



**مدى | Mada**  
Syrian Center for Public Opinion Studies



## **The Syrian Street's Stance on the Events in Suwayda**

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**The team at the Center extends its gratitude to all those who participated in the survey and facilitated the data collection process through their cooperation, as well as their clear willingness to share their perspectives on current issues of concern to Syrians.**

# Executive Summary

Syria's current situation, following the fall of the former regime, is no different from that of other nations that have endured similar experiences under decades-long dictatorships. The country is now undergoing a transitional phase fraught with complex and confounding issues—a heavy legacy left behind by the previous regime.

While the current political and military upheavals were anticipated, the postponement of addressing critical issues—without proactive measures or viable solutions—has likely been the primary reason for the deteriorating situation in Suwayda.

From the outset, the nascent government has faced numerous challenges, most notably the volatile situation in the Syrian coastal region and its mismanagement. The resulting transgressions were initially interpreted as a conflation of revolutionary faction behavior with that of a national military institution representing all Syrians.

Although the government succeeded in stabilizing northeastern Syria through the March 2025 agreement, the events in Suwayda have reminded Syrians of the recurring pattern of poorly calculated approaches to minority issues.

Undoubtedly, the conduct of outlaw militias—those refusing integration into the state's structure and its modern military institutions—has contributed to the escalation of violence at the onset of the Suwayda events nearly two weeks ago. However, the factional behavior of government-aligned forces, coupled with the involvement of Bedouin tribal fighters due to violations by Druze militias, has further fueled unrest and intensified violence.

The government's overall performance has been marked by a failure to properly assess and manage military dynamics in this context, paving the way for foreign interference—particularly by the Israeli occupation, which has exploited the situation through inflammatory rhetoric targeting the Druze community, followed by airstrikes on sovereign sites in Damascus.

In the coming days, the government may face even more volatile challenges. Thus, it is imperative to amplify political and societal participation for all Syrian communities to safeguard national unity and territorial integrity. The current moment is one of vigilance, as Syrians navigate the aftermath of a regime that oppressed them for over five decades.

This underscores the necessity of understanding Syrian public opinion regarding the events in Suwayda—an objective that the Mada Public Opinion Research Center consistently pursues to elevate Syrian voices and ensure their perspectives inform decision-making as a collective conscience representing all Syrians.

Regardless of the survey's findings, the overwhelming participation of Syrians—men and women alike—demonstrates the public's desire to contribute, at the very least, to shaping domestic policies. This compels us to reiterate the call for inclusive political and societal dialogue—for the sake of a new Syria.

# Introduction

Nearly two weeks ago, a series of military events resurfaced in Suwayda Governorate, reigniting tensions more than two months after the standoff with the Druze community in the suburbs of Damascus (Jaramana and Sahnaya) had subsided.

The unrest in Suwayda began with clashes between Bedouin tribes and the local Military Council, following a series of kidnappings perpetrated alternately by both sides. These incidents escalated into armed confrontations, leaving approximately 37 casualties from both factions.

On July 15, government security and military forces intervened to quell the fighting, only for the clashes to abruptly turn into full-scale battles between state forces and armed militias affiliated with Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, the Druze spiritual leader in Suwayda.

After making advances into the governorate, Syrian government forces withdrew under a ceasefire agreement brokered amid regional and international pressure. This coincided with an Israeli military escalation, including airstrikes targeting government forces at multiple locations in Suwayda, followed by an attack on the Army General Command headquarters in Damascus. Government forces redeployed two days later, handing over security responsibilities to local civilian police. However, the truce quickly collapsed due to violations by Sheikh al-Hijri and his loyalists.

Militias linked to al-Hijri then spread across multiple areas, launching raids and arrests targeting Bedouin civilians. This prompted tribal factions from several provinces to join the military confrontation. On July 19, a U.S.-mediated ceasefire was announced, welcomed by Turkish and Arab actors.

The clashes resulted in dozens of deaths and injuries, with reports of severe violations by all parties. Subsequently, Interior Ministry forces entered Suwayda to enforce the ceasefire, facilitate humanitarian aid, secure the release of abductees, and open safe corridors for civilians—later followed by the UN-supervised evacuation of Christians from the area.

