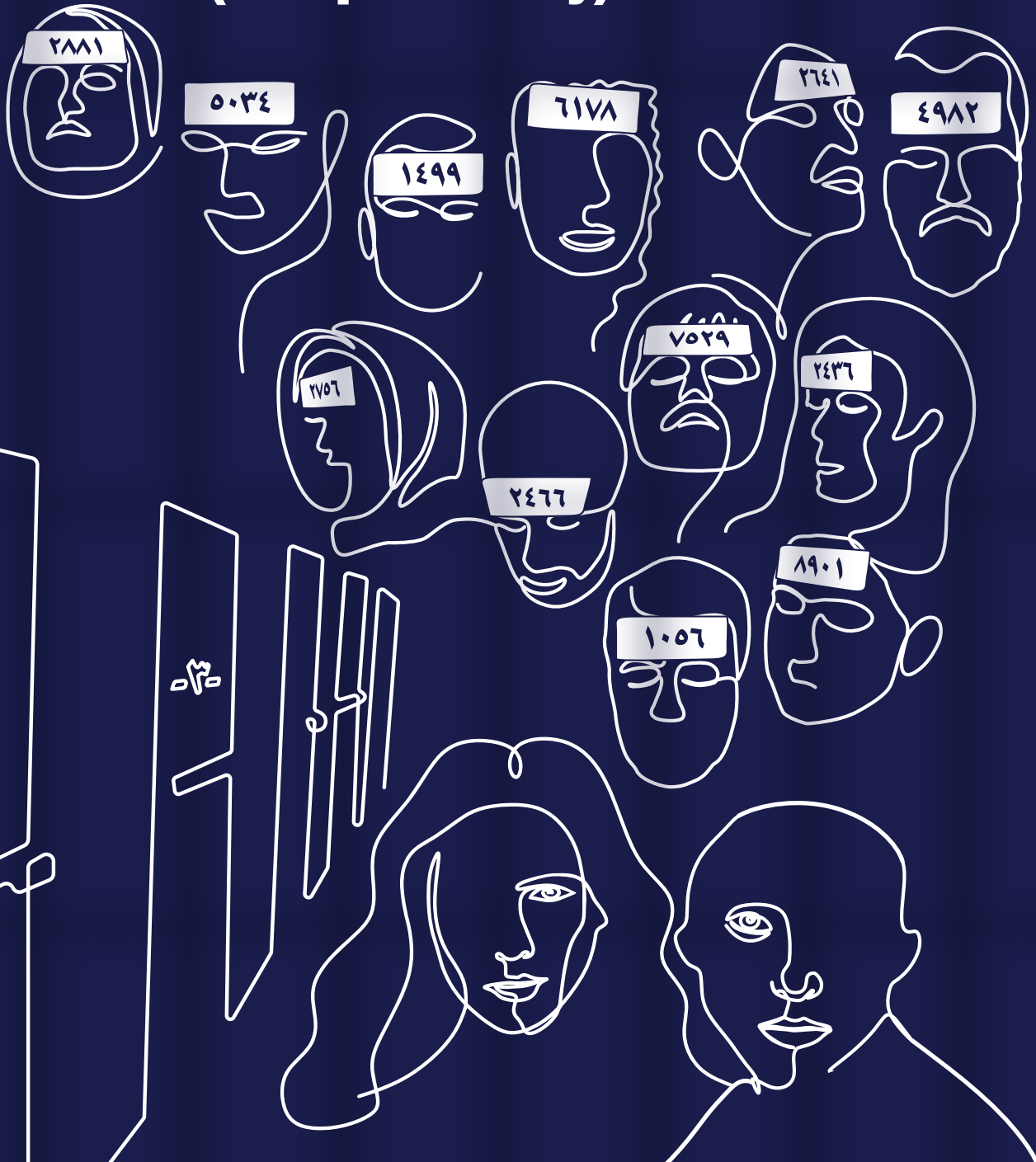




# Survivors' Experiences in Regime Prisons in Syria (Sample survey)





اليوم التالي  
لدعم الانتقال الديمقراطي في سوريا



THE DAY AFTER  
Supporting Democratic Transition In Syria

## Survivors' Experiences in Regime Prisons in Syria

(Sample survey)

July 2020

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The Day After (TDA) is a Syrian organization that works to support democratic transition in Syria, and its scope of work is focused on the following areas: Rule of law, transitional justice, security sector reform, electoral system design and Constituent Assembly election, constitutional design, economic reform and social policies.



**We thank the Orient Policy Center for their valuable contribution to this report.**



The Orient Policy Center (OPC) is an independent research center established in 2014, providing consultations and research services with the aim of developing humanitarian policies and programs, and supporting stabilization and reconstruction in crisis areas and fragile environments.

## A Word from the CEO

Since the Ba'ath Party's seizure of power, Syria has witnessed a decline in respect for the rule of law and human rights by the encroaching executive authority and its imposed security over the lives, dignity, and rights of citizens. The severity of these violations escalated with every move Syrians made toward demanding their rights.

During Ba'athist rule, the Syrian regime has built a system to ensure its survival by silencing and excluding opponents, using a number of tools including enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and its accompanying torture, and extrajudicial execution. It unleashed its Security Services and granted them immunity from prosecution, built a system of emergency courts to guarantee revenge against any opponent, and outlawed the free expression of opinion, transforming the role of Syrian state institutions from serving its citizens to serving the regime.

Arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance were not just tools to punish opponents, but a deterrence tool for all Syrians. Threatening the same fate for any who dared oppose the regime perpetuated fear and built a kingdom of terror.

With the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance were among the most important tools used by the regime to suppress peaceful protests and to break the will of demonstrators, through the brutal torture and extrajudicial killings accompanying arrests.

The first part of this study examines the experience of 200 male and female detainees in the al-Assad regime's detention centers, who were more fortunate than others to arrive in Adra prison after an arrest experience during which they were subjected to several types of violations. We say "more fortunate" because even emergency tribunals in Security Services basements become a source of hope, however slight, for detainees. This hope has not been fulfilled for many of those who were tortured to death or who were secretly abducted by government forces, whose fate is not yet known.

The second portion of the study focuses on the reality of detention centers in Syria by analyzing the legal and institutional framework, identifying gaps in legal texts and gaps between text and implementation, examining Adra prison as a model for detention centers, and forming recommendations to bring detention centers in line with international human rights standards.

Since its creation, The Day After Foundation has operated from the viewpoint that democratic transformation in Syria can only be achieved by examining the events of the past and the violations contained therein, identifying gaps and practices, ensuring accountability and reparation, and reforming institutions through the internal controls of transitional justice, to pave the way for a fair and sustainable peace that delivers justice to victims and ensures non-recurrence.

We at The Day After Foundation thank everyone who shared their pain and harsh experiences in order to provide a narrative documenting the reality of detention centers, which helped identify gaps in this structure and highlight the features of necessary reform to ensure such violations never happen again.

### **Mutasem Syoufi**

Executive Director of The Day After





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## Introduction:

Arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances have been practiced at a large scale by the Syrian regime security forces since the protests in March of 2011 broke out. These profoundly disturbing methods remain one of the most important means for the Syrian regime to establish its control over citizens; by spreading terror, breaking their will, and stripping them of their dignity.

Since 2011, the issue of detainees has been raised as a central issue in the Syrian conflict, beginning with the Arab League's proposition on solution initiatives in Syria, and subsequently included in Kofi Annan's "Six-Point Peace Plan"—Annan was the joint special envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League in Syria at the time. That plan, which was reaffirmed by Security Council Resolution 2042 in April 2012, demanded that the regime intensify the speed of release of persons who were detained arbitrarily, and provide a list of all places of detention without delay, and immediately begin to regulate access to these places.<sup>(1)</sup>

Three months later, the United Nations Military Observer (UNMO) entered Syria and failed in its mission. The UN Secretary-General then sent a letter to the Security Council in July 2012, in which he stated, "Thousands of Syrians are still detained in facilities of various types administered by the government. There has been no progress in this area, and the conditions of thousands of detainees remain unclear. There are still worrying reports of major violations, arrests, and detentions at a large scale."<sup>(2)</sup>

In the same period, during the Geneva talks, a statement was released that served as a baseline for the United Nations Security Council Resolution No. 2254 of December 2015, demanding that the Syrian regime accelerate the release of detainees, and grant access to detention facilities to international committees. The Syrian delegation representing the opposition raised the issue of the detainees in all of the Geneva talks' fourteen rounds, but to no avail.

To date, the number of detainees and enforced disappearances by the regime are still increasing steadily. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights in its latest report, issued in March 2020, approximately 130,000 Syrian men and women are still detained by the regime; other sources indicate significantly higher numbers.<sup>(3)</sup> The Syrian Network for Human Rights estimates the total number of people who have been detained is more than one million men and women, while it continues to document hundreds of names of new detainees and forcibly disappeared persons each month.<sup>(4)</sup>

A Syrian lawyer says, "The terms 'arbitrary detention', 'enforced disappearance,' and others, do not accurately reflect the reality of the situation of those who are being held by the Syrian regime. In the most accurate sense, they are hostages of the regime, who are frequently blackmailed, and the regime will never relinquish this measure at any cost."<sup>(5)</sup>

The absence of any formal fact-finding process, or foundations for transitional justice, after nine years of conflict in Syria intensified our efforts at The Day After. Through this report, and through other similar projects, those efforts should not be seen as solely an attempt to document the facts, but rather as a stepping stone that paves the way to transitional justice in Syria. The information presented in this report must contribute to combating the denial of war crimes committed in Syria, and thus serve as a source for any formal judicial process to reach future transitional justice.

Two hundred male and female prisoners spoke about their imprisonment experience in this survey, and were lucky enough to be transferred at some point from their detention facility to Adra Civil Prison in Damascus, where they were eventually released. Thus it can be said that they were the most fortunate of detainees, compared to others who died under torture in various security branches, and whose deaths were cited as natural causes, when the Caesar<sup>(6)</sup> documents revealed that those medical records were, in fact, fabricated. Those survivors are also a segment of thousands of detainees who were executed in Sednaya prison—"the human slaughterhouse," as coined by Amnesty International.<sup>(7)</sup>

Additionally, the whereabouts of tens of thousands of detainees remain unknown. This report gives an understanding of the survivors' experiences. It covers the management of the detention system by the Syrian regime, and the context in which it operates, including unlawful detention and trials, and exceptional courts.

(1) See the Security Council Resolution mentioned in the link: <https://bit.ly/2Sm9Y05>, last seen 30-30-2020.

(2) See the report of the United Nations Secretary-General at: <https://undocs.org/ar/S/2012/523>, last seen 30-30-2020.

(3) A search engine for two hundred thousand detainees and enforced disappearances by the Syrian regime, Zaman Al-Wasl newspaper, at the link: <https://bit.ly/3d4aBEc>, last seen 40-04-2020.

(4) See the report of the Syrian Network for Human Rights, March 2020, at the link: <https://bit.ly/3aPvcWy>, last seen 30-30-2020.

(5) Phone interview conducted by the researcher with a Syrian lawyer and human rights activist, who preferred to remain anonymized, 04-28-2020.

(6) The Arab Independent, from Assad's prisons Caesar tells his story, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2YhL5XT>, last seen 30-30-2020.

(7) Amnesty International, The Human Slaughterhouse, Mass Hangings and Systematic Extermination at Sednaya Prison, Syria, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2yY3H4B>, last seen 25-04-2020.



## Methodology:

The survey presents the findings of data collected from standardized interviews with two hundred former detainees released from Adra Prison, with most former detainees based in Syria or Turkey. The interviews were conducted in an expanded questionnaire, and included questions that tracked various experiences of the former detainees, starting from the first moments of detention, followed by interrogation and torture in the security branches, and finally, detention in Adra prison and their trials.

This report presents the findings of qualitative research conducted in May 2020. Data was collected through secure online communication with healthcare providers, employees, and healthcare facility owners based in Syria, as well as thorough desk-based and online research. The resources used included Government of Syria data, various articles from Syrian and other Arabic language media outlets, as well as specific information from humanitarian and healthcare sites. Where possible, data points were triangulated using multiple sources to increase the finding validity.

The findings are drawn from a team of five trained researchers, who underwent trauma training to interview the former detainees. Strategies and approaches included building the interviewees' confidence before asking the questions, and taking specific measures to avoid re-traumatizing them. Furthermore, the researchers were also at risk of experiencing secondary stress, and therefore, were trained to filter painful information as much as possible. The condition of the researchers conducting the interviews was monitored frequently, to ensure that their mental well-being during work was managed.

The researchers also underwent legal training, with the aim of introducing to interviewees the importance of information confidentiality by the signing of an informed consent document. Those who refused to sign the informed consent document have been given false names in the paper, for security.

In addition, no false promises were made—in order to build trust—and researchers were obliged to fully identify themselves to the interviewees. Furthermore, they spoke to the interviewees about the work they were doing, where the information would go, who would be able to access the information, and how it would be used.

The survey comprises two hundred interviews of former detainees, with a gender ratio of 64% men to 36% women. This is a justified variation, as the vast majority of detainees held by the Syrian regime are male, and most female detainees do not disclose their imprisonment, fearing stigma. Moreover, the age ratio is 63% to 31% for those between 26-40 years of age and 41-60 years of age, respectively.

66% of the detainees<sup>(8)</sup> were either married or heads of households, making them the majority, while unmarried detainees formed 24% of the total interviewees.

The largest sample in the survey comes from Idlib province (29% of total interviewees), followed by those from Damascus province (17%) and Aleppo province (12%). The rest were distributed among the provinces of Dara'a, Homs, Hama, and Deirzozor, with rates ranging between 5-7%. The rates are in direct proportion to the number of interviews conducted in each area in Syria.

Most of the interviews were conducted with former detainees in northern Syria, under opposition control, and in areas and cities along the Turkish border, where large Syrian refugee communities are located—the majority of whom came from northern Syria, with the exception of Istanbul, which has the largest number of Syrian refugees as a non-border Turkish city.

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(8) The Syrian regime aims to destroy the foundations of Syrian society by not only detaining the person of interest, but by blackmailing and threatening their families. With this high percentage of married people, we can imagine the extent of damage inflicted on Syrian society (parents - mothers).



