

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

# The Syrian Police

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

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

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



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

### About the authors

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# Executive Summary

This working paper presents survey results regarding the Syrian police. It focuses on respondents' knowledge of the police's roles and responsibilities before the war and explores how they assess the police forces' position within the security sector and their involvement in state repression.

## Survey results

Of all core security providers, survey participants stated they knew the roles and responsibilities of the Syrian police best. It appears the police were the security provider to which survey participants could most relate. However, while the roles and responsibilities of the police were known to four fifths of respondents, only a small minority perceived the police as their main source of protection before the war in Syria (for more details, see also Working Paper 1: Safe Spaces and Protection in Syria before and during the War).

According to survey participants, the police were responsible for violence and repression both before and during the war, albeit to a lower extent than all other core security providers. Before the war in particular, the police played a comparatively minor role in violence and repression. During the war, the perception of their involvement in violence and repression doubled. However, they still ranked among the three actors least involved in these activities.

Despite negative perceptions and experiences, 85% of survey participants consider the police an integral part of a security sector, followed by the justice sector and civil society. Overwhelming, 91% of survey participants stated that the police should be the entity responsible for providing security to citizens in post-war Syria.

## Conclusions

Current political developments in Syria, and the likelihood that the regime will win the war militarily,

limit the prospects for comprehensively reforming the Syrian security sector. However, it is important for international actors working in and on Syria to keep in mind how Syrians envisage an ideal security sector for post-war Syria. The role of the police is crucial in this regard. Without taking these into consideration, long-term stability and peace will be doomed to fail. This, therefore, prompts several recommendations for further academic research as well as policy analysis and development:

- » **Assess the security needs of Syrian boys, girls, women, and men**, with a special focus on the role the police should play in protection and providing security. With civil society, discuss community policing approaches based on international best practices that would help establish a culture of citizen-orientation, especially for rural and scarcely-populated communities. Conduct further research on the question of why fewer women stated they had knowledge about the police, and the possible repercussions implied by this lack of knowledge.
- » **Analyse the performance of the Syrian police** in all governorates, and collect and assess deficits and challenges regarding guidelines, policies, procedures, organisational structure, and available resources. Include alternative forms of policing during the war, for example in (former) opposition-held and Kurdish areas. Conduct focus group discussions and public perception surveys among important Syrian diaspora communities to collect citizens' expectations vis-à-vis the police services in their communities of origin.
- » **Plan ahead** to develop the police into a security provider trusted by all citizens once a political window of opportunity for comprehensively reforming the whole security sector opens. According to survey participants, the police should be the entity responsible for providing security to all citizens. Develop recommendations for tackling organisational

reform on how to transform the police into an effective law enforcement agency that operates transparently, allocates its resources to the needs of citizens, and acts according to the needs of all Syrians.