The Suwayda events mark the second major crisis faced by Syria's new government, following the earlier unrest in the coastal region (The investigation was completed, and the committee announced its results in a press conference.). These developments have triggered unprecedented public concern, with many Syrians fearing a descent into renewed cycles of violence.

This report seeks to gauge Syrian public opinion—beyond social media narratives—on the clashes in Suwayda, which have sparked both on-the-ground sectarian violence and digital polarization. It examines the Syrian collective stance on the root causes of the bloodshed, the government's handling of the crisis, and its broader responsibilities in ensuring security and stability.

# Survey Methodology

This survey was developed following a focused discussion session with Syrian affairs researchers, addressing key themes related to sectarian dynamics in Syria and the political and on-the-ground developments up until the aftermath of the Israeli airstrike on the Army General Command building in Damascus' Umaween Square.

The questionnaire was designed to assess public attitudes and perceptions regarding one of Syria's major societal components, both in military and civilian contexts. Notably, several critical variables were intentionally excluded from this survey as part of a broader initiative to produce a series of future opinion polls. These will aim to comprehensively reflect Syrian collective perspectives on current issues—political, military, economic, social, and beyond.

## Data Collection

Fieldwork was conducted by Mada Center's team, supported by collaborating university researchers across multiple governorates, over four days (July 18-21). This period coincided with ongoing military clashes and the day after the agreement between the Syrian government and Druze factions was reached. Interviews were carried out via in-person meetings or phone calls with Syrians (men and women) from various regions.

## Sample Composition

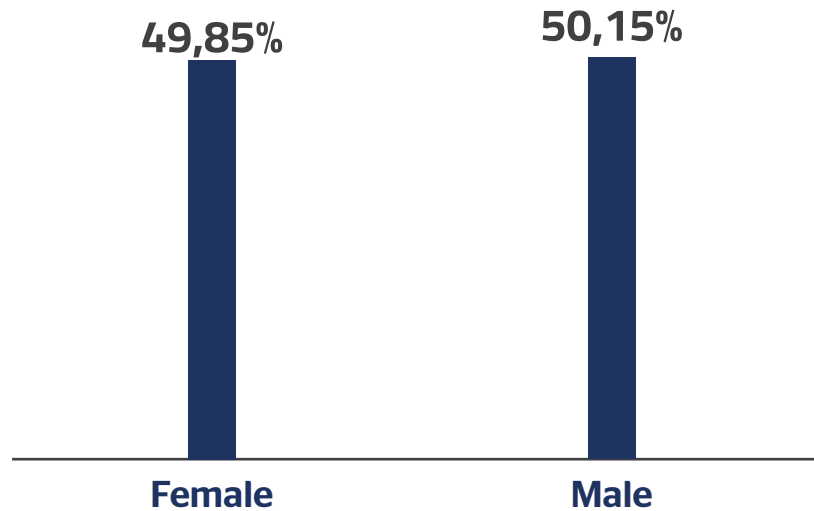
The survey included 1,950 respondents (male and female) across thirteen governorates. Suwayda Governorate was excluded for widely understood reasons tied to the active military confrontations and security conditions during the survey's implementation.

## Methodological Approach

The report adhered to established public opinion research standards, employing a descriptive-analytical methodology. The primary objective was to gauge Syrian attitudes toward the recent events in Suwayda—a crisis that remained unresolved at the time of this survey's publication.