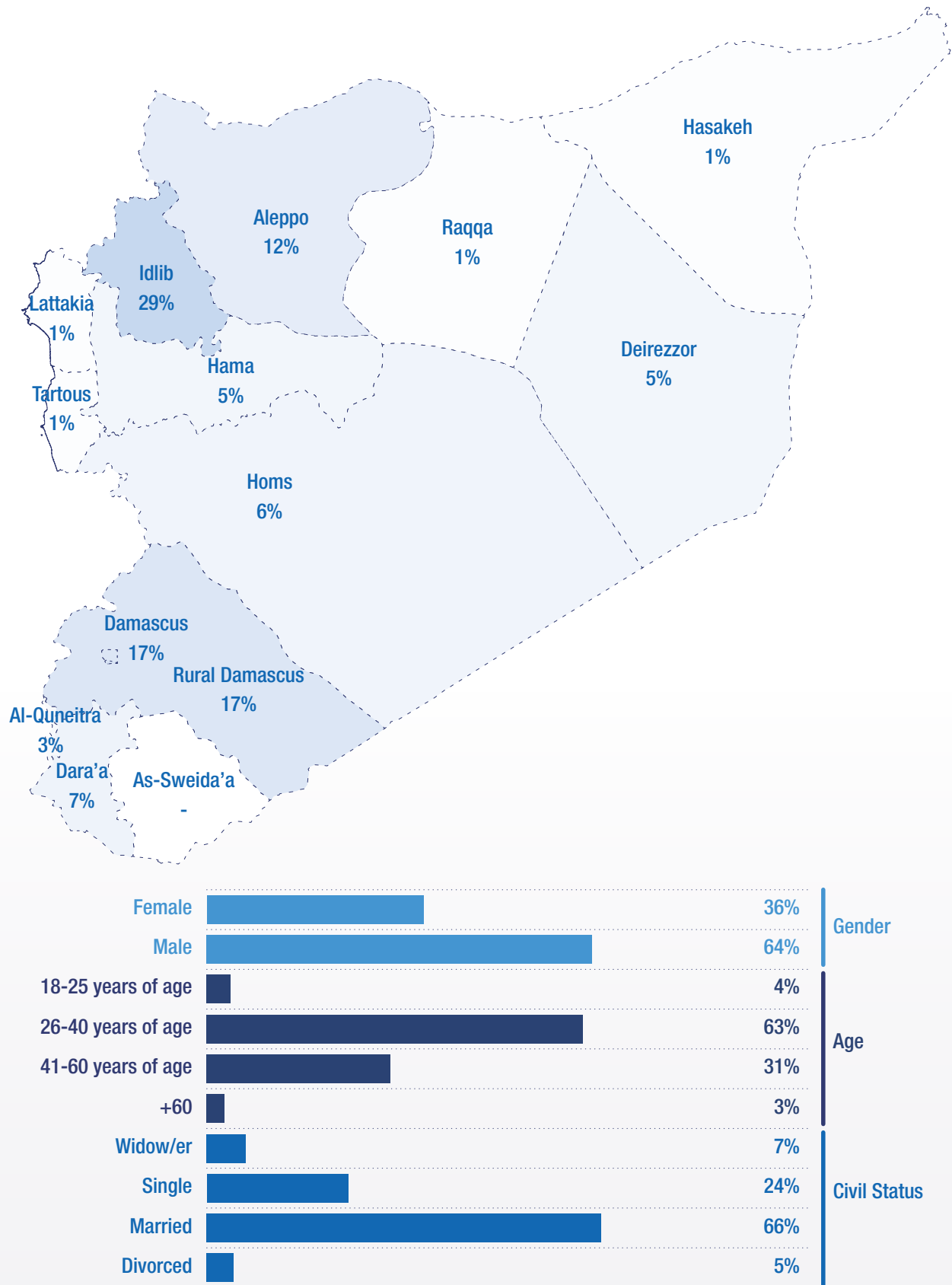


Figure 1 shows the composition of the survey sample according to the variables of age, gender, civil status, and province

## **-Chapter 1-**

### **Patterns of Arrests and Their Implications**

- I. Where do the arrests happen and how?**
- II. What do detainees know about the parties that arrested them?  
How do they obtain the information?**
- III. The main security services and forces responsible for the arrests**

This chapter presents the most important findings in the first period of detention, and describes this stage and its patterns. The chapter focuses on three main axes: the first describes the detention operations and the violations that often accompany them; the second focuses on exploring the level of the detainees' awareness of their situation and their jailers; the third is concerned with identifying the security and military forces involved in carrying out the arrests.

## I. Where Do the Arrests Happen and How?

The data indicates that the largest segment of survey respondents (about 38%) were arrested at Syrian regime checkpoints. Thus, it can be said that the roads were the most dangerous place in Syria, posing a huge probability of being arrested. Since the anti-regime protests broke out in March 2011, the number of fixed and mobile regime checkpoints multiplied on all major roads between Syrian cities and towns and in most city neighborhoods. Until 2017, for example, the number of checkpoints in Damascus alone was estimated to be about 300.<sup>(9)</sup> Who those checkpoints answer to varies—security branches, army units, or even militias affiliated with the regime—and some checkpoints were overseen by more than one of the aforementioned entities. Checkpoints appear to have been the biggest catalyst in carrying out arrests.

It is likely that the checkpoint cases did not know they were wanted by the regime; otherwise, they would not have attempted to pass through the checkpoints. In contrast, detainees who were arrested in home raids—and come in second at 23% of the total sample of the research—often had an arrest warrant already issued in their name.

Perhaps the most difficult data to collect and synthesize are the cases of those who were arrested in public spaces, such as cafes or parks. They make up almost 17% of the total sample of the report, coming third in frequency of arrests. The survey sample also included people who were arrested from their workplaces (12%), and others who were arrested in government or education facilities (5% each).

### » Where were you arrested?

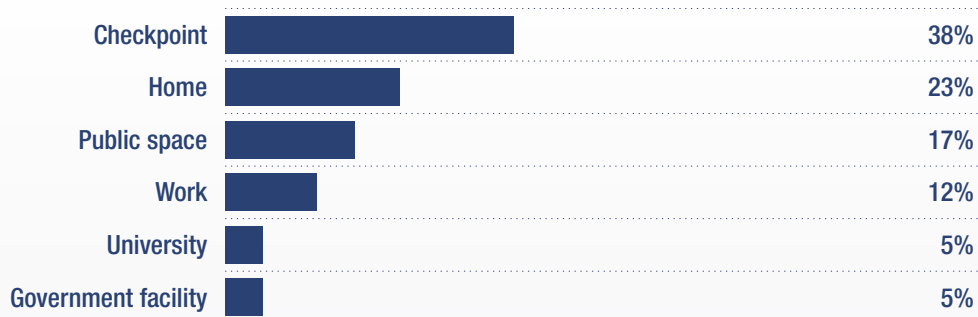


Figure 2 shows the distribution of respondents based on where the arrest took place.

Wherever the arrests took place, whether on the road with other travelers or at home in front of family members, detainees were almost always beaten and insulted during the arrest; 77% of respondents stated that their arrest took place in a humiliating manner. Of these, about 68% said they were subjected to beatings and forms of physical abuse upon being arrested, and in all of these cases the beatings were accompanied by verbal insults. 27% of respondents said they were subjected to only verbal insults. Moreover, detention operations included various forms of death threats, the concealment or harming of family members of the detainee, and sexual harassment and abuse, as was stated by many respondents in the sample. Male detainees were subject to more severe forms of abuse at 86%, compared with 60% of the female detainees.

(9) Dīaa Odeh and others, the checkpoints in the capital diminish, *Enab Baladi* newspaper, 2017, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2SN0T10>, date 05-05-2020.

### » How were you treated?

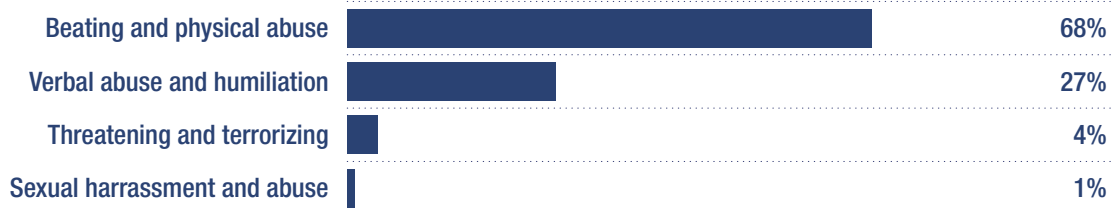


Figure 3 shows the distribution of respondents according to methods of abuse at the time of arrest.

One of the survivors we spoke to, who had been arrested at a security checkpoint, recounted his experience:

- “They took me out of the car and threw me on the floor of their car violently and then kicked me really hard while the car started moving, and the beating and insults continued until we got to the security branch.”
- Other survivors recounted how the beating was concentrated on their face and head; some of them suffered severe concussions from the brutality of the beating.
- What can be inferred from the high percentage of detainees who have been subjected to violence from the moment they were caught—who are the vast majority—is that beating, insults, and other physically and psychologically harmful practices are extremely common. The goal is to show excessive cruelty, presented as a prelude to what detainees will face inside the security branches and detention facilities.<sup>(10)</sup>

## II. What Do Detainees Know About the Parties that Arrested Them? How Do They Obtain the Information?

Only 28% of the total respondents stated that the security apparatuses arresting them identified themselves when the arrest occurred, while the vast majority of the security apparatuses did not identify themselves during the arrest, prompting detainees to pick up on specific signs to identify which party was arresting them. This highlights the violations committed by the security services from the first moment they arrest their victims.

One of the few ways a detainee can initially identify the party arresting him/her is by identifying one or more elements of the individuals making the arrest. Thirty-three percent of the respondents said they were able to know the party arresting them by identifying the officer/element who carried out the arrest. However, the third-largest group of detainees in the sample, 25%, were not able to identify the party arresting them until after arriving at the detention facility, and that was done by asking their fellow detainees about the facility.

### » How did you know identify the party that arrested you?

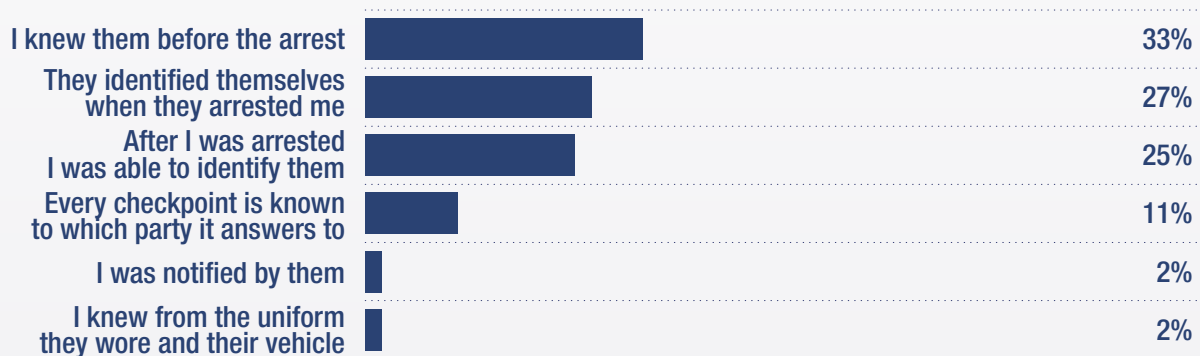


Figure 4 shows the distribution of respondents according to the authorities that conducted the arrests.

(10) Most of these arrests and investigations were carried out without the supervision of an official court, and thus deprived the detainees of their most basic rights

Another group of respondents—specifically those who were arrested at checkpoints—were able to recognize the party who arrested them through prior knowledge of which authority the checkpoint answers to. About 11% of respondents said they had identified the arresting party in this way.

In conclusion, there are detainees who to this day do not know the party responsible for arresting them, even after they were released. This can be explained by the fact that the detainee transfer process usually entails moving between different security branches; a person may be arrested by one specific party, spend a short or long period under solitary confinement in that detention facility, and then be transferred to another branch before they know who was responsible for detaining them in the first place. Those detainees make up 29% of the respondents, almost a third; a clear indication that the degree of information available to detainees on exactly who arrested them is scarce.

### » Were you aware of the party that arrested you?

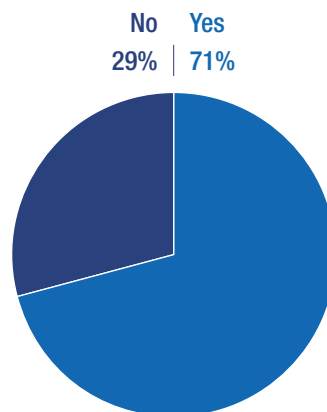


Figure 5 shows the distribution of respondents based on their knowledge of the party that arrested them.

## III. The Main Security Services and Forces Responsible for the Arrests

The data indicates that the largest segment of respondents (43%) was arrested by one of the security branches of the Military Intelligence Service (“military security”). This agency is the most involved in carrying out arrests and committing violations; it is a subsidiary of the Ministry of Defense, and is linked to the National Security Office<sup>(11)</sup>—which is directly linked to the presidential authority. Legally, military security—as its name indicates—refers to issues related to the army and military units, but the entity interferes in all civil, military, economic, political, and cultural issues.<sup>(12)</sup>

There are at least twenty security branches of the military security scattered throughout all major cities and large towns in Syria. They are known by various designations, the most notorious of which are Area Branch 227, Branch 216, and Raid and Incursion Branch 215, described in a report by the Syrian Network for Human Rights as “The Syrian Holocaust”<sup>(13)</sup> and others.<sup>(14)</sup>

Furthermore, the data shows that both branches of the General Intelligence services, known as State Security and Air Force Intelligence, were responsible for the arrest of 19% and 18% of the respondents respectively. As is the case with the Military Security Agency, the State Security and Air Force Intelligence services have an unknown number of security branches in all Syrian provinces, and the two agencies must be differentiated: State Security is directly affiliated with the Presidency of the Republic and coordinates with the National Security Office; Air Force Intelligence answers to the Ministry of Defense,<sup>(15)</sup>

(11) Assi Hallaq and others, ‘Reforming the Police Systems and the Security System in Syria’, The Syrian Law Forum, 2018, at the link: <https://bit.ly/3dkpUIW>, dated 05-05-2020.

(12) Anwar Al-Bunni, Security Services in Syria, Jerun Media Network, 2017, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2YryWzo>, dated 05-05-2020.

(13) The Syrian Network for Human Rights, The Syrian Holocaust, Branch 215, DDN, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2xOZkbQ>, date 05-05-2020.

(14) Anwar al-Bunni, Security Services in Syria, Jerun Media Network, 2017, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2YryWzo>, dated 05-05-2020.

(15) Maan Talaa, ‘The Syrian security services and the necessities of structural and functional change’, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 2016, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2NNIBv0>, Tareeh 03-07-2020.



but their tasks are also linked to the National Security Office.

