations for the organization's new program in Syria. He is a recipient of the European Union–funded Samir Kassir Award for Freedom of the Press (2019) and also works as a freelance researcher specializing in minority rights, human rights, inclusive citizenship, refugee issues, and political affairs in Lebanon and Syria.
A former clergyman for 13 years, he has built strong relationships across Syria's diverse communities, including Christian and other minority groups, which inform and strengthen his research. He holds a Master's degree in Islamo-Christian Relations from Saint Joseph University.

Stephanie Abboud (Assistant Researcher)
Stephanie Abboud is the head of programs at a leading civil society organization in Lebanon, with seven years of experience in international affairs, policy advocacy, research, and human rights. She holds a master's and a bachelor's degree, both in International Affairs and Diplomacy, with a minor in Strategic Studies. Stephanie's previous and ongoing work has addressed various themes, including foreign policy, governance, civil and political rights, peace & conflict, and interreligious dialogue.

Appendix 2: **Interview Questions:**

1. **Political Evolution**: How can the political development of the Christian stance be described during the war years: Participation, allegiance, opposition, or neutrality? How did this stance evolve with the changes witnessed during the war years?

2. **Socio-economic Status**: How have the social and economic conditions of Syrian Christians developed? This includes questions of emigration, displacement (internal or external), demographic change, and the economic situation and related activity during those years.

3. **Vision for Post-Assad Syria**: From the perspective of your sect, region, and generation, how do you view Syria's present and future after the fall of the Assad regime and the arrival of the new authority? Might this view differ among another sect, region, or generation? Why?

4. **Security and Justice Concerns**: Questions of security and justice after the fall of the regime are among the most frequently raised. What are your fears and general expectations, both positive and negative, regarding the security file and the path of transitional justice?

5. **Emigration Trends**: The war years saw intensive emigration of Christians from Syria, leading to a decline in their numbers in some areas by up to 80%. How do you see the inclination of Christians to emigrate today and in the foreseeable future? Have the recent changes, starting with the fall of the regime and what followed, led to a change (positive or negative) in the stance on emigration? How? What are the most prominent factors contributing to their stay and the factors driving them to emigrate?

6. **Political and Public Participation**: Speaking of political life and participation in it, how do you view the Christian stance on participation in the broader public sphere and specifically in political life? Is there a tendency towards withdrawal or a greater inclination to engage? How do you assess the current public space? What is the difference between the current situation and what was happening under the previous regime? How can Christians be effective and participating citizens, instead of being isolated from the public life scene?

7. **Social Contract and Legal Guarantees**: Regarding official and civil policies, laws, and practices, how can Christians be an effective part of the renewed social contract, built on changing foundations after the conflict? What legal and constitutional guarantees do you wish to see in place?

8. **Role of the Church**: How do you view the role of the Church and religious leaders in the next phase?

9. **Role of the International Community**: How do you view the role of the international community in the next phase?

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