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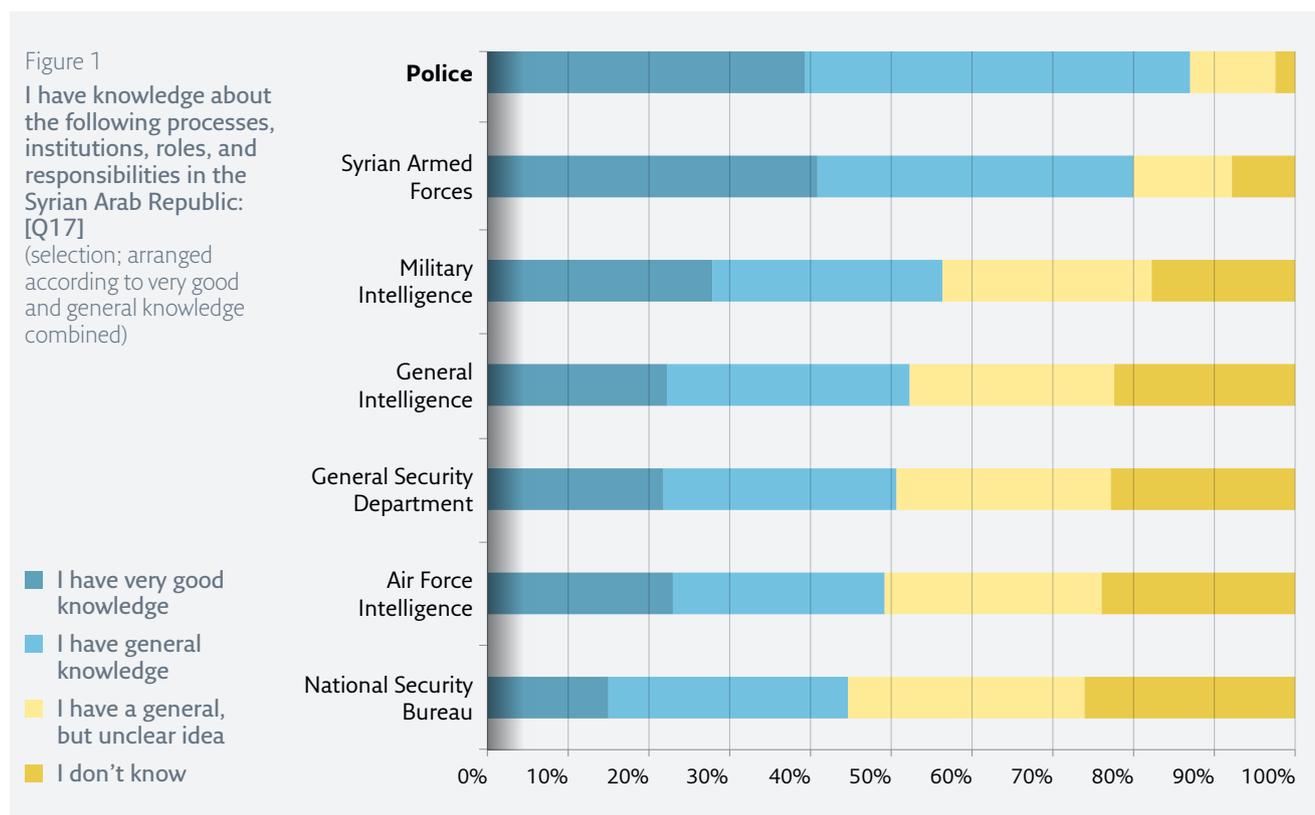
# The Syrian Police

For citizens, the police are very often the most visible representatives of a security sector. As a core security provider, their performance has an influence on the perceived legitimacy of state security provision. Therefore, it is important to assess the role and performance of the police as well as to analyse respective perceptions of citizens. This paper presents the results of the survey directly linked to the Syrian police. These results focus on knowledge about the police's roles and responsibilities before the war, their involvement in state repression, and the position of the police within the security sector. Consideration is also given to the role the police should ideally play in post-war Syria.

## Good knowledge of the police's roles and responsibilities

Of all core security providers, survey participants indicated knowing the roles and responsibilities of the police best (87% *very good knowledge* and *general knowledge* aggregated; see Figure 1). It appears the police were the security provider to which survey participants could most relate. A number of reasons for this seem plausible. First, the police are generally the closest to citizens among state security providers. Usually, they are citizens' first point of contact. Second, in comparison to other state security providers, the police were probably the most visible in all governorates and communities. Third, the police should have the duty to protect citizens, to combat crime, and to serve as first responders in the event of threats to the public. This is why citizens often comprehend the roles and responsibilities of the police better than those of other security providers, such as the army or intelligence agencies.

By contrast, around half of survey participants indicated they lacked knowledge about main intelligence agencies in Syria (when aggregating *I have a general, but unclear idea* and *I don't know* answers for Military



