

Syria Program Summary

The ongoing Syrian revolution has produced a dynamic political environment and the International Republican Institute (IRI) is committed to supporting the country's transition. Three key objectives guide IRI's work: (1) assist with the development of democratic political and civil society institutions inside Syria; (2) strengthen the ability of reformers to influence public discourse and project a vision for Syria's transition; and, (3) support a diverse and representative range of democratic actors from among the Syrian opposition.

IRI began its work in Syria in 2005 with a focus on improving access to restricted information, supporting unfettered communication between reformists and the establishment of a secure web-based communications platform. IRI also supports the work of Syrian researchers and analysts who are focused on the country's political transition.

In 2011, IRI developed a survey research program to explore Syrian popular attitudes regarding the March 2011 uprising and the future of Syria. IRI's survey research efforts are intended to understand Syrians' attitudes towards fundamental issues facing the country including: the state of the national economy, personal economic circumstances, political reform, efforts to find an end to the current conflict, and the performance of opposition and government political figures. An initial survey conducted at the end of 2011 contacted 310 Syrian respondents, 78 percent of whom were still inside the country at the time the survey was conducted. Since then, IRI has released two subsequent surveys, [one of Syrian refugees in Lebanon](#) and [another of self-identified opposition](#), which gathered responses from more than 1,200 Syrians, many of whom were still living inside Syria at the time.

In 2012, IRI hosted an exchange program for a number of Syrian opposition activists in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Participants interacted with former and current Bosnian government officials whose experience running a post-conflict, multi-ethnic state is directly relevant to the Syrian experience.

IRI also supports the work of Syrian civic organizations that promote an active civil society and reducing inter-ethnic tensions in Syria. The Institute's focus is on helping activists layout a clear mission statement and management structure allowing them to more easily put their future plans into action. This work serves as a model for future IRI assistance to grassroots organizations that have formed since the beginning of the March 2011 uprising against the Assad regime.

Additionally, in coordination with the [Women's Democracy Network](#), IRI hosted a [negotiations and coalition building workshop](#) for Syrian women led by Northern Ireland peace and reconciliation leader Monica McWilliams. During this workshop, the Syrian attendees agreed to a common action plan for greater inclusion of women in Syria's future democratic political process.