



IRI Syria Index

Summary

This survey reflects the views of self-identified Syrian opposition both inside and outside Syria. The survey was conducted from June 1 - July 2, 2012, and was undertaken by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in cooperation with international survey research firm [Pechter Polls](#) of Princeton, NJ (P3).

Given security considerations, the survey was conducted electronically using a referral, or “snowball” method, rather than through strictly random selection of respondents as would be done in a public opinion poll. To achieve broader representation, five different individuals were used to initiate the referral chain, ultimately reaching a sample of 1,168 opposition members, approximately 315 of whom were actually inside Syria. Eighty-five percent of respondents were male and 15 percent were female. Margin of error is not strictly applicable to this survey because of the non-random selection of respondents.

As the battle for Syria’s fate continues to be waged in the nation’s streets, IRI’s survey sought to explore Syrian opposition views on the current conflict, the opposition itself and visions for a post-Assad Syria. The survey found that respondents overwhelmingly support at least some level of international military intervention in Syria. The survey also uncovered mixed support for the Syrian National Council (SNC) but strong support for the Free Syrian Army (FSA). When asked about the possibility of a post-Assad Syria, most respondents who were outside the country responded they would return to Syria and a strong majority indicated they would seek to shore up the nation’s foundering economy and establish an equitable judicial system that would be capable of handling post-Assad transitional justice.

Methodology

Due to the logistical and political complexities of the project, several months of preparation were required for both survey development and recruitment of opposition activists who had strong in-country networks that were not permeated by the Assad regime. To minimize the possibility of participants’ arrest, or any other form of regime interference, IRI and P3 employed a referral methodology—relying strictly on dissidents who were known to IRI or P3. Thus, the survey is not a randomized sample and is also skewed heavily toward men, who by all accounts dominate both the armed and unarmed opposition.

The project primarily relied upon five networks to initiate the survey circulation. From there, activists within and outside Syria from different ethnic, religious, political and socioeconomic backgrounds were encouraged to circulate the survey amongst their sub-networks. The questionnaire was developed with the input of all network leaders, under the guidance of Dr. David Pollock, former chief of Near East/South Asia and Africa Research for the U.S. Information Agency.

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The survey was translated from English into Syrian colloquial Arabic and placed on a secure server outside of Syria with extensive security protocols to mitigate regime tampering. Each of the five trusted network leaders was given an individual link to access the questionnaire, allowing P3 to track progress and observe any suspicious results in real-time throughout the survey's administration. Respondents were assured that their responses to the online survey would be anonymous.

It is important to note that discrepancy exists in the survey data regarding how many respondents were actually inside Syria when taking the survey. The difference may be explained by a slight semantic shift between questions. When asked where they live, 315 respondents gave a location inside Syria. However, in response to the question: if the Assad regime is no longer in power, would you return to live in Syria? only 220 respondents answered that they were currently inside the country. It is likely that this is due to respondents considering Syria their home even if at the time of the survey they were outside the country. In addition, because a significant number of opposition activists have been traveling back and forth lately between Syria and Turkey or other places, some were probably contacted while briefly outside of Syria but planning to return soon, even while Assad remains in power.

Demographics

A strong plurality of respondents who were inside Syria indicated Damascus Governorate as the place where they lived, though the survey benefitted from a geographically varied pool of respondents. Respondents came from a variety of age groups with a plurality falling in the 26-35 range. Most respondents were Sunnis (81 percent) and Arab (81 percent). Kurds were the second most prevalent ethnic group (14 percent). Given that the survey was electronically transmitted through opposition networks, a strong majority of respondents had received at least some university level education.

Main findings of the Survey are as follows:

Opposition Favors Armed International Intervention, Rejects China, Russia and Iran

- Respondents exhibited support for a range of international armed intervention measures, with the most support going to actions that would not involve an international presence on the ground. Measures that would require only air power and air strike support scored the highest, including the imposition of a no-fly zone (average 6.35 on a scale of one to seven, seven being the strongest agreement), the establishment of humanitarian corridors (6.25 average) and armament training to the FSA (6.25 average).
- A small but not insignificant minority (15 percent) said they believed there should be no military intervention whatsoever.
- Respondents showed support for U.S. involvement though not necessarily its leadership in an international armed intervention. Whereas only 13 percent of respondents said the

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U.S. should not be involved in an international alliance, only 34 percent said the U.S. should lead, making it the sixth choice behind Turkey (54 percent), Saudi Arabia (41 percent), NATO (41 percent), France (40 percent) and Qatar (36 percent).

- Respondents did not respond favorably toward Iran, China and Russia. When asked which countries should not be part of a military intervention, 78 percent and 74 percent selected Russia and China, respectively; only Israel received a higher response rate of not being part of an intervention, with 79 percent. When asked which countries had treated the opposition the best, China, Russia and Iran all received the worst ratings, scoring an average of 1.53, 1.46 and 1.17 respectively on a scale of one to seven.

Tepid Support for SNC Outpaced by Support for FSA, Opposition Highly Fragmented

- While a slim plurality of respondents (24 percent) gave the SNC the highest possible mark for legitimacy (selecting seven on a one to seven scale), the survey indicated the SNC is struggling to generate broad appeal in the opposition as the responses averaged only 4.95.
- When asked what opposition group was the most legitimate representative of the Syrian people, the FSA eclipsed the SNC by 11 points (34 percent to 23 percent).
- When asked if any one country had too much influence on the SNC, nearly half (45 percent) responded that Turkey did. On a scale of one to seven, with one meaning disagree and seven meaning agree, responses averaged 4.96 when asked if they agreed that the SNC gives clear priority to Syria's needs over their own personal gain.
- Regarding opposition group affiliation, the FSA, SNC and Local Coordination Committees accounted for 40 percent of respondents, however a significant number (25 percent) responded other, indicating a highly fragmented opposition that has failed to fully unify behind one body.

Opposition Prioritizes Rebuilding Economy, Shows Mixed Feelings Toward Transitional Justice

- When asked what the most important post-Assad aims of the opposition would be, respondents scored establishing a strong judicial system and giving fair trials to suspected war criminals as two of the highest priorities with averages of 6.71 and 6.47, respectively. At the same time, most placed a high premium on swift retribution: the idea of punishing war criminals without being delayed by judicial processes was also highly appealing to the opposition.
- On the same seven point scale, the priority of building a strong economy scored second highest with an average of 6.63.

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- Opposition views on transitional timelines for a post-Assad Syria favored transitional government leading to elections (40 percent) or the Tunisian model of electing a constitutional assembly leading to elections (36 percent). A minority favored immediately holding presidential or parliamentary elections and respondents mostly balked at the Egyptian model of electing a parliament and then drafting a constitution.
- Respondents indicated a strong desire to live in a post-Assad Syria, with a total of 82 percent of those who are currently outside the country reporting they would return at least temporarily after Assad's fall.

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