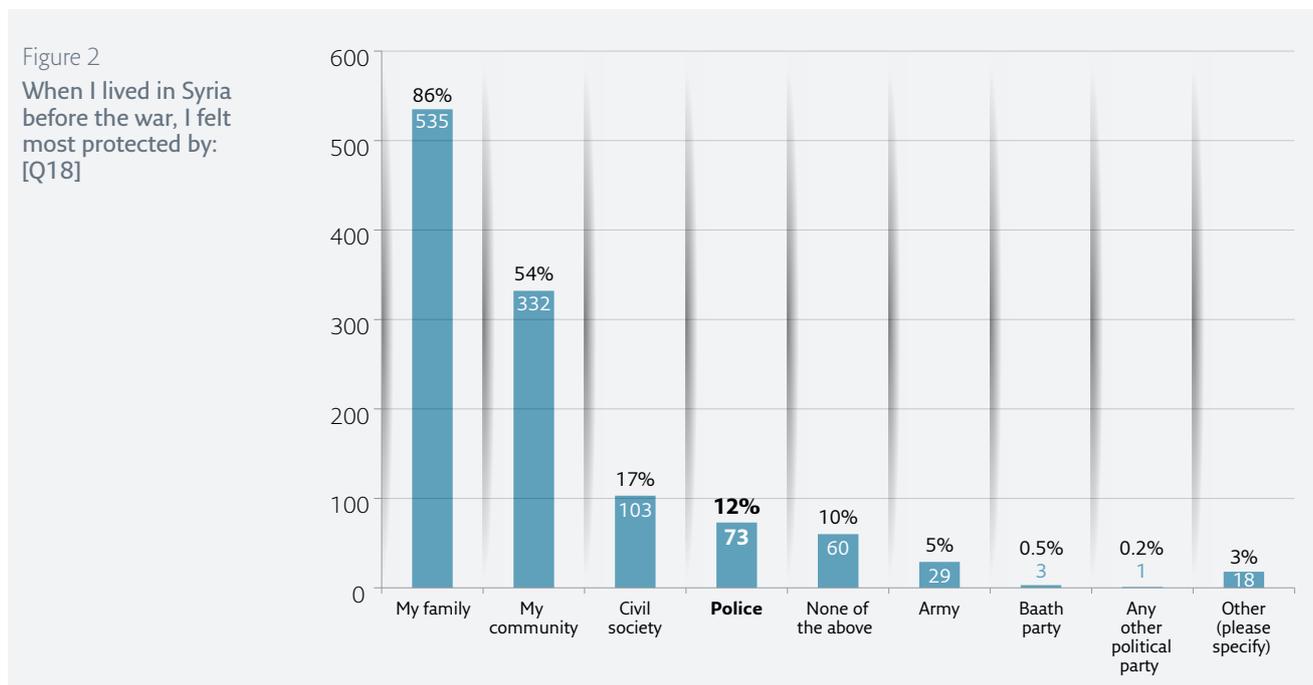
Intelligence, General Intelligence, General Security Department, Air Force Intelligence, and National Security Bureau).

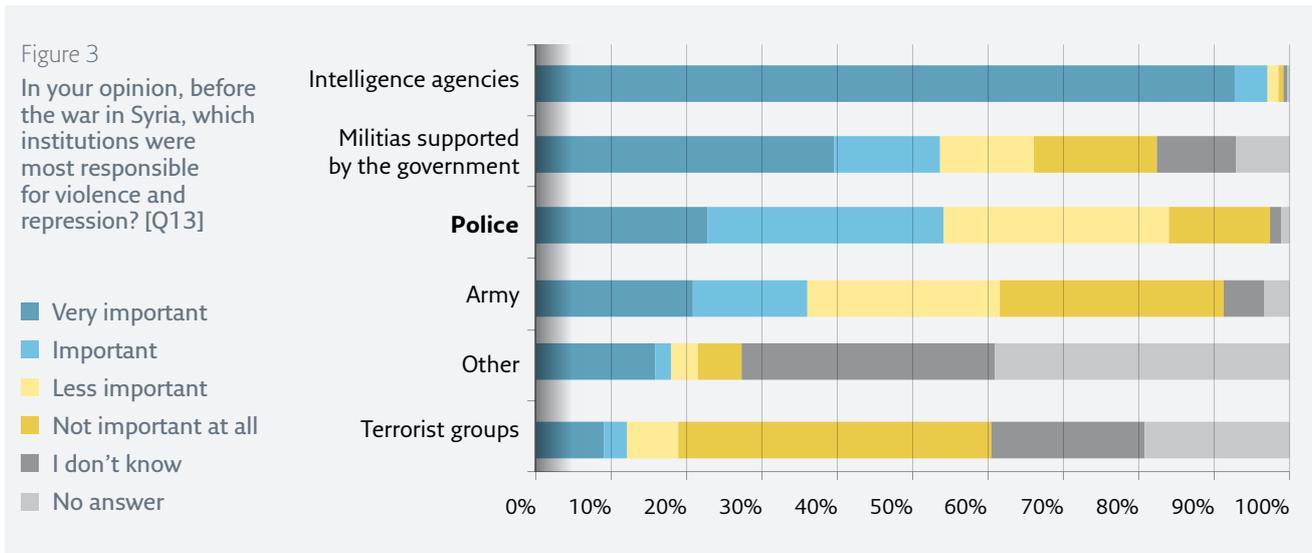
88% of all men indicated having knowledge about the processes, institutions, roles, and responsibilities of the police in the Syrian Arab Republic (40% *very good knowledge* and 48% *general knowledge*), while only 78% of all women stated the same (35% *very good knowledge* and 43% *general knowledge*). It may be that, traditionally, more men than women have been in contact with the police, either to deal with their own cases or acting on behalf of family members. This might also hint at the fact that women pursued other conflict resolution channels outside the realms of core security providers. A complementary explanation could be that security-related issues have traditionally been perceived as the responsibility of men more than women. Perhaps it was difficult for women to address the police and to present their issues. Further research should elucidate this question and focus on the ability of the police to adequately respond to the needs of women and girls.