The fourth security apparatus, also with a major role in carrying out the arrests, is Political Security and its branches in the provinces; they are responsible for arresting 15% of respondents. Unlike the previous security services, Political Security is administratively under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, but is also linked to the National Security Office.<sup>(16)</sup>

### » Please mention the party that arrested you

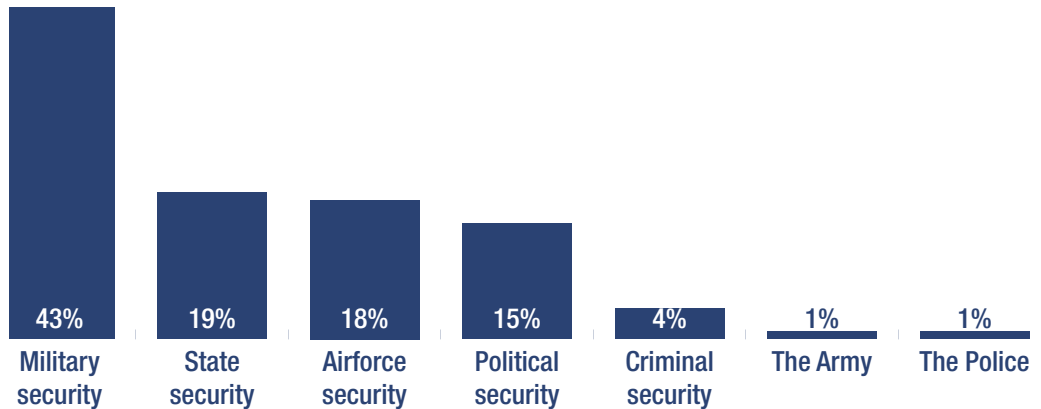


Figure 6 shows the relative distribution of respondents according to their knowledge of the security authority that arrested them.

The four security agencies mentioned are responsible for most mass arrests in Syria. Despite their formal affiliation with the Ministries of Defense or Interior, the powers of those agencies exceed those of the aforementioned ministries due to their direct association with the Syrian president. In addition, the absence of legal mechanisms gives these agencies the ability to commit all kinds of violations with impunity, as their members enjoy immunity that protects them from prosecution against violations committed during their work.<sup>(17)</sup>

(16) Ibid.

(17) The Syrian Human Rights Committee, a new decree protecting security personnel accused of torture from prosecution, 2018, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2WcXUBk>, dated 05-05-2020.



## **-Chapter 2-**

### **Arrested Without Rights: The Security Branches Stage**

- I. Torture to elicit confessions and torture for the sake of torture**
- II. Conditions of detention and a glimpse inside the security branches**
- III. Periods of detention and transfers among the security branches pre-transfer to Adra prison**



Once a detainee reaches the security branch, they are completely stripped of any protection which might be granted to them by Syrian law. Detainees are subjected to a wide range of violations that include torture, ill treatment, sexual abuse, etc. Much has been reported on it by survivors, and their stories have been published by human rights organizations and international newspapers and reports. This chapter includes a presentation of the quantitative indicators of detainees' experience in the security branches.

## I. Torture to Elicit Confessions and Torture for the Sake of Torture

According to Human Rights Watch—and based on more than 200 interviews with former detainees, including women and children—investigators, guards, and officers in Syria's security branches use a wide variety of torture methods, including prolonged beatings. This is often done with tools such as sticks and wires, holding detainees in painful or compromised positions for long periods, sexual assault and humiliation, nail extraction, and mock execution. Human Rights Watch also stated that almost all the detainees that were interviewed said they had been subjected to torture or witnessed the torture of others during their detention.<sup>(18)</sup>

In total, Human Rights Watch has documented more than 20 different methods of torture used in the many Syrian torture basements. The Syrian Network for Human Rights, however, reported that it has documented 72 methods of torture that the Syrian regime continues to practice in its detention facilities and military hospitals.

The main forms of torture are physical, with 39 documented methods. Health negligence and dire conditions of detention comprise 6 documented methods; sexual violence, 8 documented methods; psychological torture and belittlement, 8 documented methods. Torture in military hospitals comprises 9 documented methods, including forced labor and detention in solitary cells.<sup>(19)</sup>

The general perception is that the aforementioned methods of torture are associated with interrogations that aim to elicit confessions from detainees; in fact, the survey shows strong indications that torture is not necessarily related to such interrogations. A large segment of respondents were subjected to torture unrelated to eliciting confessions, but for other purposes.

Ninety-one percent of respondents confirmed they were tortured for the purpose of eliciting a confession, both male and female detainees, though the percentage of males was higher than females—96% to 81%. This overwhelming majority affirms once again that torture is a regime policy, and is widely practiced within the security branches.

### » Were you subjected to torture during imprisonment?

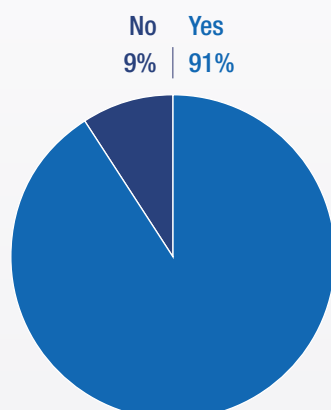


Figure 7 shows the distribution of respondents based on torture during interrogation.

(18) Human Rights Watch, *Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and Enforced Disappearance in Syrian Detention Facilities since March 2011*, 2012, at: <https://bit.ly/2zLUzjV>, 10-05-2020.

(19) The Syrian Network for Human Rights, *documented 72 methods of torture that the Syrian regime continues to carry out in its detention facilities and military hospitals*, 2019, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2KKIdun>, dated 10-05-2020.



If the 91% were a sub-sample, and the 9% of those who somehow survived torture were excluded, the overwhelming majority of those who were subjected to torture during interrogation—about 95% of that sub-sample—were subjected to physical and psychological torture at the same time. Among this segment, 18% were subjected to sexual abuse, including harassment, rape, and genital harm, among both sexes, male and female.

### » What kind of torture were you subjected to?

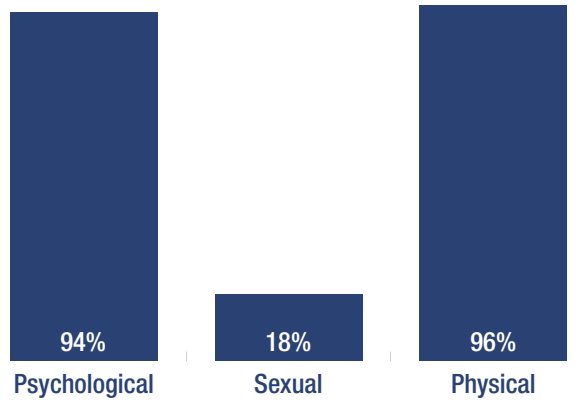


Figure 8 shows distribution of respondents according to the type of torture they were subjected to in the detention facilities.

Will torture<sup>(20)</sup> succeed in forcing detainees to confess to crimes they did not commit or to sign fabricated confessions? The data in this survey indicates that more than 70% of those who were subjected to torture confessed to what they were asked to confess to, even if they knew such confessions might mean a death sentence. In fact, this majority can be interpreted as such: that at some point in the detention, confession becomes the only way for detainees to end their suffering—which may last for weeks, months, or even years unless their jailers are given what they've asked for. Often detainees are not referred to a court at all unless they make such confessions.

### » Were they able to elicit a confession from you during interrogation?

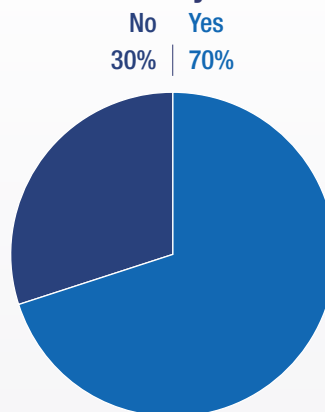


Figure 9 shows the distribution of respondents according to the extent to which confessions were elicited under torture.

Fifty-five percent of respondents were forced to confess to terrorism-related charges, such as weapons possession, fighting the army, financing terrorist groups, and other charges that impose the death penalty. Fifteen percent of respondents were accused of demonstrating against the regime, and 13% were forced to sign blank papers, and do not even know what they ultimately “confessed” to.

(20) Despite Syria ratifying the Convention against Torture in 2004 <https://www.ohchr.org/ar/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>

### » What did you confess to?

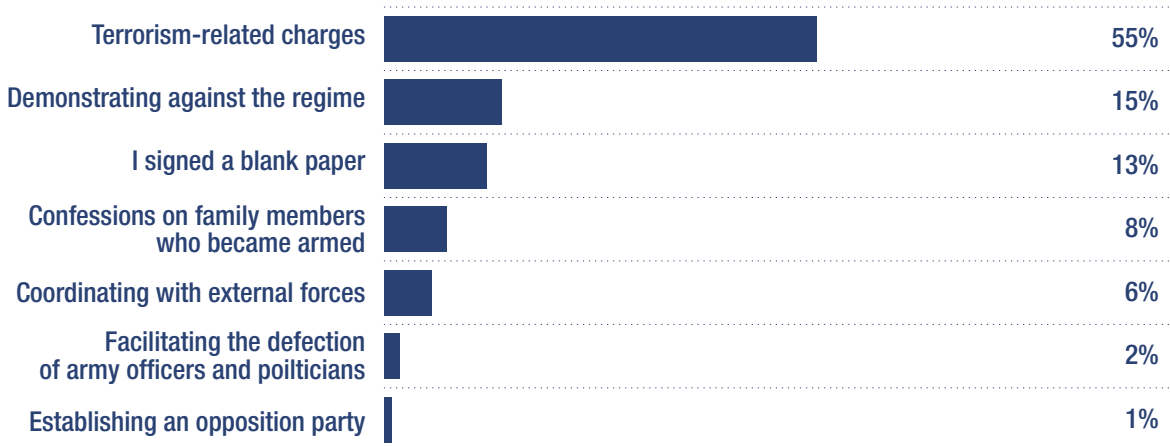


Figure 10 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the nature of confessions they made under torture

About 68% of the detainees reported that they were subjected to torture unrelated to their interrogation. This type of torture is perhaps the most severe, because the detainee in this case is not in a position to resist arrest and is forced to confess to something they didn't do. Confession is the only option for ending the torture. The detainee became a torture tool, and as described in a report by Amnesty International, the aim of the regime is to "break the human"<sup>(21)</sup> in this disturbing process.

### » In your place of detention, were you subjected to torture outside interrogation times?

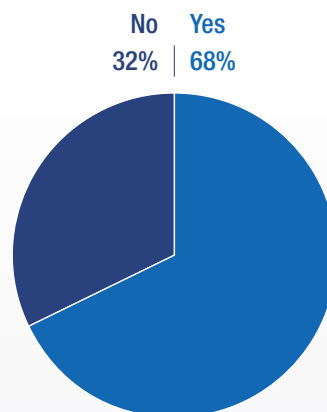


Figure 11 shows the distribution of respondents according to their exposure to torture outside interrogation times.

## II. Conditions of Detention and a Glimpse Inside the Security Branches

The conditions of the detention facilities in which detainees are placed complement the torture operations imposed by the regime; as described by many of the survivors, they are a "living hell." This section describes two features of the conditions of detention: overcrowding and the atrocities detainees witness while in detention.

Overcrowding in security branches means the lack of the natural space a detainee needs to sleep, or even to change their position when sitting or standing.<sup>(22)</sup> The cells are of normal size, but dozens of detainees are crammed into each cell so there is no room for movement. About 56% of respondents confirmed that they were held in cells with more than 30 other people present, while 19% said they were held in cells with between 20 and 30 people. Only 15% said they were held in cells with 10 people or less.

(21) 'It breaks the human': Torture, disease and death in Syria's prisons, Amnesty International, 2016, at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/4508/2016/en/https://bit.ly/2WCZefL>, 09-05-2020.

(22) This violates the most basic rules for the treatment of prisoners, as set out in the Standard Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Mandela Rules) [https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/GA-RESOLUTION/A\\_ebook.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/GA-RESOLUTION/A_ebook.pdf)



### » How many people shared your cell?

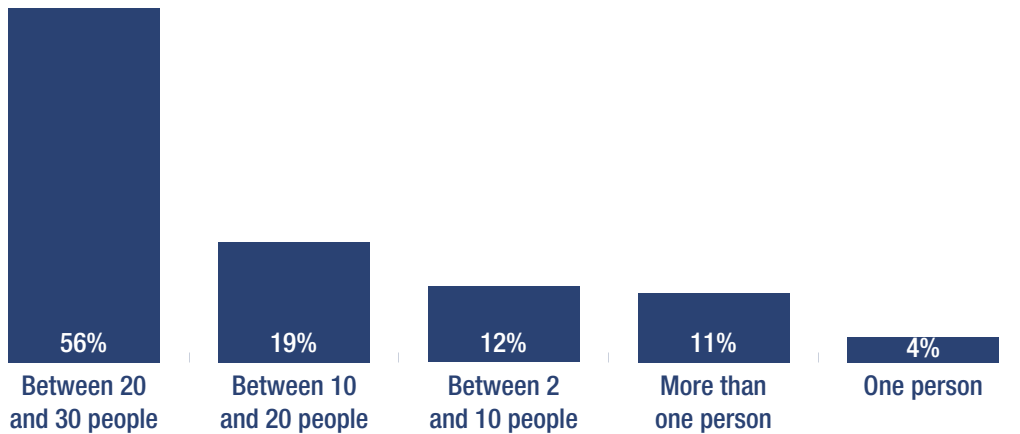


Figure 12 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the number of people they shared a cell with.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (92%) reported that there was not enough space in their cells to sleep. Thus, the overcrowding of cells is an around-the-clock torture method, and is associated with another form of psychological torture: detainees being forced to observe their fellow inmates subjected to and even dying under torture. In fact, 61% of respondents said they had witnessed the death of a fellow inmate under torture.

### » Have you witnessed the death of a fellow detainee dying under torture?

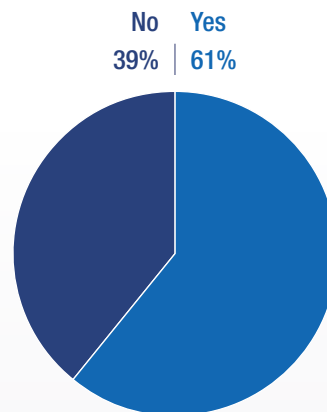


Figure 13 shows the distribution of respondents according to their observations of fellow detainees who died under torture in the security centers.

Ninety-one percent of respondents said that they witnessed their fellow inmates subjected to torture at the security branch in which they were held—by hearing their screams, or by observing the effects of torture on their bodies after they were returned to the cell. The psychological impact of the experience becomes so severe when repeated on a daily basis, that the detainees who weren't subjected to torture still have to go through the horrible experience.