# Survey Results

Figure (1): Sample Distribution by Gender



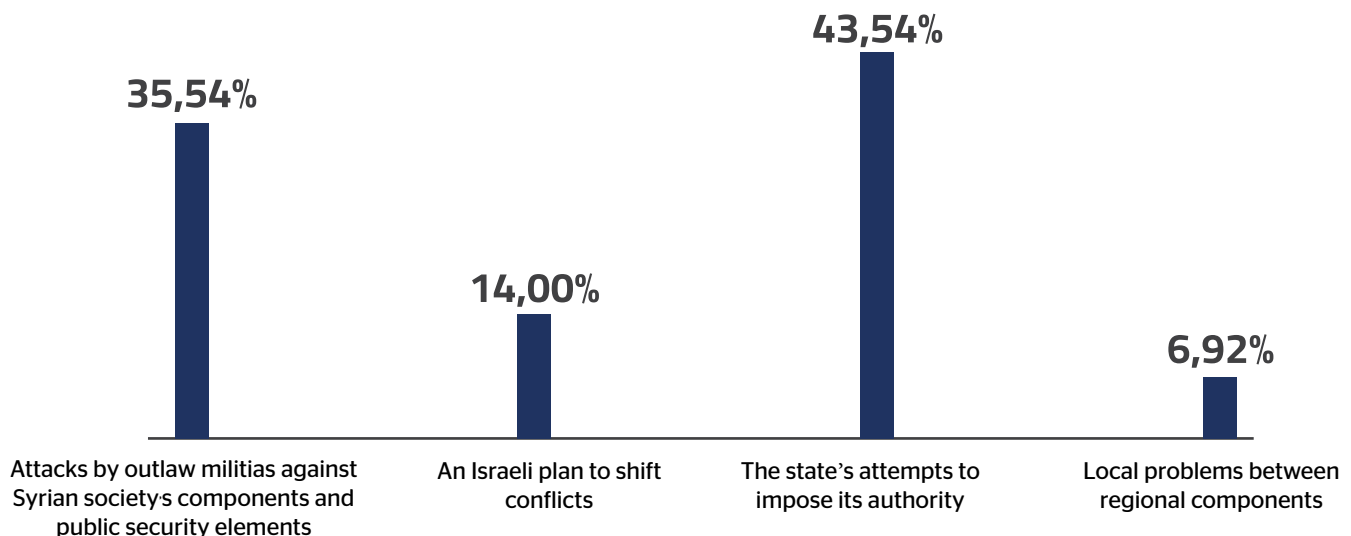
The sample comprised 50.15% male and 49.85% female respondents, achieving a balanced gender representation. Notably, there was a marked increase in female participation compared to previous surveys, reflecting a growing willingness among Syrian women to engage in opinion-sharing on issues affecting the country. This trend signals a broader shift in Syrian society toward active participation in public discourse.

## Geographical Distribution

The survey ensured proportional representation across 12 governorates, including: (Damascus - Rural Damascus - Daraa - Quneitra - Aleppo- Hama- Homs - Idlib- Al-Hasakah- Raqqa- Latakia- Deir Ezzor).

## I. Root Causes of the Suwayda Events: External Interference and Militarization of the Suwayda Issue

Figure (2): Survey Respondents' Perceptions of the Causes Behind the Suwayda Events



## The state's attempts to impose its authority

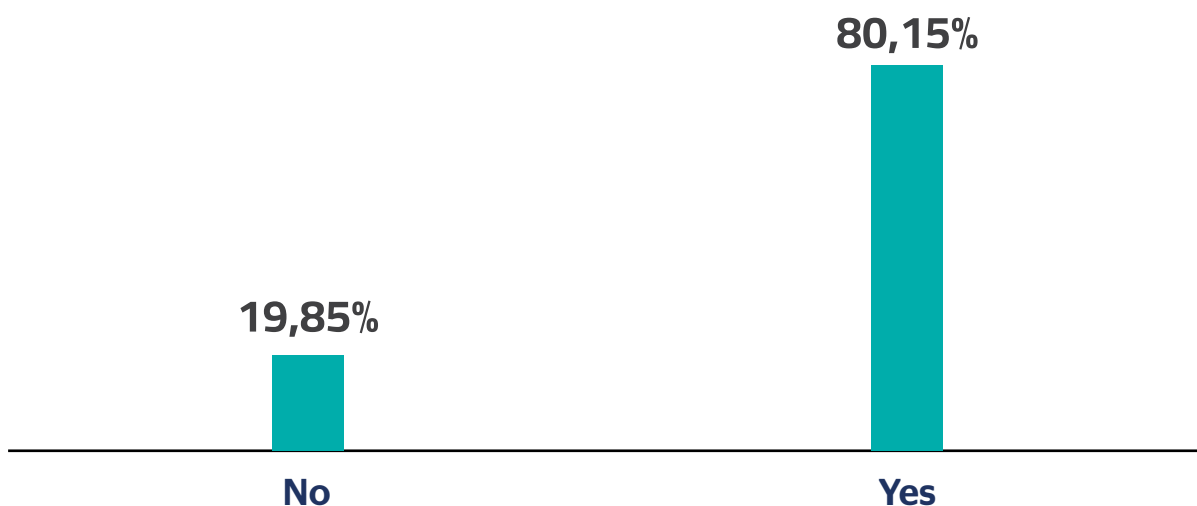
43.54% of respondents believed the background that led to the outbreak of confrontations and clashes in Suwayda was due to (an Israeli scheme to ignite conflicts between components of Syrian society). The sample's preference for this reason as one of the most important factors for what happened coincided with Israeli raids and airstrikes on the Syrian General Staff building and around the presidential palace in central Damascus, simultaneous with the outbreak of clashes in Suwayda city and its outskirts.