## A limited role in protecting citizens

Before the war, only 12% of survey participants felt most protected by the police (see Figure 2). The overwhelming majority (86%) felt most protected by their families, while nearly half (54%) also felt protected by their community. Even civil society (17%) was more strongly perceived as a source of protection than the police. Although respondents apparently knew that the police would have been responsible for their protection (see above), they did not seem to have been able to satisfactorily protect Syrian citizens (for a complete analysis of this question, see also Working Paper 1: Safe Spaces and Protection in Syria before and during the War).

One reason for this may have been that traditionally strong family ties served for many issues of societal life as the predominant social safety net. It could also mean that, even though Syrians addressed the police, they were not satisfied with the interactions, procedures, or results. In the open-ended answer option, two additional sources of protection appeared several times: *Money and connections* and *Not expressing their opinions in public*. "Even the police could be bought by bribery", stated one participant, for example. On the

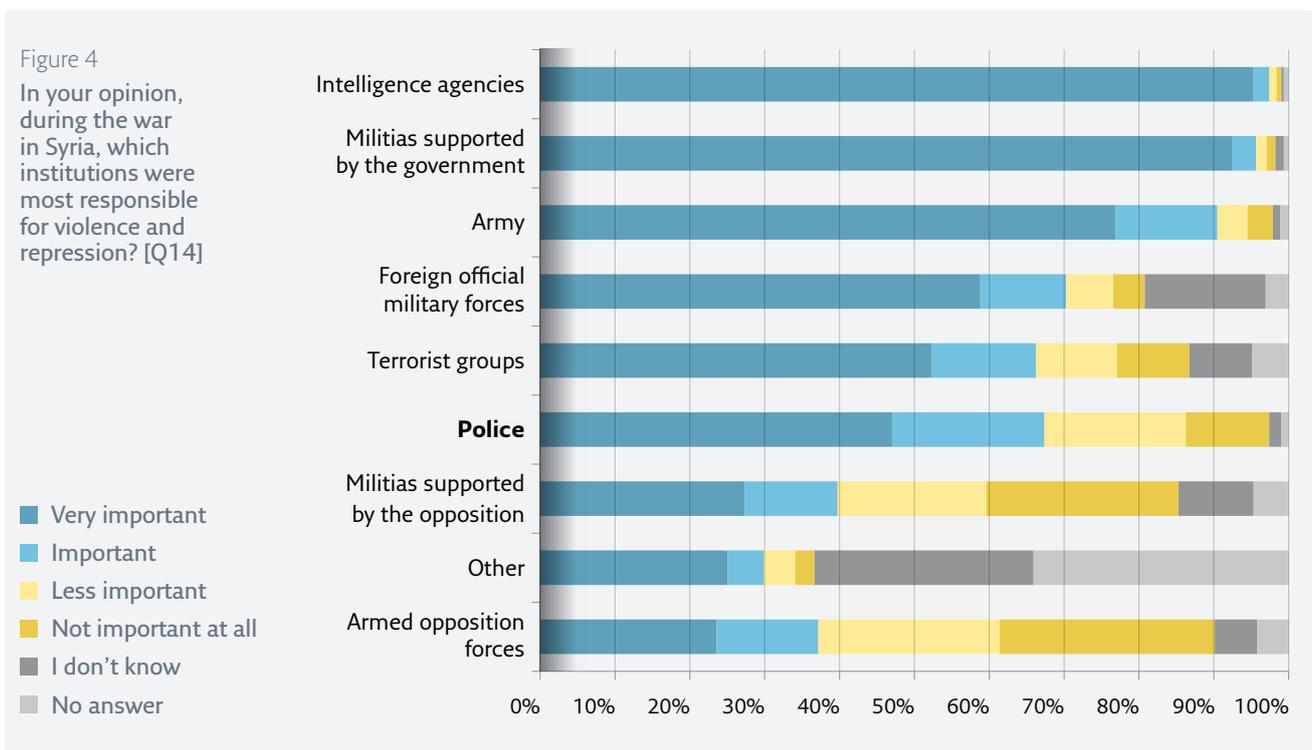




one hand, corruption was one reason for citizens not to address the police, and on the other, having the necessary resources to bribe offered some form of protection.

## The role of the police in violence and repression before and during the war in Syria

Another reason for the weak score of the police in protecting citizens before the war could be that they have been perceived as part of an abusive security sector and, thus, as untrustworthy. This is reflected in another question on the responsibility of selected actors for violence and repression in Syria (see Figure 3). More than half of survey participants thought the police were responsible for violence and repression (54% for very important and important answers combined); however, only 23% selected very important.



Yet, in comparison to other core security providers, the police played a minor role in violence and repression. 93% of participants attributed a very important role for repression and violence to the intelligence agencies, followed by militias supported by the government.

During the war (Figure 4), responsibility for violence and repression attributed to various actors increased for all. The perception of the police's involvement in violence and repression doubled for very important answers, and increased by 24% to 67% for very important and important answers combined. However, the police ranked among the three actors least responsible, right before armed opposition forces and militias supported by the opposition. Nevertheless, there was a trend by which those who attributed responsibility to the police for violence and repression during the war were also wary of trusting state security providers in general. When asked if they would resort to the government in the event of danger, the same group showed a tendency to refrain from doing so (for a complete analysis of this Question 33, please refer to Working Paper 6: General Notions of Ideal Security Provision). When looking solely at state security providers (the army, police, and intelligence agencies), the police was perceived as the least responsible state actor for violence and repression during the war. Despite committing atrocities, the police could potentially offer a leverage point for reforming a core security provider that seems to enjoy more acceptance among the population than other core security institutions.

Survey participants from the Governorate of Aleppo were more critical of the police's role in violence and repression than those from the Governorate of Damascus and other governorates (see Table 1). This may reflect different forms and levels of violent and repressive engagement by the police of citizens in the Governorate of Aleppo. Alternatively, it might be linked to an even more negative perception of the government and its security institutions in general, including the police, among participants from the Governorate of Aleppo.

Table 1: In your opinion, which institutions were most responsible for violence and repression before and during the war in Syria? [Q13 & Q14]