### » Have you witnessed other inmates being tortured?

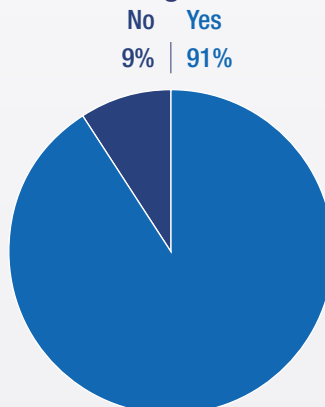


Figure 14 shows the percentage of respondents who witnessed the torture of their fellow inmates in detention.

To make matters worse, the depth of this psychological effect is that about half of the respondents (45%), reported that their children were also held in the security branch, and the majority of these respondents said that these children were also subjected to torture.<sup>(23)</sup>

#### » Have you witnessed children being tortured?

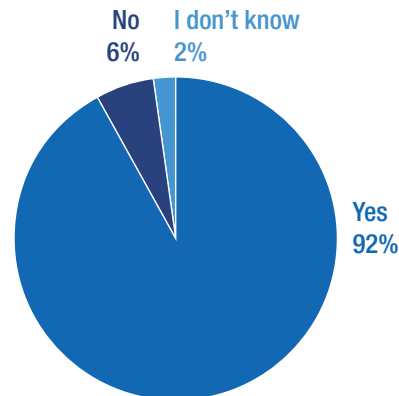


Figure 15 shows the distribution of respondents according to their observations of children who were subjected to torture in detention facilities.

### III. Periods of Detention in Security Branches Pre-Transfer to Adra Prison

The law in Syria today stipulates that the period of detention for those suspected of committing crimes be limited to seven days; however, that period may be extended by the public prosecutor, provided that the total period does not exceed sixty days.<sup>(24)</sup>

The results of this survey however, show a violation of this law. Only 29% of respondents spent less than sixty days (Syrian law) in the security branches before being referred to court and then to prison. 33% of the respondents, the largest segment, spent between two and six months, compared with 20% who remained in detention between six months and a year, and the remaining 18% who spent more than a year before being referred to any court.

#### » Period of stay in security branches before transfer to prison

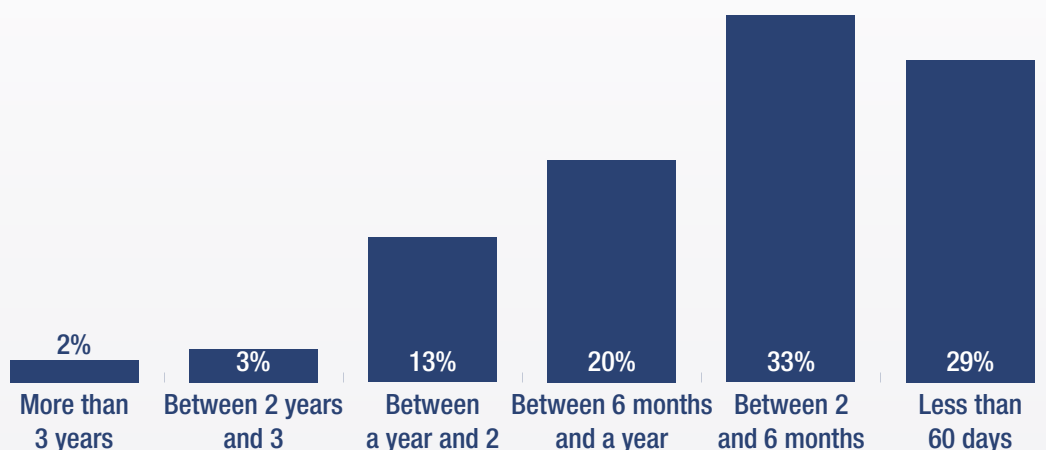


Figure 16 shows the distribution of the respondents according to their period of stay in detention in the security branches before being transferred to prison.

During those long periods of detention inside the security branches' facilities, the detainee rarely remains in the same place, but is often transferred from one security branch to another or from one province to another, and the vast majority

(23) Syria signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993 and its two protocols <https://www.ohchr.org/ar/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

(24) Refer to Legislative Decree 55 of 2011 containing the amendment of the Code of Criminal Procedure issued by Legislative Decree 112 of 1950 on the jurisdiction of the judicial police, website of the Syrian People's Assembly, 2011, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2AcDMGU>, date 09-05-2020 .



of respondents (88%) reported that they were transferred more than once between detention facilities. Only 12% said they were immediately transferred to Adra prison following their stay in a single detention facility.

Thirty-six percent of respondents said they were transferred to another security branch different from the security branch that arrested them. 27% of respondents were transferred among three security branches, while 14% stayed in four different security branches. The remaining 23% stayed in five different security branches before referral to trial.

#### » No. of detention facilities the detainees stayed in

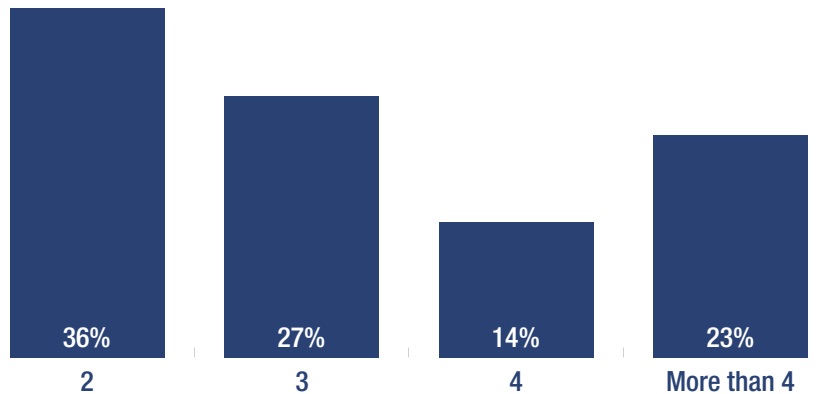


Figure 17 shows the distribution of respondents according to the number of detention facilities (security branches) in which they stayed before being referred to trial.

The mechanism by which the transfers of detainees take place between various security services and their branches in different provinces is still an opaque process to the public, although some Syrian jurists believe that the matter is related to power overlaps and the lack of coordination between the security services. What can be ascertained is that in most cases of transfer, the detainee is newly interrogated in every branch he or she is transferred to, charged again with new/additional charges, and subjected to various methods of torture.



## **-Chapter 3-**

### **Adra Prison**

- I. Attacks and Violations in Prison**
- II. Prison Sexuality**
- III. Prison Conditions and Services**



The Damascus Central Prison, better known as Adra Prison, is located in the industrial suburb of Adra, east of Damascus, and is one of the largest and most notorious prisons in Syria. The prison has sections for men and women, totaling 14 wards. The detainees are distributed according to the types of crimes they are accused of committing, with a capacity to hold 2500 female and male inmates.<sup>(25)</sup>

However, this information is documented only on paper; the prison's reality is totally different from the information published about it. In 2014, the number of detainees reached about 7,000.

There is a wing for political detainees, and it is managed by security branches under the supervision of the Political Security Division, and the Civil Prison Administration has no say in what goes on inside this particular wing.<sup>(26)</sup>

The following presents an array of experiences related by former detainees (respondents)—how they were subjected to and witnessed various methods of abuse and torture.

## I. Attacks and Violations in Prison

From the moment they arrive in Adra Prison, a large segment of detainees are subjected to abuse of various kinds. In this context, more than 36% of respondents stated that they were subjected to abuse by prison officials at the moment they arrived at the prison. Sixty-four percent said they were not subjected to such abuse. Interestingly, the number of female detainees subjected to abuse at the moment of their arrival in prison was higher than the number of males, reaching approximately 45% (the number of males did not exceed 32%).

### » When you arrived to the prison, were you assaulted by prison staff?

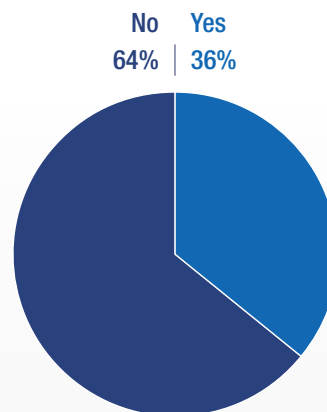


Figure 18 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the extent of their abuse the moment they arrive at Adra prison.

Ninety-six percent of respondents said they were subjected to verbal abuse at the moment they arrived in the prison. Beatings comprised 30%, 5% were molested, and 3% were forced to completely undress and stand in the nude.

(25) With justice, Adra prison. The point of contact for the security branches in Syria, 2020, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2ydod0Z> Date 10-05-2020

(26) Ibid.



### » What were those abuses?

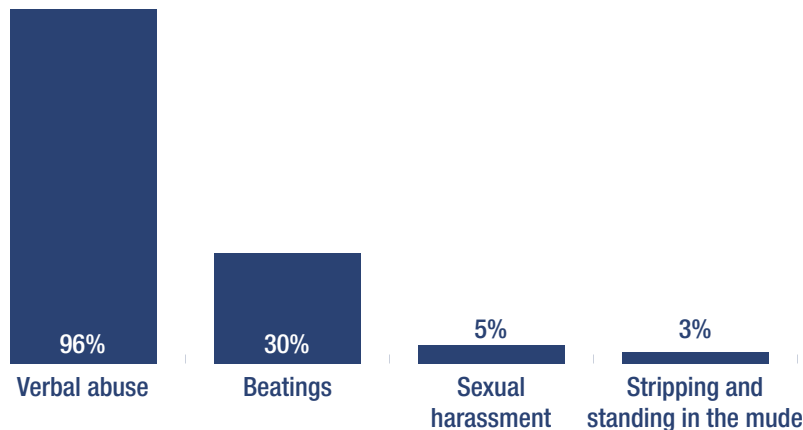


Figure 19 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the type of abuse they were subjected to.

To further elaborate on the first moments of arriving at the prison, the respondents were asked: Did the prison officials read you a list of your rights and duties inside the prison? Eighty-nine percent of them reported that this list was not read out to them, compared with only 11% who were read a list of their rights.

### » Did the prison officials read you a list of your rights and duties inside the prison?

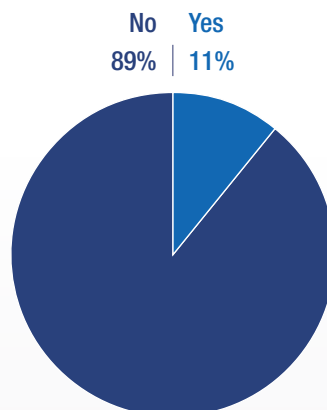


Figure 20 shows the distribution of the respondents according to whether or not they were read their list of rights in prison.

The data presented above indicates the nature of the relationship prison officials build with new arrivals. Although Adra is a civilian prison, it is assumed that everyone detained there has been referred to the prison after completing interrogation by the security services, and are awaiting their sentence. However, this is not the case for everyone.

It was found that 27% of the former detainees surveyed were attacked in prison. Although the number of those who suffered attacks inside the prison decreased compared with those who were attacked in the security branches, the numbers still remain very high—considering that the prison is not a place for interrogation, torture, and confessions.

Females were subjected to more attacks; 35%, compared with 23% for males. There is no clear explanation for the high number of abused females, but based on results that will be presented later in this report, it may be due to factors related to the sexual exploitation of women by prison officials. 46% of the respondents reported sexual activities run by prison officials.

### » Were you assaulted in prison?

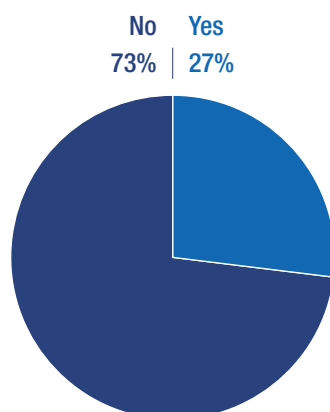


Figure 21 shows the distribution of the respondents based on whether they were attacked in prison or not.

To probe further into the nature of these attacks, respondents were asked to clarify the nature or type of abuse practiced against them. It was found that 84% were subjected to verbal abuse, compared to 76% subjected to physical assault and 7% subjected to sexual assault.

### » Please specify the type of abuse

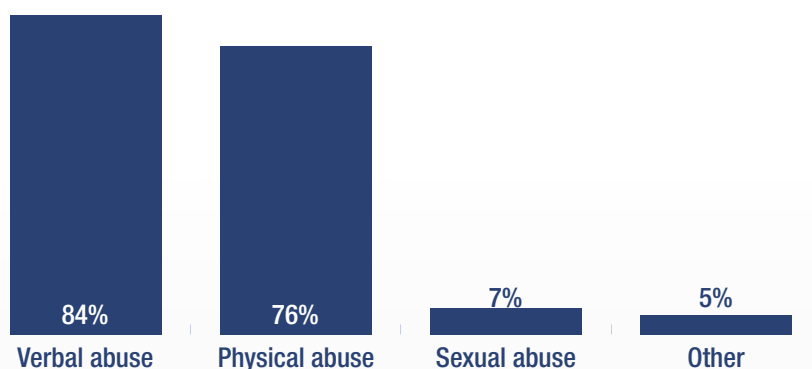


Figure 22 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the nature/type of abuse they were subjected to inside the prison.

The previous figures and ratios indicate that some survivors were exposed to more than one type of abuse while detained in the prison. A somewhat low number of respondents spoke of being sexually assaulted inside the prison.

The majority of those responsible for these attacks were the prison officers/staff and senior prison officials, as affirmed by 53% of respondents. 33% said that the persons responsible for their attacks were various elements working inside the prison, while 13% attributed their attacks to senior prison officials.

Aside from prison staff, 27% of the respondents said that some attacks were carried out by other inmates, indicating a great deal of chaos in the prisons. In addition, prison administration turns a blind eye to some inmates who carry out attacks against other inmates.



### » Who committed the abuse?

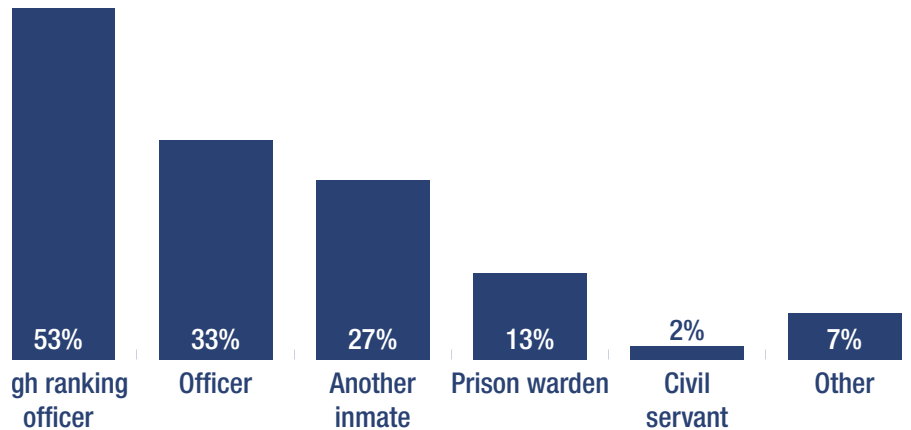


Figure 23 shows the distribution of the respondents based on who carried out an assault against them.