The second factor, according to one-third of the sample's perceptions, was the continued existence of Druze military militias that had not been incorporated into the military and security institutions by the time the clashes occurred, along with associated attacks on public security personnel (35.54%), coinciding with the state's attempts to impose its control and authority over the city (14%). This was particularly evident with the presence of the "Military Council in Suwayda", the most prominent existing force, which was established in February 2025, months after the fall of the regime, under the leadership of Tariq al-Shoufi. The council brought together numerous factions that were mostly auxiliary to Syrian regime forces, some of which were Russian backed, while others coordinated with Iranian militias. The council is notable for including former leaders in the regime's army, along with many former officers from the regime's army (Regime remnants) in addition to retired officers from the regime's army and youth who were later recruited with the stated aim of protecting Suwayda governorate and its people, as well as ensuring the governorate would not be subjected to any attacks from the south, including from Bedouins.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, 6.92% believed the main cause was the existence of local problems between the components of the area that include Druze and Bedouin tribes in the region.

In reality, all the reasons led to the current situation in Suwayda. However, the emphasis by observers - and respondents here in particular - on one reason over other stems from the sample's interpretation of the most influential factor in what occurred. The sample may have viewed all reasons as having relative impacts, but we chose to ask about the main reason from the respondents' perspective.

## II. Separatist Military Agendas Behind the Suwayda Events

Figure (3): Respondents' Perceptions of Militia Rebellion Objectives



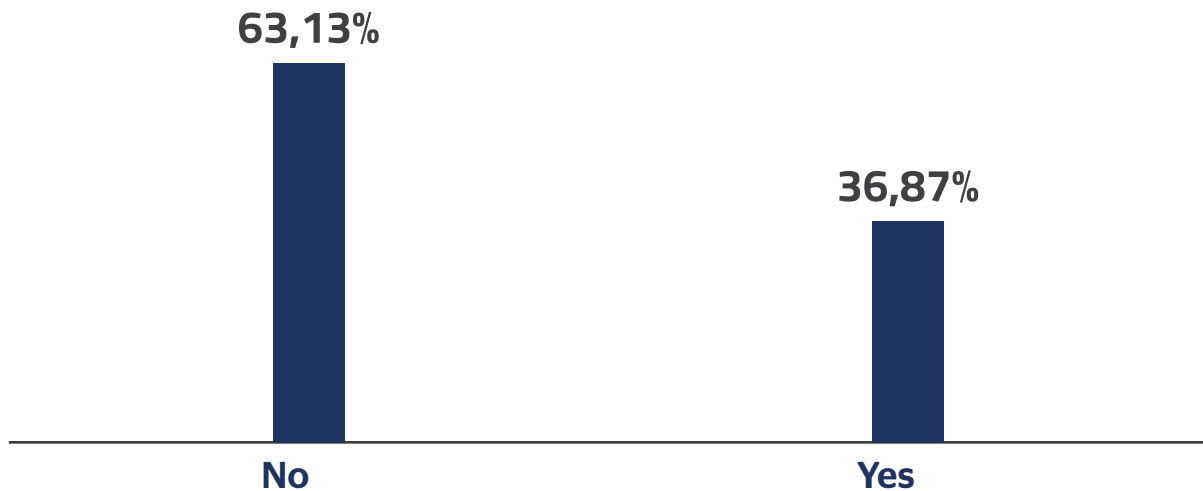
<sup>1</sup> Subhi franjeh, [Factions and Sheikhs of Suwayda... How Many Are There, Their Affiliations, and Their Stances](#), Almajalla