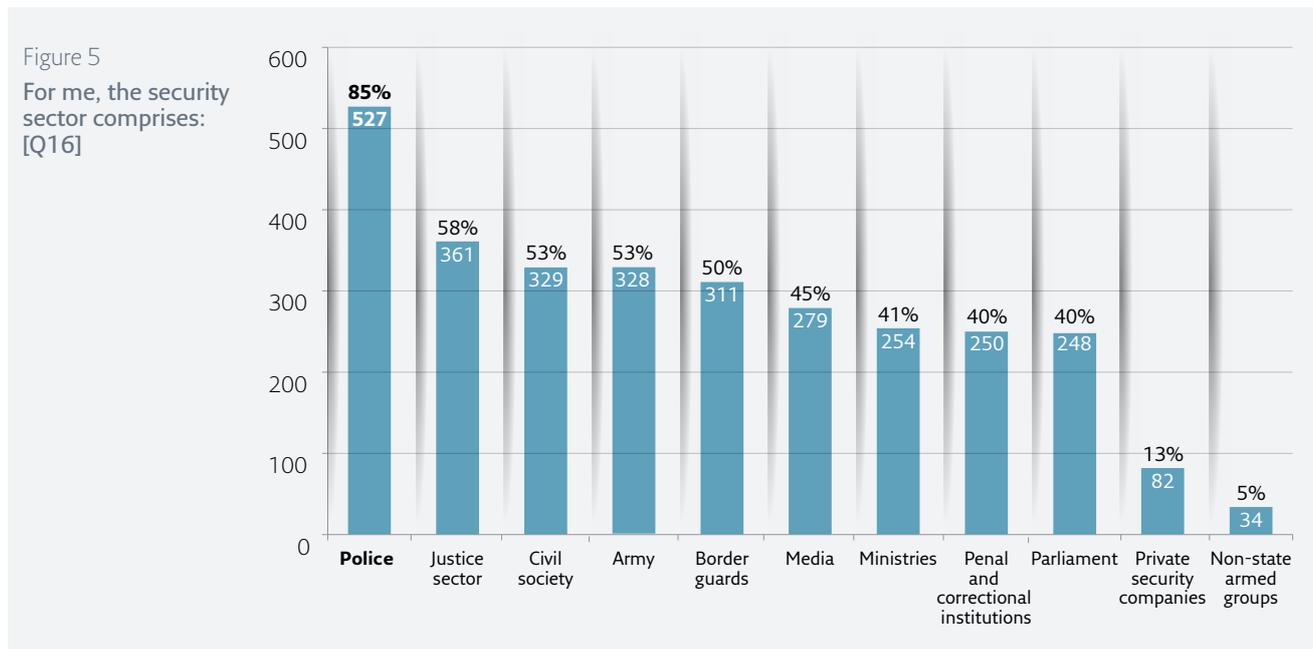
Variable: Police

	Before the war			During the war		
	Very important	Important	Combined	Very important	Important	Combined
Governorate of Aleppo	30%	33%	63%	44%	24%	68%
Governorate of Damascus	17%	30%	47%	49%	14%	63%
Other governorates	24%	31%	55%	47%	22%	69%

During the war, perceptions of the repressive role of the police increased amongst all respondents, with the highest increase for participants from the Governorate of Damascus. These findings require further analysis of potential regional differences in policing procedures and actions to achieve a nation-wide level of service quality and standards.

## The composition of the security sector

While only very few survey participants felt protected by the police, and many held them responsible for repression and violence, especially during the war, respondents still saw them as a legitimate part of the security sector. The police was by far the most often selected component of a security sector (85%), followed



by the justice sector and civil society (see Figure 5). It appears that, when reflecting about the composition of security sectors in general, survey participants first thought of the police. They attributed the most visible legitimacy of belonging to a security sector to the police, regardless of negative perceptions or experiences with Syrian police forces before and during the war. In consequence, two conclusions should be drawn for any future security sector reform initiatives. First, remaining trust in the police as a core security provider could be used to build momentum to eliminate their deficits and develop effective reform programmes for the Syrian police with the aim of achieving citizen-oriented policing. Second, successful reform efforts with the police could pave the way for building trust in the reform of other security providers, such as the army and intelligence agencies.