As to the frequency of these attacks: 58% of the respondents who suffered attacks inside the prison stated that they were subjected to such attacks more than once; 13% said they were attacked more than five times. Forty-two percent said they were attacked only once. This frequency of attacks reflects a systemic policy within the prison against specific inmates, rather than isolated incidents. This may relate to the nature of the charges against these inmates, which are mostly charges related to terrorism and attempting to overthrow the regime.

### » How many times were you assaulted during your stay?

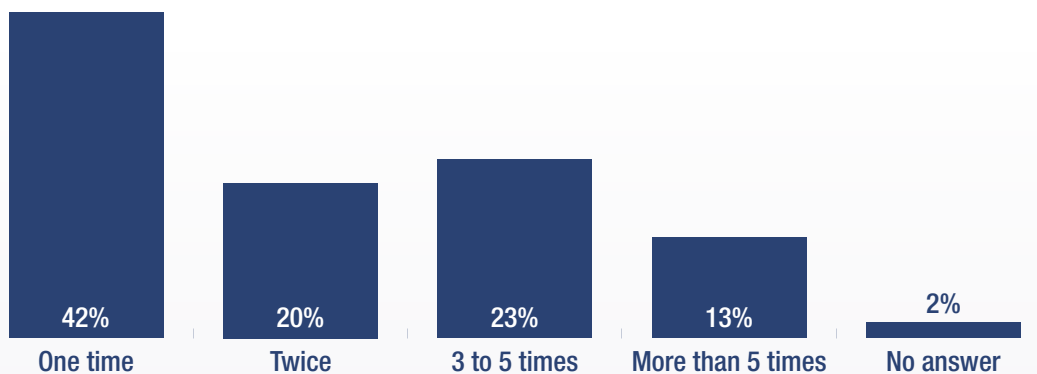


Figure 24 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the number of times they were assaulted.

To gain clarity on practices inside the prison, the former detainees were asked two questions about whether there were assaults against other inmates, and the types of these assaults.

Sixty percent of the respondents witnessed assaults against other inmates, while 40% did not witness such assaults. In terms of the type of assaults carried out against other inmates, 93% of respondents said it was primarily physical assault, followed by verbal assault at 78% reported, and 8% reported witnessing sexual assault. Ten percent were forced to perform certain services for some elements or officers at the prison, while 3% were imprisoned in solitary confinement.

### » What was the type of abuse?

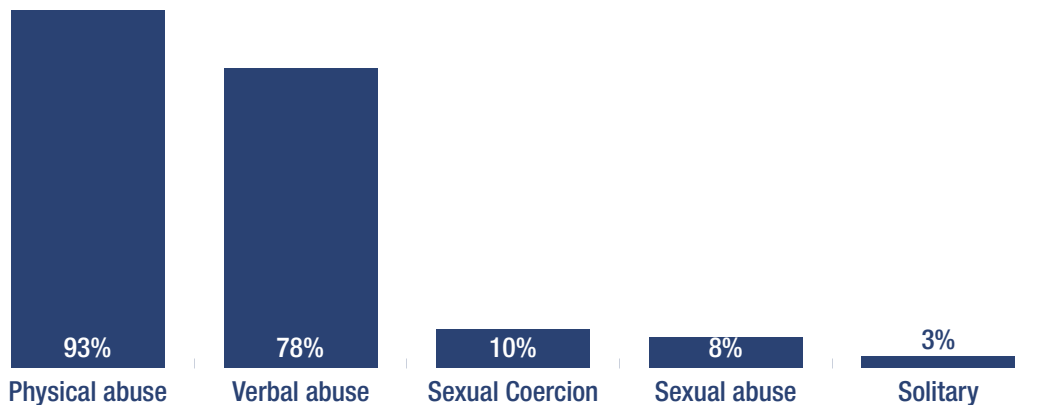


Figure 25 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the type of abuse they witnessed being practiced against other inmates.

## II. Prison Sexuality

Sexual assaults against the respondents of this survey also occurred—according to the observations of the survivors—against other inmates inside the prison. This necessitated a separate focus on these aspects.

Twenty-eight percent of the respondents confirmed that there were sexual activities managed by prison officials, compared to 25% who answered that there were no such activities; the remaining 47% said they did not know. By linking these results with the gender variable, it is clear that the sexual activities victimizing females were higher, as they were more open about speaking of such activities at 46% compared to only 18% of males.

### » Were there any sexual practices run by the prison officials?

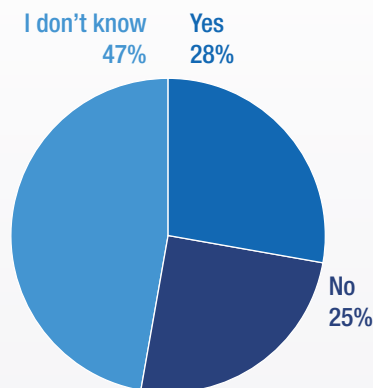


Figure 26 shows the distribution of the respondents according to their perceptions of sexual activities run by prison officials.

The survivors were asked whether they were personally coerced, or knew other inmates who were coerced, to engage in sexual practices for the benefit of those in prison or outside the prison. Eleven percent said they were personally coerced or knew someone who was coerced into engaging in sexual practices. Although the percentage is not significant—due to Syrian cultural sensitivity to delve into such issues—it indicates that such activities do, in fact, take place to a certain degree within the prison. By linking these results with the gender variable, these types of activities were requested more from females (24%) than from males (4%).

To conclude, sexual activities take place in an organized and consistent manner within the prison, with females as the primary target for such activities.



### » Were you or an inmate coerced into performing a sexual activity?

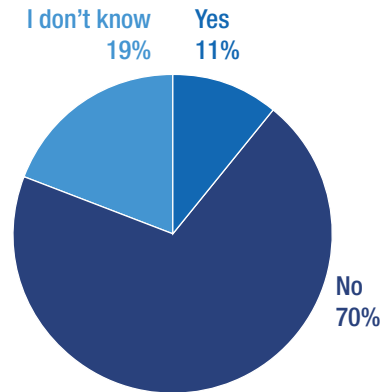


Figure 27 shows the distribution of the respondents according to whether they were personally coerced, or knew others who were coerced into performing sexual practices.

Some respondents confirmed the existence of a room designated for sexual activities, under the direct management of a police officer. As for the nature of these sexual activities, answers varied between those who confirmed heterosexual activities and others who confirmed homosexual activities; still others confirmed the use of children in such practices.

Eighty-eight percent of the respondents confirmed that there were children under the age of eighteen in prison; only 7% said they didn't, and 5% said they weren't sure. Among those respondents confirming the presence of minors, 18% said they witnessed children under 18 years of age subjected to sexual exploitation.

### » Were there any children under 18 in the prison?

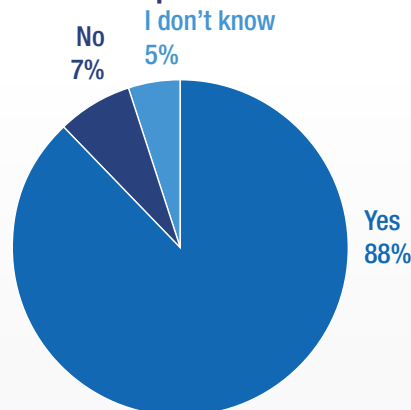


Figure 28 shows the distribution of the respondents according to their knowledge of the presence of children in the prison.

### » According to your knowledge, were the children being sexually exploited?

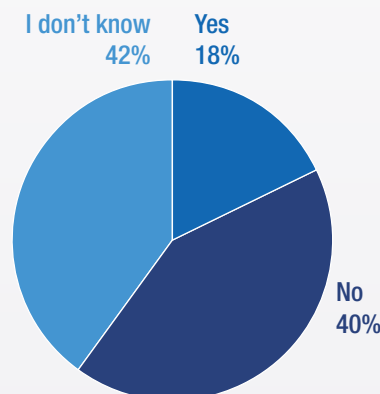


Figure 29 shows the distribution of the respondents according to their knowledge of children being sexually exploited in the prison.

One respondent said that a 9-year-old girl was sexually assaulted to elicit a confession from her mother. Another reported that prison personnel used children as “servants,” and sexually abused them at the same time. One said that children were sexually exploited by some of the adult prison inmates, with the consent of the police in exchange for money.

### III. Prison Conditions and Services

Respondents' answers differed in their description of the services and conditions of Adra prison. The following is a presentation of the most significant of these perceptions:

**Overcrowding.** The majority of respondents (43%) reported that each ward/cell held more than twice the room's capacity to hold prisoners. Thirty-two percent said the number was twice the room's capacity to hold prisoners. Only 5% reported being in wards/cells where the actual number of inmates held was less than the room's capacity.

#### » How many people were held per ward?

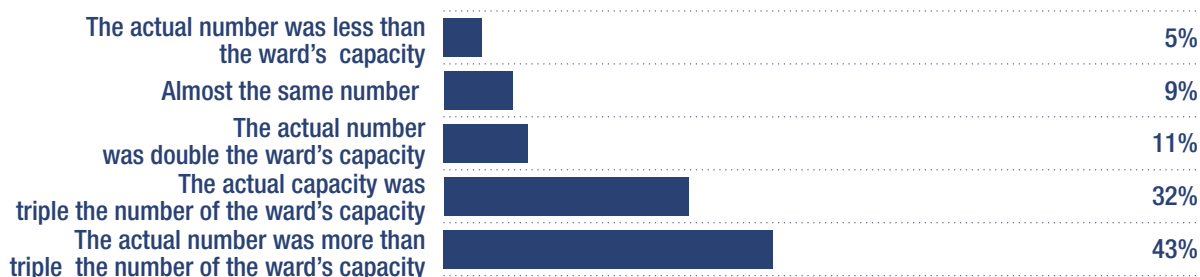


Figure 30 shows the distribution of respondents according to their answers about the number of prisoners in one ward/cell.

**Availability of sleeping spaces.** Seventy-seven percent of respondents said they did not have a cot, compared to only 23% who said they did.

#### » Did you have your own cot to sleep in?

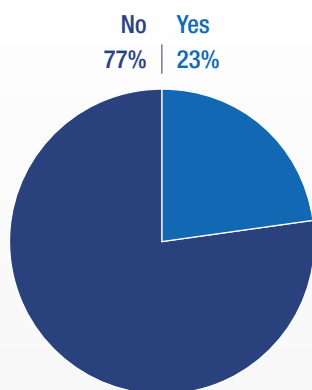


Figure 31 shows the distribution of respondents according to their answers about having a cot.

**Availability of Shower Facilities.** All respondents said they were allowed to shower at least once a week; some were allowed up to ten showers per week.

#### » How many times were you allowed to take a shower per week?

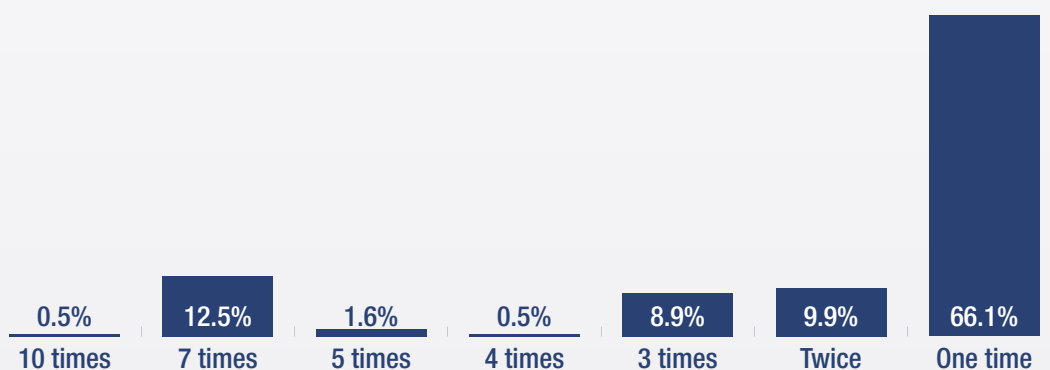


Figure 32 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the number of showers they're allowed to take per week.



**Food Quality.** Fifty-eight percent of respondents said the quality of the food served to them in prison was bad; only 6% said it was good, and the remaining 37% said it was acceptable.

» **How was the food quality in the prison?**

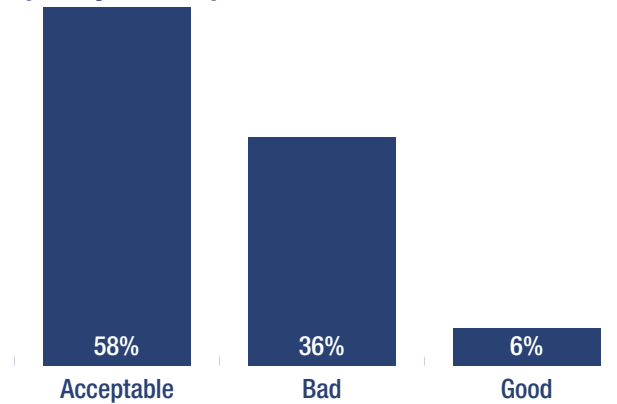


Figure 33 shows the distribution of respondents based on their evaluation of the quality of food in prison.

**Laundry Facilities.** Fifty percent of respondents said that there were machines for washing clothes in the prison, while 50% said there were none.

» **Were there washing machines in the facility?**

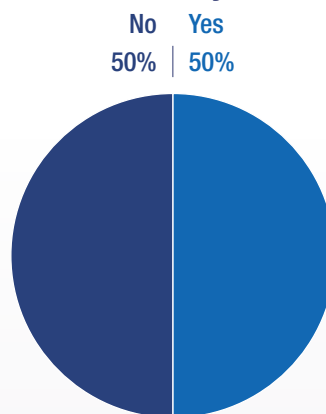


Figure 34 shows the distribution of respondents based on their knowledge of the availability of washing machines in Adra prison.

**Public Phone Services.** Ninety-three percent of respondents said a public phone service was available, compared to 7% who said it was not.

» **Was there a public payphone available to you in the facility?**

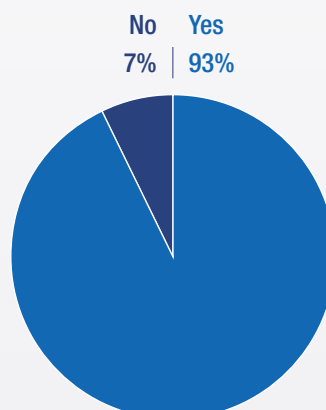


Figure 35 shows the distribution of respondents based on their knowledge of the availability of a public phone.