80.15% of survey respondents perceived the events in Suwayda - including the armed Druze militias' clashes with Syrian security forces and their fluctuating stance on signed agreements followed by violations - as secessionist calls to separate from Syria. This perception was further reinforced among respondents by Israel's "propagandistic" statements about protecting the Druze, interventions by the Druze spiritual leader in Palestine urging military involvement in favor of the Druze, along with Hikmat al-Hijri's appeal to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to intervene for his "protection"

### III. Syrian Druze's Commitment to the National Choice and Rejection of Separatist Tendencies

Figure (4): Respondents' Perceptions of Separatist Inclinations Among the Druze:



Despite sectarian tensions and violent disputes at the military, social, and social media levels, 63.13% of survey respondents believed that the majority of Druze in Suwayda do not harbor separatist tendencies, while 36.87% believed such tendencies exist.

This general perception among respondents can be linked to the suffering endured by the people of Suwayda under the oppression and violence of the regime and its militias throughout the Syrian war, as well as the province's resistance to forced conscription—which led to the assassination of Sheikh Wahid al-Balous, founder of the "Men of Dignity" movement and a prominent popular figure opposing the Assad regime.

On the other hand, those in the survey who believed in the existence of separatist tendencies among the Druze may have been influenced by the ongoing political conflict between the Druze religious leadership in the province and the Syrian government since the fall of the regime. Additionally, the interference of the Druze religious authority in northern Palestine—urging Syrian Druze to seek Israeli protection—followed by calls to annex Suwayda under Israeli guardianship and the raising of the Israeli flag in the province (while Israel bombed Damascus near Umayyad Square and the People's Palace) may have reinforced this perception.



In reality, these results indicate a growing interest among the Syrian public in national affairs, driven by media and social media. Despite smear campaigns between conflicting parties online and the widespread use of electronic propaganda during collective events, these findings suggest a reasonable level of awareness and rational perspective on Syria's current reality and future, steering clear of ideological, sectarian, and ethnic polarization.

This percentage can also be interpreted as reflecting Syrians' desire to express their views on internal and external changes affecting the country after decades of apathy and disengagement—policies enforced by previous authorities that alienated citizens from public affairs, convincing them that their voices and opinions held no weight in political and public decisions. It may also stem from Syrians' determination to avoid slipping back into civil war and its consequences—further violence, displacement, and division—after years of exclusion, war, and refuge.

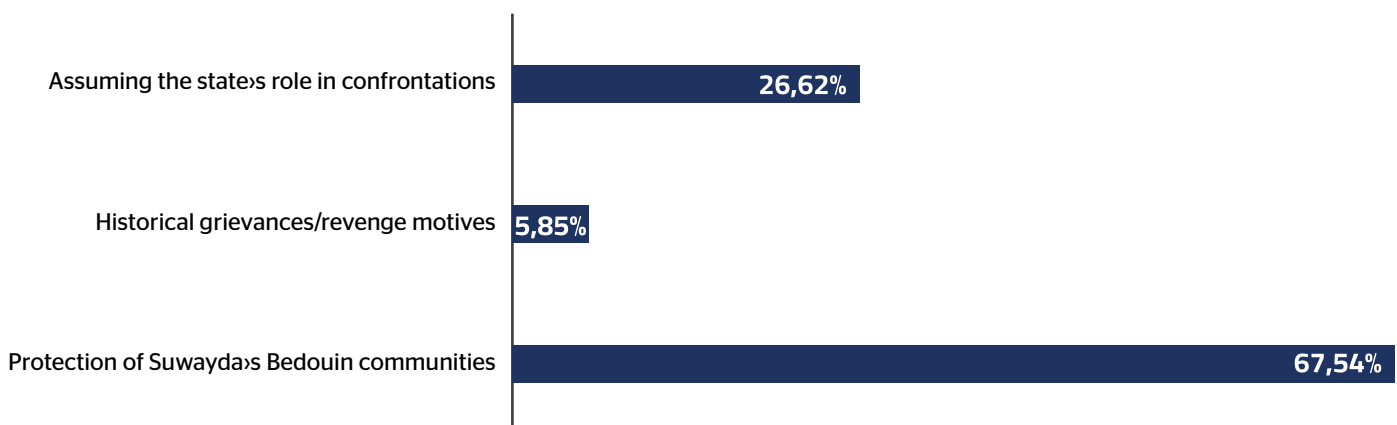
Figure (5): Respondents' Perceptions of Druze Integration into the State