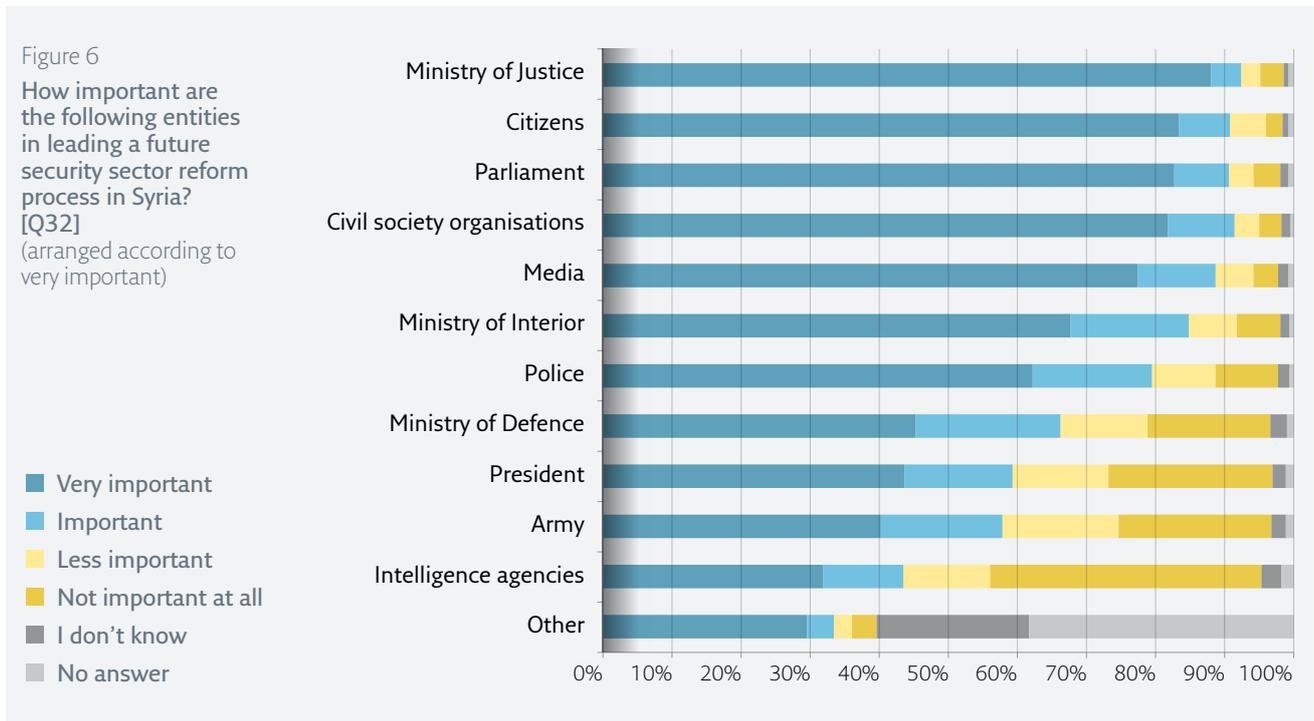
## The police in the post-war Syrian security sector

Survey participants prefer civilian institutions to lead a future security sector reform process in Syria (Question 32; see Figure 6), such as the Ministry of Justice, citizens, parliament, civil society, and the media. They differ in their opinions about the role of core security providers. The police, for example, rank first among core security providers: nearly two thirds of survey participants attribute very high importance to their leading role in a future security sector