**Medical Services.** About 88% of respondents said there was a medical clinic inside the prison. However, when asked about the quality of the services in this clinic, 65% of respondents rated it as bad, 6% said it was good, and the remaining 29% evaluated the service as acceptable.

#### » How was the medical service in the facility?

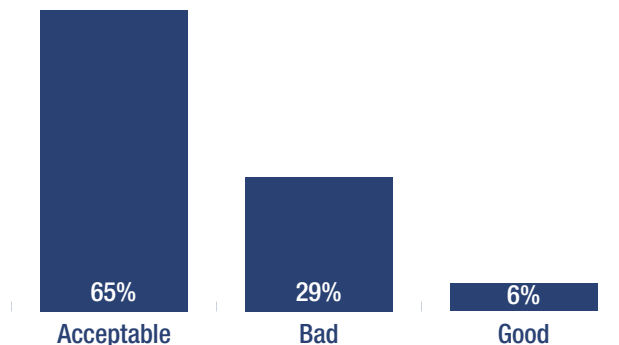


Figure 36 shows the distribution of respondents according to their perceptions on the quality of medical services provided in prison.

**Visiting Privileges.** Ninety-three percent of respondents were permitted visitors from outside, but it was not the case for 7% of them.

#### » Were visits permitted in the facility?

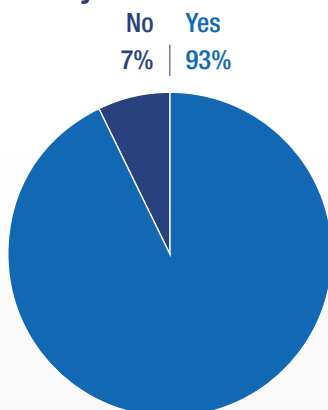


Figure 37 shows the distribution of respondents based on their answers about permission for visits.

The variation in answers between respondents reflects a disparity between different sections of Adra prison and the different segments of detainees. Generally, the conditions in Adra prison—despite the violations occurring there—are better than the conditions in the security branches. At least the detainees in the prison are not deprived of food, sleep, or using the bathroom. This is what makes Adra prison, and other central prisons, safe for many detainees. On the other hand, detainee conditions inside Adra prison are directly influenced by how much money they have, as many services, goods, and privileges can be purchased inside the prison.<sup>(27)</sup>

(27) Review the Mandela Rules referred to in footnote 21

**-Chapter 4-**  
**The Trial Process**

- I. Types of courts and detainees distributed to them**
- II. Conditions of Trials**
- III. Duration of detention, imprisonment, and beyond**

The judicial system of the regime—in its various specializations, its exceptional courts,<sup>(28)</sup> and the legislations and legal texts that are in force—constitutes a system of arrest and intimidation that the regime uses to strengthen its domination of Syrian society, and the crushing of its opponents. These judicial institutions play a major role in covering the crimes and violations committed by the security branches against detainees. In a study published by the Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research entitled “Terrorism of the Courts,” lawyer Anwar Al-Bunni affirms that

“Law and courts in Syria are not tools for achieving justice in society, but for terrorizing and crushing society, and suppressing any dissenting voice. This is confirmed by changing the judiciary law, and adapting the Supreme Judicial Council, and establishing exceptional courts since the Baath party came to power.”<sup>(29)</sup>

This section reviews quantitative indicators on how the respondents were tried, the types of courts and charges they were subjected to, details on the conditions of the trials, and violations committed against the detainees during that period.

## I. Types of Courts and Detainees Distributed to Them

Detainees often reach the court after a confession has been elicited from them under torture, in which they state that they have committed serious crimes. As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this report, approximately 64% of the 200 respondents said that they confessed to crimes they did not commit as a result of torture—because confessing is often the only way to escape interrogation and torture, and also a way to leave the security branch for a civilian prison where treatment is not as brutal. Fifty-five percent of the respondents said they confessed to committing or supporting terrorist acts; 15% confessed to demonstrating against the regime, and some were forced to sign blank papers which would be filled in with charges later by the investigators (often without letting the detainee know what charges had been filled in).

Referring a detainee to Adra prison coincides with the referral of his dossier to court. But a small percentage of detainees in Adra prison (12%) are in the process of moving from one detention center to another, merely passing through Adra; this often happens with the transfer from the province in which the detainee was arrested to one of the security branches in Damascus. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents said they had already stood trial when they were transferred to Adra.

### » Did you stand trial before imprisonment?

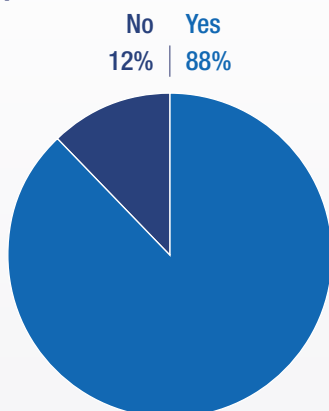


Figure 38 shows the distribution of the respondents who stood trial and those who did not.

The data also shows that there are four types of courts to which detainees have been referred. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents who stood trial before incarceration at Adra were referred to the Terrorism Cases Court in Damascus, followed by 34% who were referred to the civil courts, and the remaining 9% who were referred to Military Justice in both military and field courts. No one knows for sure on what basis the detainees are distributed among the various courts, given the overlap of jurisdictions.

(28) Jerun - Exceptional Courts in Syria <https://geiroon.net/archives/71699>

(29) Anwar Al-Bunni, Terrorism of the Courts in Syria, Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research, 2018, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2K0qv9t>, last seen 25-25-2020.

### » Please name the type of court you were referred to

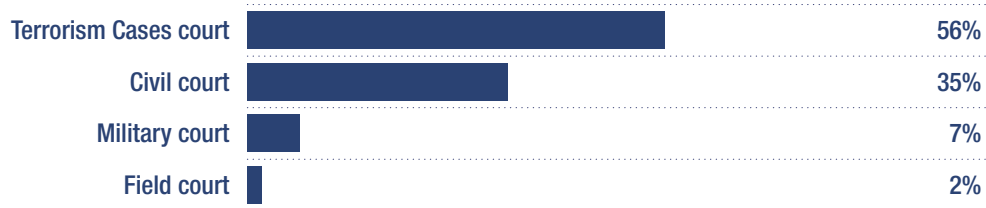


Figure 39 shows the distribution of the respondents referred to trial according to the type of court they were referred to.

Data confirms a hypothesis that the majority of those arrested in connection with activities opposed to the regime after 2012 have been referred to the Terrorism Cases Court in Damascus, in line with the narrative of the Syrian regime in describing all who oppose it as “terrorists.”

This court was established in the beginning of 2012, after the regime’s abolition of the notorious State Security court. The Terrorism Cases Court is an exceptional court, established by the regime and exempt from the restrictions of normal court procedures. Article 7 of the Terrorism Cases Court law states that the court is not bound by roles and procedures stipulated in other legislation covering prosecution and trial.<sup>(30)</sup>

Before the Terrorism Cases Court was established, those referred to regular courts or civil courts—who were arrested or referred in absentia during 2011 or early 2012—faced charges related to supporting and committing terrorist acts, and make up 79% of the respondents.

This result appears more clearly when detailing the charges against the respondents, and noting that 88% of the respondents who were referred to court faced multiple charges simultaneously. The vast majority of respondents (78%) faced terrorism-related charges—either committing terrorist acts, or supporting terrorist groups. Only 10% of detainees were charged with non-terrorism criminal charges and referred to court.

### » What were the charges filed against you?

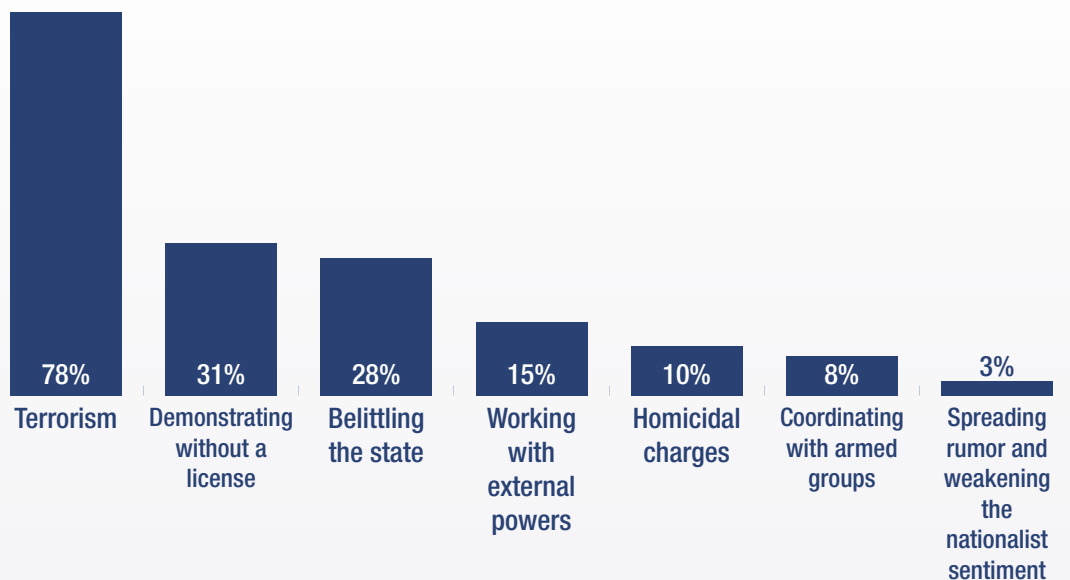


Figure 40 shows the distribution of respondents referred to court based on the charges brought against them.

A research paper for The Syrian Center for Legal Studies stated that the number of Syrians referred to the Terrorism Cases Court until May of 2015 amounted to about 100,000 men and women—half of them detained and the other half arrested in absentia. A further 40,000 detainees and fugitives were referred to the military courts.<sup>(31)</sup> Since May of 2015, those numbers have most probably increased, but these were the last credible figures, based on data presented by a network of Syrian lawyers. At present, it is almost impossible to know the exact numbers.

(30) “The Last Series of Exceptional Courts in Syria,” Syrian Legal Forum, 2018, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2KkSTje>, last seen 20-04-2020.

(31) Ibid.

## II. Conditions of Trials

When asked about the conditions during their trial, 95% of the respondents said they were not given all their rights stipulated in the constitution and Syrian laws during the trial. This overwhelming percentage reflects the type of relationship between the detainees and the courts they appeared before.

### » Were you given your full rights during trial?

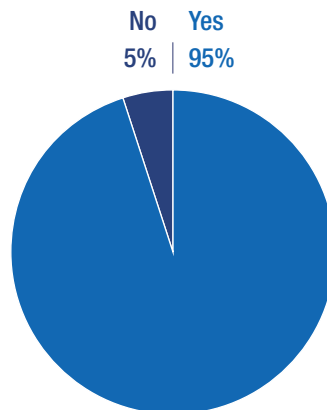


Figure 41 shows the percentage of respondents who said that they were not given their full rights during the trial.

For a more detailed understanding of this facet, the questionnaire listed several options that included basic defendant rights during trials and asked respondents to determine which rights they were deprived of.

A vast majority of the respondents (72%) indicated they were not allowed to speak and defend themselves during trial. Because most of these respondents confess to crimes they did not commit under torture in the security branches, denying them the right to self-defense before the judge becomes a measure aimed at confirming those confessions, denying the detainee the opportunity to prove themselves innocent and retract those confessions.

Sixty-nine percent of the respondents said they were not allowed to see the list of charges against them. Fifty-four percent said they did not benefit from the right to use notice periods before sentencing to express defenses; in this context, many respondents asserted that trial sessions did not last for more than minutes, especially for those referred to the Terrorism Cases Court and the Military Court.

Finally, it appears that the right to a lawyer and the right to be informed of the date of the trial were the minimum rights provided to the respondents, as only a quarter said they were deprived of those rights.

### » What were the rights granted to you during trial?

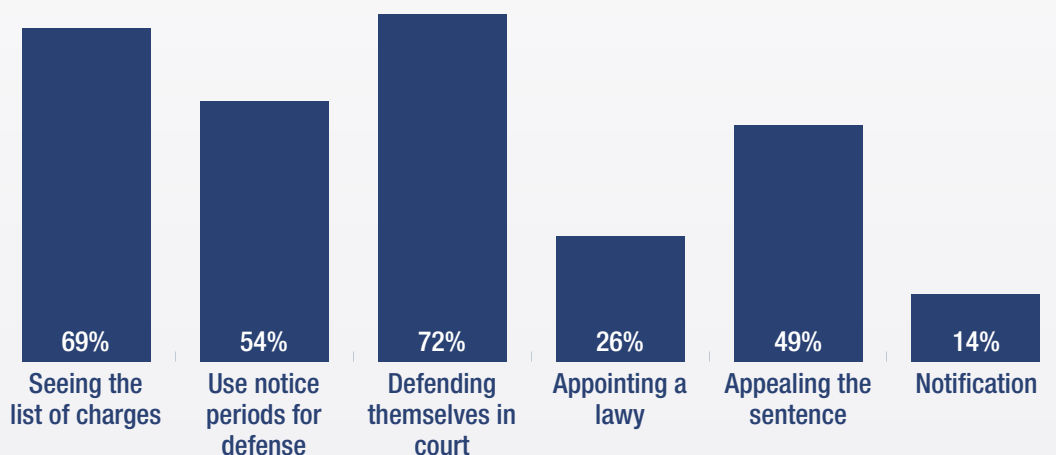


Figure 42 shows the figures for respondents referred to court and the rights they were given during trial.



Even with a few rights given to most of the detainees, the data shows them to be deficient.

One surviving detainee said, “In theory, a legal trial takes place, but in practice the judge has already made his/her ruling, and the lawyer has no leverage. In addition, false witnesses and confessions made by the branch are planted during the trial, as well as confessions that were elicited from the detainee under torture are provided to the trial.”

### III. Duration of Detention, Imprisonment, and Beyond

The results of the investigation show that more than a quarter of the respondents were detained and imprisoned for more than three years; 39% of respondents were imprisoned for a period of 1-3 years, and 34% were held for a year or less.