Consistent with the previous question, the results aligned with respondents' perceptions regarding the Syrian Druze community. Specifically, 62.15% of respondents believed that the Druze support the national option through comprehensive integration into the new state - socially, economically, and militarily.

#### IV. Primary Loyalties and Concepts of Retribution: Their Role in Escalating the Conflict

Figure (6): Respondents' Perceptions of the Reasons Behind Tribal Involvement in Confrontations

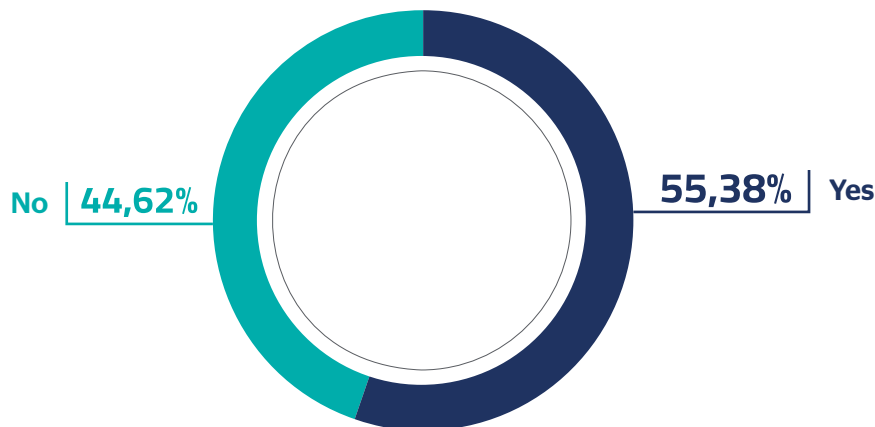


67.54% of respondents believed that Arab tribes' involvement in military confrontations against Druze militias was motivated by tribal solidarity "Fazaa" to support Suwayda's Bedouins, while 26.62% saw it as an attempt to assume the state's role in these clashes, and only 5.85% attributed it to historical vendettas. These perceptions collectively indicate that the Syrian state and all its institutions have significant work ahead in transitioning to a civil state. All the aforementioned causes demonstrate that we remain in a pre-modern state phase, where primary loyalties and the prioritization of tribal or sectarian affiliations override belonging to a civil state whose institutions should resolve any civil conflict and restore rights through legal mechanisms and human rights accountability.

This fragile reality facing the new Syrian government across all levels stems from the former regime's decades-long reinforcement of primary and regional loyalties to facilitate building its repressive state apparatus over more than fifty years. Consequently, the new government finds itself confronting numerous complex dossiers requiring years of reform and restructuring, amid internal and regional changes that pose additional challenges to its success, survival, and continued leadership of the new Syria. The data reveals how the old regime systematically transformed tribal and sectarian structures into tools of control, leaving the transitional government with the immense task of dismantling this engineered social fragmentation while establishing new civic bonds - all while navigating Syria's delicate geopolitical position and the competing interests of regional actors seeking to exploit these very divisions.