reform process in Syria. Only 9% do not want the police to take on this role at all.

On average, more men than women attribute a very important role for the police in leading a future Syrian security sector reform process (see Table 2). However, when combining both very important and important answers, the difference between women and men for the attributed importance of the police decreases.

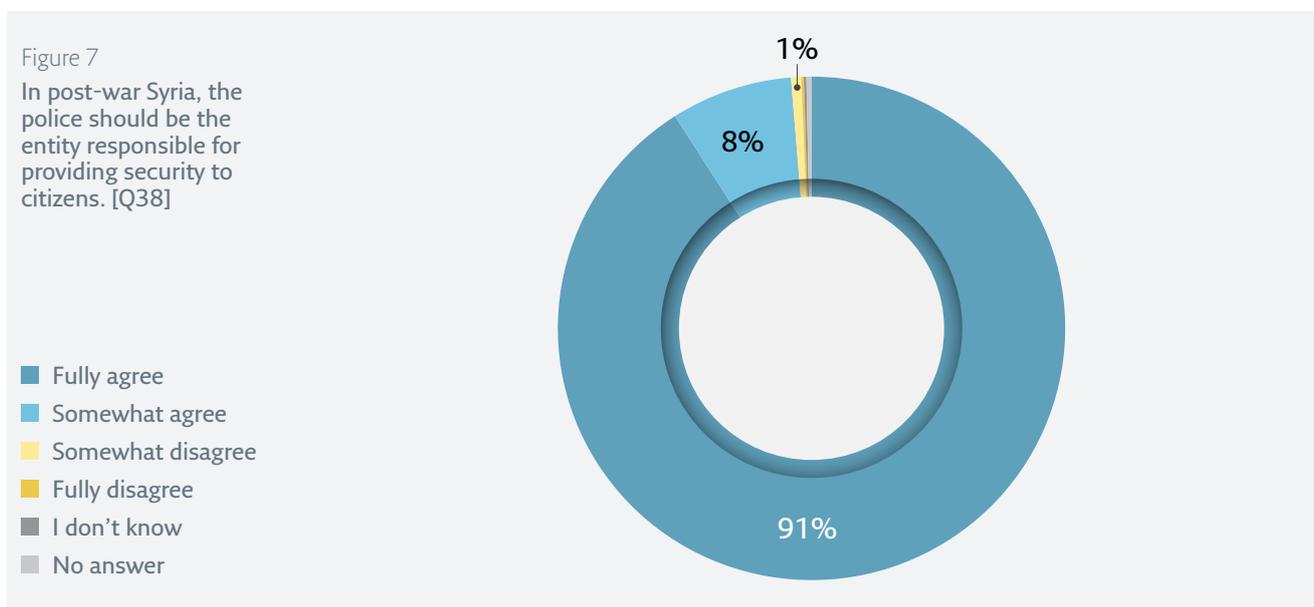
Table 2: How important are the following entities in leading a future security sector reform process in Syria? [Q32]  
Variable: Police