#### » What was the duration of your sentence?

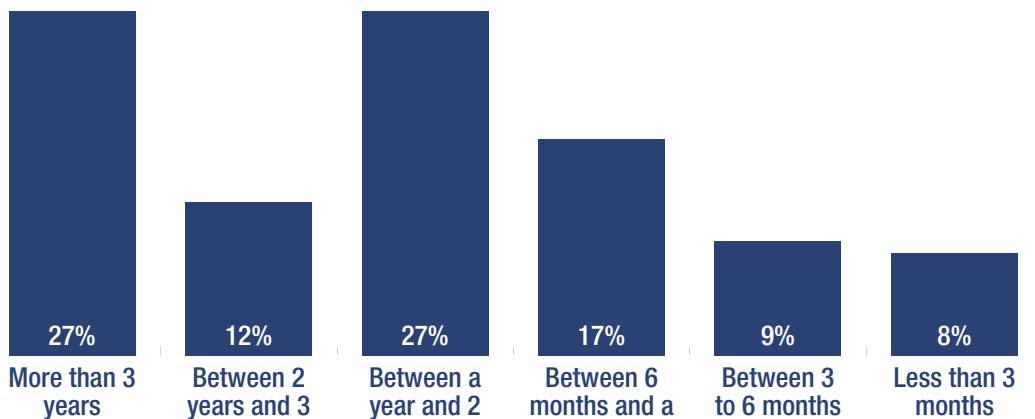


Figure 44 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the duration of their imprisonment from the moment of their arrest.

The above figure shows the length of time that the respondents spent in detention, from the moment of their arrest until the moment they left Adra prison. Upon their release from Adra, 20% of the respondents were taken to other places of detention; 80% were genuinely released.

Ninety-three percent of the respondents confirmed that the period they spent in detention had a severe impact on them—mostly psychological, as confirmed by 96% of the respondents; 73% reported physical effects.

Sixty-seven percent of the respondents said they suffered from economic ramifications, often due to unemployment while in prison, especially for those detained for long periods. Detention can be economically catastrophic for some, especially when adding in-prison expenses throughout the detention period.

Sixty-five percent of the respondents mentioned social ramifications, perhaps due to the fact that social and community connections are disrupted. Syrian society tends to stigmatize those who come out of detention; relatives and friends avoid communicating with the survivors, fearing coming under the regime’s radar themselves. However, the social impact may extend to more severe degrees—especially for women detainees, many of whom face society’s rejection after being released, and may lose their husbands and families as a result of their detention.

### » Prison impact?

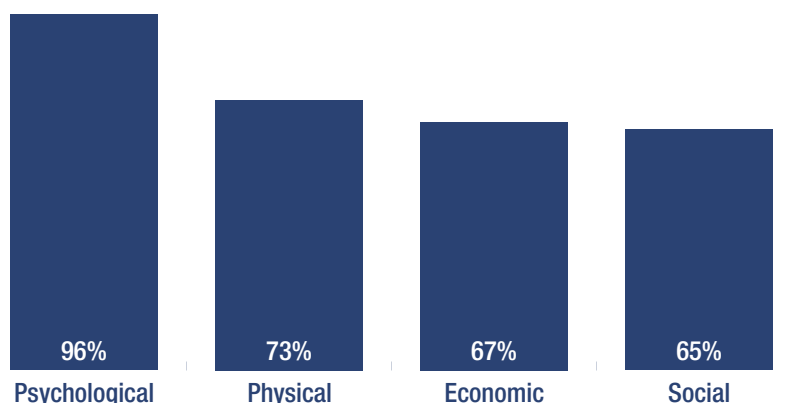


Figure 45 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the severity of imprisonment impact.

Survey data indicates these ramifications hindered the majority of the respondents (63%) from returning to their normal lives (1 or 2 on a 1-5 scale); 34% indicated light to moderate hindrance (3 or 4 on the scale); 10% said they were not hindered at all.

### » On a scale from 1-5, how much did the impact of prison hinder you from returning to normal life?

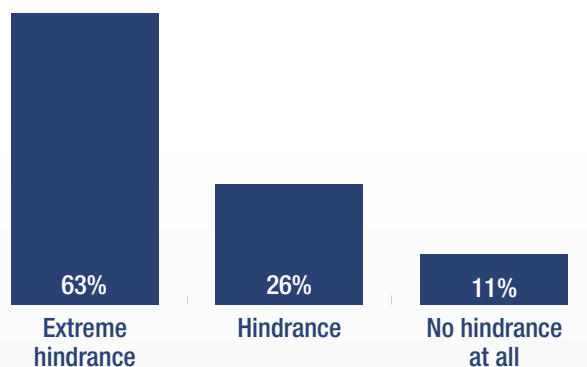


Figure 46 shows the distribution of the respondents according to the degree of their ability to return to normal life after their release.

Following their release, detainees don't seem to have had any support to compensate for what they've endured in prison. Among the respondents, the majority of them said they did not receive any financial, medical, social, or other support. About 61% faced the utmost difficulties of survival after being released from the detention facility, changes that affected their lives. Here females were more fortunate than the males, with 74% of males receiving little to no support compared with 40% of females who didn't receive support.





## » Did you receive any support after your release from prison?

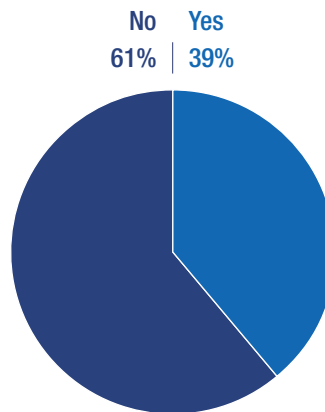


Figure 47 shows the percentage of respondents who did not receive any support after their release from detention.

Even if the remaining figures for those who received any form of support are treated as a sub-sample, the data shows that most of the support to these detainees came from their immediate families or close social circles; there was a clear absence of social, medical, and human rights organizations and institutions concerned with detainees' affairs. Only 14% of those who received support after their release said that the support was provided by a humanitarian organization or charity; slightly more than 18% said they received support from a medical institution or practitioner. Families of detainees seem to have been the largest support system for them during recovery, at a rate of 87%.

## » Who/what supported you after your release?

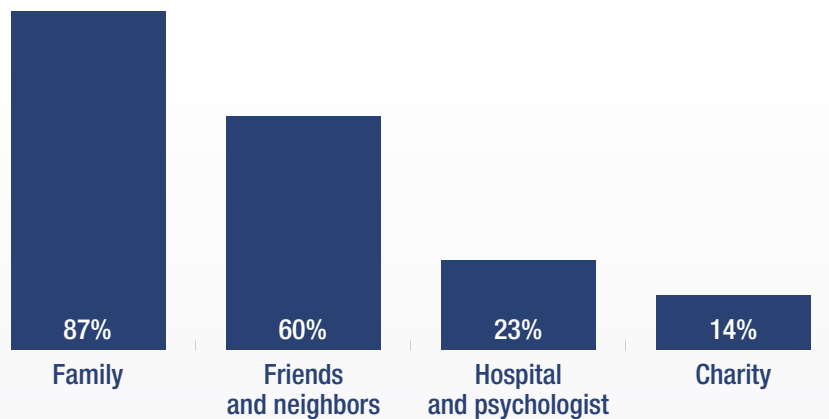


Figure 48 shows the support system of respondents after release from detention.



## Summary

This survey attempted to address a very complex and highly detailed issue in its legal, humanitarian, and political facets, expanding to more specialized studies of each. The final report presents the most relevant results gathered from the interviews of the survivors:

The largest number of detention cases, more than a third, occurred at regime checkpoints<sup>(32)</sup> in all areas of Syria shortly after the anti-regime protests broke out in 2011. Those checkpoints became traps for tens of thousands of regime opponents, or those suspected of being opponents.

Initial detentions at security branches are rarely carried out without insults or beatings—even physical torture in many cases—according to more than three-quarters of the respondents. This highlights the nature of the relationship between the detainee and those carrying out the arrests. The person is often arrested without charge and, charged or not, their civil rights are violated from the moment of arrest.

In only 25% of detention cases did the arresting authority identify themselves; for the remaining 75%, the detainee had no knowledge or means of identifying the arresting force, or they learned indirectly by personally identifying a member of the security force or obtaining information from other detainees at the security branch or detention facility.

The Military Security apparatus and its provincial branches seem to have carried out the largest number of arrests. The largest segment of respondents who were able to identify their arresting party said they were arrested by Military Security—nearly twice the number of those who were arrested by other agencies, such as State Security or Air Force Intelligence.

The results of this study confirm that torture inside the security branches is a systemic policy.<sup>(33)</sup> Four out of every five respondents (80%) in this survey confirmed that they were tortured in order to elicit confessions while detained in the security branches, while three out of five (67%) said they were tortured for reasons not related to the investigation. As a result, about three-quarters of respondents confessed to crimes they did not commit.

The period of detention inside the security branches exceeded that allowed by Syrian law (60 days) in about three-quarters of the respondents' cases. Some detainees remained within the security branch system for periods of up to three years. In most cases, these periods involved transfers between security branches; with each transfer, the detainee was re-interrogated and subjected again to various methods of torture.

When a detainee arrives at Adra prison after months or years spent in the security branch system, the worst stage of his detention has passed. But that does not mean that prison conditions in Adra are not severe. More than a third of the respondents stated that they were subjected to physical attacks or psychological bullying by prison officials from the first moment they arrived at Adra. The survey further specified the details of daily life in the overcrowded prison, where more than three-quarters of the respondents said they stayed in cells housing twice or more the number of people the cell was designed to hold. Less than a quarter of the respondents said they had their own sleeping spaces. This affects various factors of life in prison, including food, hygiene, medical services, and others.

Transfer to Adra prison often coincides with referring the detainee to trial, but this does not always happen. Most detainees are not referred to regular courts; more than half of the respondents said they were transferred to the Terrorism Cases Court, while the rest were referred to Civil or Military courts—some even to field courts. The legal criteria for referral is vague; the aforementioned courts have overlapping jurisdictions.

The vast majority of respondents faced terrorism-related charges (committing terrorist acts or supporting terrorists); there was no significant variation in figures between those referred to civil courts and those referred to the Terrorism Cases Court.

Almost all respondents who were referred to court said they were not given all their rights according to Syrian law. About three-quarters were not allowed to speak and defend themselves during their trials; in most cases this resulted in the court upholding confessions that were elicited from them under torture. About half of the respondents were not given time to

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(32) Checkpoints indirectly led to depriving citizens of access to services, especially medical and educational, due to fear of arrest; this matter had a greater impact on women

(33) There is a systemic policy followed in detention by the regime based on several factors, for example (different geographical regions to which detainees belong - different detention dates - different places of detention - different gender - different age groups ...)





gather evidence of their innocence, nor were they given the right to appeal an unfair sentence.

The policies of arbitrary detention practiced by the security services of the Syrian regime—and legally covered by its judicial institutions on a large scale since the anti-regime protests broke out in March of 2011—are one of the most significant methods the regime uses to establish its control over Syrians by spreading terror, breaking their will, and robbing them of their dignity. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians are victims of these policies, which have severe long-term ramifications and deprive survivors of a return to their normal lives.

The suffering of those in detention does not end with their release. Most survivors find themselves alone in facing their post-detention lives from all angles: social, economic, physical, and psychological. The survey data revealed that there is a large gap in the response of detainee rights-and-affairs organizations. Most respondents did not receive any support after their release, and those who said they did received their support only from close family members and social circles.

## Recommendations:

1. Repeal all laws that contravene human rights established by international conventions.
2. Cancel exceptional courts and reduce the role of the military courts to ensure that civilians are not tried before non-civilian courts. Military courts must also become subsidiary to the Judicial system (law courts).
3. Adopt new prison law, in line with minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners.
4. Restrict authorization to arrest persons to the judiciary, and prevent arrest by the security services except by order of the judicial authority. Abolish any immunity bestowed upon security officers.
5. Legislate non-custodial penalties.
6. Legislate and implement monitoring of detention centers.
7. Adopt a transitional justice law that ensures violators are held accountable.
8. Reform and rehabilitate detention facilities to ensure that the necessary conditions for the treatment of prisoners are met, including monitoring of overcrowding, health conditions, and other prisoner rights.
9. Reform the administrative system of prisons, introducing modern methods of management.
10. Remove from office or position all persons involved in detention facility violations.
11. Retrain cadres, especially the police, and all those responsible for dealing directly with prisoners; this retraining should include the promotion of a culture of human rights.
12. Ensure a complaints system that allows prisoners to report administrative decisions and inappropriate treatment to which they are subjected.
13. Establish a comprehensive program to address the trauma of detention and the assistance needs of male and female survivors in integrating back into society after their rehabilitation, providing them with adequate expertise and resources. Include both male and female survivors in the planning and creation of this program, as well as the community and civil authorities.
14. Build trust with survivors; encourage them to build oral memory as a basis for their rights. Document the violations they were subjected to and incorporate their demands into a basic article within a transitional justice program.
15. Focus on juvenile detention centers, reforming them at all levels. Ensure that the purpose of these centers is reform.
16. Support connection for survivors; build their capacity to contribute effectively in advocating for their issues and demanding their rights.