## V. Government Shortcomings and Mistakes in Handling the Suwayda File

Figure (7): Evaluation of State Performance During Suwayda Events



55.38% of survey respondents believed the state mishandled the Suwayda file, while 44.62% held the opposite view. In reality, the state's performance, represented by its relevant institutions, managed the Suwayda issue in what could minimally be described as "confused and miscalculated military operations," or at least that it was led into an avoidable trap. This resulted in those violent, painful events that created a rift in the Syrian social fabric on one hand, and on the other hand—in light of the coastal region events followed by Suwayda—highlighted the urgent need to train personnel from the Ministries of Defense and Interior. This is due to documented violations committed by elements affiliated with both

ministries, which forced the government to form investigation committees after each military operation because of recurring violations. This has negatively impacted trust between the population and security forces, necessitating strict measures to ensure troops adhere to human rights standards and rebuild community trust. Monitoring the work of security agencies and defense forces through bodies that can receive public complaints, conduct transparent investigations, issue recommendations to address violations, and provide training courses on human rights, conflict management, and community engagement is essential.

Conversely, on the level of critical thinking, perceptions, and voicing opinions, we see a positive step that Syrians would not have taken during the former regime. This shift, we believe, stems from the harsh experiences Syrians endured, particularly during the revolution and war, as well as greater exposure to the world and a desire to play a role in building a new Syria rather than remaining silent. This is evident in the debates surrounding any public issue, despite some alignments along religious or ideological lines—which is natural.

Some respondents viewed the events as part of an Israeli plot to meddle in Syrian affairs. They believed the government made a mistake by working with Israel to enter the region, essentially walking into a trap. The subsequent airstrikes on Damascus's Umayyad Square seemed to confirm their suspicions. This situation offers a cautionary lesson as the government faces another delicate challenge: managing the northern and eastern Euphrates territories. This issue will require a carefully structured, institutional response rather than ad hoc decision-making.

## VI. Positive Trends Towards Institutionalization and State Control

A series of questions were posed to gauge approval or rejection rates regarding variables related to institutionalization, state control, and civil peace. The results were as follows:



The field results revealed significant trends toward the necessity for the state to assume its roles and responsibilities in governing the country through a model based on transparency in dealing with complex domestic issues—especially given Syria’s vulnerability to periodic social tremors due to the transitional phase’s nature, with anticipated problems emerging at social, economic, and political levels inherent to this stage. These trends manifested in support for the state extending its control over all Syrian territories, particularly given the ambiguous situation in the Euphrates regions, and for curbing random weapons outside state authority—a phenomenon still prevalent in various parts of the country.

The inclination toward institutionalization was clear, reflecting Syrians’ (the survey sample) desire to live under clear laws where they can secure their rights through defined legal mechanisms, such as holding violators from all parties accountable—whether in Suwayda’s events or unresolved issues from the former regime’s era. The necessity of displaced people returning to their cities and villages in Suwayda—a principle we believe applies to all displaced Syrians—serves as a precursor to reordering the human geography after a decade and a half of demographic shifts due to forced displacement and migration.

There was also significant support for activating local reconciliation committees in Suwayda and other regions, alongside involving local communities in managing their areas—facilitating the government’s engagement with administrative structures obligated to coordinate and implement state plans nationwide.

In reality, resolving Syria’s post-regime complex challenges primarily requires a political and societal dialogue encompassing all Syrian components and political currents to reestablish shared national vision frameworks. This must be coupled with activating transitional justice mechanisms and holding all perpetrators accountable—whether during the Syrian revolution or violations in the coastal and Suwayda regions.

## Findings

1. Israeli Incitement as Primary Cause: There is broad consensus that the main driver behind the recent Suwayda events was Israeli provocation and its baseless propaganda under the guise of “protecting minorities.”
2. Separatist Tendencies in Druze Militias: Respondents viewed the behavior of Druze militias as motivated by separatist ambitions.
3. Druze Rejection of Secession: The survey found that the majority of Suwayda’s Druze population does not support separatist movements.
4. Tribal Involvement Driven by Retaliation: Tribal engagement in the clashes was primarily attributed to retaliatory solidarity (“Fazaa”) against violations targeting Bedouin communities in Suwayda.
5. Government Mismanagement: A significant majority believed the state mishandled the Suwayda crisis, contributing to the escalation.
6. Growing Demand for Institutional Governance: There is increasing public support for state control over security and a clear institutional framework to replace current instability.