	Very important	Important	Combined
Men	65%	16%	81%
Women	47%	28%	75%



Furthermore, the police should be the entity responsible for providing security to citizens in post-war Syria: an overwhelming 99% responded positively to this statement (Figure 7; 91% fully agreed and 8% somewhat agreed). Despite the negative assessment of actual police conduct before and during the war, survey participants apparently desire that the post-war Syrian police deliver citizen-oriented security in the future. These results could also be interpreted to the effect that only the police should provide security for citizens. Further research is needed to fully confirm these hypotheses.

It is both a blessing and curse at the same time that survey participants responded so positively to questions regarding the police's role in post-war Syria. On the one hand, this means Syrians may react optimistically regarding police reform. On the other hand, if reforms do not achieve positive results in a short period of time, citizens might get disappointed and project this frustration on the entire security sector and all reform efforts.



# Recommendations

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

- » Assess the security needs of Syrian boys, girls, women, and men, with a special focus on the role the police should play in protection and providing security. With civil society, discuss community policing approaches based on international best practices that would help establish a culture of citizen-orientation, especially for rural and scarcely-populated communities.
  - » Conduct further research on the question of why fewer women stated they had knowledge about the police, and the possible repercussions implied by this lack of knowledge. Focus on the ability of the police to adequately respond to the needs of women and girls.
  - » Analyse the performance of the Syrian police in all governorates. Collect and assess deficits and challenges regarding guidelines, policies, procedures, organisational structure, and available resources. Conduct focus group discussions and public perception surveys among important Syrian diaspora communities to collect citizens' expectations vis-à-vis police services in their communities of origin, to identify potential regional differences in policing procedures and actions in order to obtain a more complete picture of the nationwide level of service quality and standards.
  - » Conduct research on alternative forms of policing during the war, for example in (former) opposition-held and Kurdish areas. Assess civilian perspectives of their performance and reflect on how to integrate best practices in the post-war Syrian police.
  - » Map the police's role within the Syrian security system. Understand whether mandates overlapped with other security providers. Assess, for example, whether police forces were used to undertake intelligence operations.
  - » Assess the extent to which the police had a civilian character before and especially during the war. It is possible that the war and conflict environment led to a militarisation of core security actors, including the police. This may be manifested in the dissolution of boundaries between the police and military roles.
  - » Analyse all forms of corruption, bribery, and favouritism within the police and how these affect their service provision. Eliminating corruption, bribery, and favouritism will be key to any reform effort.
  - » Conduct research on the police's current recruitment processes to identify discriminatory practices in recruitment and service provision that hinder the transformation of the police into a more representative force. Place particular emphasis on the recruitment of former combatants into the police, as they may have been involved in abuses against civilians.
  - » Assess and analyse the existing legal framework that guides the work of police forces based on international standards and best practices and develop recommendations for a legal framework allowing citizen-centred security provision by police forces.
  - » Plan ahead to develop the police into a security provider trusted by all citizens once a political window of opportunity opens for comprehensively reforming the whole security sector. According to survey participants, the police should be the entity responsible for providing security to all citizens. Develop recommendations for tackling organisational reform on how to transform the police into an effective law enforcement agency that operates transparently, allocates its resources to the needs of citizens, and acts according to the needs of all Syrians.
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