## Appendix - The questionnaire

1. Researcher name:
2. Method of interview:
3. Personal Information:
4. Name:
5. Surname:
6. Current Address:
7. Contact information (phone number - email):
8. Email us at the following address:
9. Place:
10. Date of Birth:
11. Place of interview:
12. Gender:
  - Male
  - female
13. Nickname in Adra prison:
14. Branch ID Number:
15. Nationality:
16. Civil status:
  - Single
  - Married
  - Divorced
  - Widower
17. Ethnicity
  - Arab
  - Kurdish
  - Turkmen
  - Circassian
  - Armenian
  - Assyrian
  - Prefer not to answer
  - Other
18. Religion - Sect
  - Sunni
  - Shiite
  - Alawite
  - Ismaili
  - Druze
  - Yezidi
  - Christian
  - Prefer not to answer
19. Province (Region):
20. Reason(s) for arrest:

## Reasons for arrest.

21. Number of arrests:
  - Once only
  - Twice
  - Three times
  - More (state number of times)
22. Date of arrest? (Day - month - year)
23. What city were you arrested in?
24. Where were you arrested?
  - Home
  - University
  - Work
  - School
  - Off the street
  - Other (please specify)
25. How were you arrested?
  - Ambush
  - Checkpoint
  - I was called to the branch that arrested me.
  - From a hospital
  - Off the street
  - From a government facility
  - The border
  - A mosque
  - Immigration and Passport control
  - At the airport
  - Other (please specify)
26. Did other people witness the arrest?
  - Yes (possibly more than one person, and I have their contacts)
  - No
27. Did you know who arrested you?
  - Yes (please specify the arresting party)
  - No
28. How did you know them? (Choose all that apply)
  - The arresting officer identified themselves when they arrested me
  - They showed ID
  - I already knew who they were
  - I did not know them
  - They did not show an arrest warrant
  - Other (please specify)
29. Where were you taken after your arrest?
  - Police station (please specify)
  - Security branch (please specify)
  - Government detention (please specify)
  - Directly to Adra Prison
  - Other (please specify)
30. Were you mistreated during the arrest process?
  - Yes (please specify: insults, beating, etc.)
  - No
31. What was your condition while you were transferred to the prison? (Choose all that apply)
  - Handcuffed
  - Shackled feet
  - Blindfolded
  - Mouth closed with duct tape
  - Other (please specify)
32. How long did you stay in the detention center before being transferred to a court or civil prison?
  - \_\_\_\_ Days
  - \_\_\_\_ Months
  - \_\_\_\_ Years
33. Were you interrogated in your place of detention?
  - Yes
  - No
34. If yes, who interrogated you? (Give name if you remember)
  - Public Prosecutor
  - Investigative judge
  - High-ranking Officer
  - Officer
  - Security Element
  - Other (please specify)
35. Were you tortured during interrogation?
  - Yes
  - No
36. If yes, what kind of torture was inflicted upon you? (choose all that apply)
  - Physical beating with a stick or a baton; whipped using a thick belt or cable; ironing; nail pulling; doused with boiling water; doused with cold water; immersion in boiling water; immersion in cold water; deforming the face and visible parts of the





- body; skinning; being prevented from eating; being forced to eat too much; being crushed under heavy weight; tearing, pulling, and wrenching of limbs; electric shock; 'wheel'; 'flying carpet'; 'German chair'; being stepped on; other (please specify)
- Sexual  
Rape; forced sexual positions; forced to sit on a bottle; beatings on sexual organs; abuse of sexual organs or sensitive areas; castration, strapping or tensioning of sexual organs or sensitive areas; forced rape or sexual assault; intrusive insertion (sodomy); threatening with rape; harassment; other (please specify)
  - Psychological  
suggesting death or murder or drowning; threatening to arrest parents; being forced to watch another person being tortured; being forced to hear another person being tortured; hearing the sounds of torture; being forced to torture another person; being forced to watch sexual assault; sleep deprivation; blindfolding; deafening the ears; forcing blasphemy; insulting religious sanctities; cursing honor; stripping; solitary confinement; spitting in food; putting shoes inside food; pouring food in the toilet; deprivation of food; postponing the removal of a corpse for a long time; other (please specify)
37. Were they able to elicit statements from you under torture?
- Yes (please specify)
  - No
38. Did you sign a blank paper during or after the interrogation?
- Yes
  - No
39. Were you captured on video or an audio recording during the interrogation?
- Yes - Video
  - Yes - Audio
  - Yes - Both
  - No
  - I don't know
40. Where were you held? Were you subjected to torture outside interrogation times?
- Yes
  - No
41. Where were you held? Were you subjected to torture for purposes other than the investigation?
- Yes
  - No
42. How many times were you tortured in your place of detention?
- Once
  - Twice
  - Three times
  - More than three times
43. Were there other detainees in your place of detention?
- Yes (adults)
  - Yes (children - under 18 years old)
  - No (I was alone)
44. If there were children, were they tortured?
- Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
45. Did you witness the torture of other detainees?
- Yes
  - No
46. Did you witness the death of a detainee under torture?
- Yes (provide name if possible)
  - No
47. How many people were placed in one room?
- 1
  - Between 2 to 10
  - Between 10 and 20
  - Between 20 and 30
  - More
48. Were there enough places to sleep?
- Yes
  - No
49. Were you transferred to several detention centers?
- Yes (please name the centers)
  - No
50. Can you name officers, non-commissioned officers, or members of any rank who were commanded who carried out the torture tactics?
- Yes (provide their names, ranks, and responsibilities)
  - No

## Detention conditions in the civilian prison

51. When were you transferred to Adra prison? (Day - month - year)
52. Had you been brought before a court before being sent to Adra prison?
  - Yes
  - No
53. When arriving at the prison, were you abused by them?
  - Yes
  - No
54. If yes, what kind of abuse?
  - Verbal
  - Verbal abuse against your family
  - Beating
  - Harassment
  - Other (please specify)
55. Did the prison officials read you your list of your rights and duties inside the prison?
  - Yes
  - No
56. Can you describe Adra prison from outside and inside?
  - Yes
  - No
57. If yes, please specify:
  - The Site:
  - Building Exterior:
  - Number of Floors:
  - Direction of Building:
  - Sections:
  - Wings/Wards
  - Number of Rooms:
  - Prison Outside Space:
  - Other:
58. Can you provide us with the names or titles of any of the officers, officials, or prison staff?
  - Yes (please specify)
  - No
59. What was the stated capacity of each ward/cell?
  - Capacity:
  - Don't know
60. How many people were actually housed in the room with you?
61. Did you have your own cot?
  - Yes
  - No
62. If you were not provided a cot, where did you sleep?
  - On the ground
  - I shared a cot with another inmate in shifts
  - I paid to sleep on a cot
  - Other
63. Was there a place to urinate in the room?
  - Yes
  - No
64. Was water available?
  - Yes
  - No
65. Were showers available in prison?
  - Yes (How often per week?)
  - No
66. Were you allowed out into the yard for exercise?
  - Yes (How many hours/times a day/week?)
  - No
67. Please rate the food situation from 1 to 5, where 1 is very bad and 5 is very good.
68. Please rate the general hygiene situation from 1 to 5, where 1 is very bad and 5 is very good
69. Was there a washing machine in the prison?
  - Yes (How often were you allowed to use it per week?)
  - No (How did you wash your clothes, or were you not allowed to?)
70. Were there places designated for the following services?
  - Sports
  - Cafeteria
  - A library inside the prison (How often were you allowed access and borrowed books to read?)
  - Other (please specify)
71. If you were interested in studying, were you allowed to do so?
  - Yes (How?)
  - No





72. Was there a public phone?
- Yes
  - No
73. If yes, how often were you allowed to use the public phone?
- I wasn't allowed to use it
  - I was allowed to use it daily
  - I was allowed to use it weekly
  - I was allowed to use it monthly
  - Other (please specify)
74. Was there a medical clinic inside the prison?
- Yes
  - No
75. If yes, rate the quality of the health service from 1 to 5, where 1 is very bad and 5 is very good.
76. Were visits with persons from outside the prison allowed?
- Yes (How many times per week/month?)
  - No
  - They were permitted in exchange for (a service or money)
77. Who was entitled to visit you? (Choose all that apply)
- Nucleus family
  - Relatives
  - Friends
  - Lawyer
  - Other (please specify)
78. Please describe the visit:
- Behind bars
  - Visitation rooms with surveillance (with camera or police officer present)
  - Children's play areas
  - You pay money for a visit
  - Did you need to provide anything in particular for a visit? (please specify)
  - Did you need to pay money to allow your relatives to bring you in-kind material during the visit?
  - Other (please specify)
79. Were you allowed to see your spouse in a private room?
- Yes
  - No
80. If you were attacked in prison, what was the type of abuse?
- Verbal assault
  - Physical assault
  - Sexual assault
  - Forcing you to do a certain job (please specify)
  - Other
  - I was not assaulted
81. If yes, by whom? (choose all that apply; please give names if possible)
- Prison warden/administrator
  - Officer
  - Guard/soldier
  - Civil worker inside the prison
  - Another inmate
  - Other (please specify)
82. How many times were you assaulted?
- Once
  - More than once (state the number of times)
83. If you were assaulted by another inmate, did you inform the prison administration of the assault?
- Yes
  - No
84. If yes, what did the prison administration do with the perpetrator?
- Locked him up in solitary
  - Asked him to apologize
  - Punished him by beating him
  - Nothing
  - Other (please specify)
85. Did you ever witness another inmate being assaulted?
- Yes (please give name of victim if possible)
  - No
86. If yes, how was the inmate assaulted?
- Verbally
  - Physically
  - Sexually
  - Forced to perform certain tasks
  - Other



87. Who attacked this inmate whose assault you witnessed? (please give names if possible)
- Officer in charge in prison
  - Officer
  - Guard/soldier
  - Civil worker inside the prison (please give his name if possible)
  - Another inmate (please give his name if possible)
  - Other (please specify)
88. Were you tortured while in prison?
- Yes (state number of times)
  - No
89. If yes, what kind of torture was inflicted upon you? (Choose all that apply.)
- Physical  
beating with a stick or a baton; whipped using a thick belt or cable; ironing; nail pulling; doused with boiling water; doused with cold water; immersion in boiling water; immersion in cold water; deforming the face and visible parts of the body; skinning; being prevented from eating; being forced to eat too much; being crushed under heavy weight; tearing, pulling, and wrenching of limbs; electric shock; 'wheel'; 'flying carpet'; 'German chair'; being stepped on; other (please specify)
  - Sexual  
Rape; forced sexual positions; forced to sit on a bottle; beatings on sexual organs; abuse of sexual organs or sensitive areas; castration, strapping or tensioning of sexual organs or sensitive areas; forced rape or sexual assault  
intrusive insertion (sodomy); threatening with rape; harassment; other (please specify)
  - Psychological  
suggesting death or murder or drowning; threatening to arrest parents; being forced to watch another person being tortured; being forced to hear another person being tortured; hearing the sounds of torture; being forced to torture another person; being forced to watch sexual assault; sleep deprivation; blindfolding; deafening the ears; forcing blasphemy; insulting religious sanctities; cursing honor; stripping; solitary confinement; spitting in food putting shoes inside food; pouring food in the toilet; deprivation of food postponing the removal of a corpse for a long time; other (please specify)
90. If you were tortured, give the name of the person who tortured you (if possible)
91. What was the reason for your torture?
- Interrogation
  - Only for the sake of torture
  - Other (please specify)
92. What kind of harm did the torture cause?
- Physical
  - Sexual
  - Both
93. Is there a medical report on any of the damages you suffered?
- Yes
  - No
94. Was another inmate tortured with you?
- Yes, and I remember name and contact information (please supply)
  - Yes, but I cannot remember name and contact information
  - No
95. If yes, what kind of torture was this inmate subjected to?
- Physical
  - Sexual
  - Both
96. If yes, do you know who tortured him?
- Yes (please identify by name if possible)
  - No
97. Do you know a prisoner who died under torture?
- Yes (please give their name if possible)
  - Yes, but I do not know their name
  - No
98. Do you know who caused their death under torture?
- Yes (please identify by name if possible)
  - No
99. Were you or any inmate you know asked to engage in sexual practices for the benefit of the prison or out of prison? (provide name/rank of person requesting, if possible)
- Yes, and I know someone else who was
  - Yes, I was, but I don't know anyone else who was
  - No, but I know someone who was
  - No, and I don't know anyone who was



100. Were there sexual activities run by prison officials? (Choose all that apply.)
- There were no activities
  - I don't know
  - There were activities inside the prison
  - There were activities outside the prison
  - They were using women
  - They were using children
  - They were using men
  - Other
101. Were there children (under the age of 18) in prison?
- Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
102. If yes, were any of those children tortured (as far as you know)?
- Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
103. Do you know if any of the children were subjected to sexual harassment or sexual assault?
- Yes (What kind of abuse or harassment)
  - No
  - I don't know
104. Were there any significant events/incidents inside the prison?
- Yes
  - No
105. If yes, what were those events/incidents? (Choose all that apply.)
- Hunger strike
  - Fire
  - Riot
  - Epidemic
  - Mass fighting
  - Other (please specify)
106. Did these events lead to anyone's death?
- Yes [please provide name(s) if you know]
  - No
  - I do not know
107. How did the prison administration deal with these events?
108. Do you know the names of officers in charge of the prison administration?
- Yes (please provide the names)
  - No
109. Did you know the name of the prison warden when you were incarcerated?
- Yes (mention it)
  - No
110. Do you know the names of civil workers inside the prison?
- Yes (mention them)
  - No
111. Can you provide two names of Adra prison survivors?
- Yes (mention them)
  - No
112. When were you released from prison? (Enter date)
113. Where did you go when you were released? (Indicate place)
114. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very different and 5 is no difference, how much did your life change after your release from your life before imprisonment?
115. Did prison leave harmful effects on you?
- Yes
  - No
116. If yes, in what way?
- Physical effects
  - Psychological effects
  - Social effects
  - Economic effects
  - Other effects (please specify)
117. On a scale of 1 to 5, how hindered are you by these effects from practicing your normal life, where 1 is extremely hindered and 5 is not hindered at all.
118. Have you received any kind of support since your release?
- Yes
  - No
119. If yes, what kind of support?
- Financial
  - Medical
  - Psychological
  - Social

120. If yes, who provided you with this support?

- Charitable Organization
- Family
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Hospital
- Psychologist
- Other (Please Specify)

## Legal Procedures

121. Did you stand trial before a court?

- Yes
- No

122. If yes, what court did you stand trial in?

- The investigative judge
- A military judge
- Penalty 'beginning' Magistrate
- Penalty Magistrate
- State Security Court
- Field Court in the place of detention
- Other (please specify)

123. What is the name of the judge before whom you appeared at trial?

124. When you appeared before the judge, how were you?  
(Choose all that apply.)

- Blindfolded
- Hands tied
- Feet Shackled
- Standing up
- Sitting on a chair
- Sitting on the floor
- In an iron cage

125. Were the trials public or secret?

- Public
- Secret

126. If the trials were public, who attended the sessions?  
(Choose all that apply.)

- Family
- Attorney
- Friends
- Those Concerned with the Case
- Other (Please Specify)
- No one

127. What were the charges leveled against you by the court?

- Criminal charges
- Fake
- Terrorism
- Damaging the well-being of the state
- Phone calls
- Other (please specify)





128. If your trial spanned several sessions, when were you notified of the date of the next session?
- At the end of the previous session
  - The day before the next session
  - The same day as the next session
  - Other (please specify)
  - I was never notified
129. Were you allowed to appoint a lawyer? (If no, the terms of a fair trial were broken)
- Yes
  - No (Why not?)
130. Did the court appoint a lawyer for you?
- Yes (give his name)
  - No
131. How long was the lawyer-trial session?
132. If you were allowed to hire a lawyer, what were you or your lawyer allowed to do?
- See the Prosecution List
  - Provide Payments and Objections
  - Contact with Lawyer
  - Meet Privately with Lawyer
  - Lawyer Visits in Prison
  - Other (Please Specify)
133. Did something happen during the trial sessions that affected your trial progress?
- Yes (What was this event?)
  - No
134. Were some or all of the trial hearings responsible for your torture in the place of detention?
- Yes
  - No
135. Were you given all your rights during the trial?
- Yes
  - No
136. If no, what rights did you not have?
- Allowed to See Prosecution List
  - Given Deadlines to Make Defenses
  - Speak for Defense at The Trial Session
  - Hire A Lawyer
  - Appeal Sentence
  - Public Trial
  - To be notified
  - Other (Please Specify)

This concludes the survey.

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate.



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لدعم الانتقال الديمقراطي في سوريا



THE DAY AFTER  
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