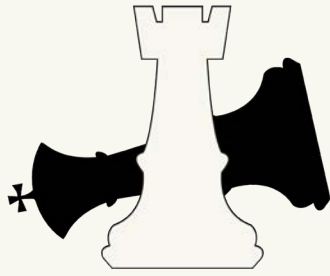


# Youth Interest in Public Affairs

## Case Study



كش ملك  
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## Executive Summary

This study attempts to understand the root causes of Youth's stand back stance away from participating in the public sphere and how they foresee friendly governance conditions under which they see youth in Syria are empowered and have a greater role in the public arena. For this purpose, research material was collected on the experiences of (523) male and female youth from inside and outside Syria, and was analyzed along two main tracks:

The first is a conjoint quantitative-qualitative analysis of the respondents' perspective towards the standing hurdles that youth in Syria face and lead to the mainstream lack of engagement with public affairs over the past years. The second part applies the same approach examining youth's standpoint on their vision of ideal steps in Syria and local communities that they see are pivotal for youth empowerment, and that would drive more youth population in Syria's public affairs.

At the onset, the study focused on thoroughly understanding the nitty-gritty details of youth's perspective of what they deem as a public affair. Later, the questionnaire worked to map youth's background on their experience in Syria's public affair, and the potential of their pursuing a public affair endeavor at the current conditions in the country. Also, measure the extent of their interest in keeping up with Syria's day-to-day news such as following up on news reports, commenting and posting on social media, as well as the percentage of respondents' participation in organized civil, political, or other activities.

The results showed that the majority of respondents are highly interested in the civil aspect of public affairs, unlike the apolitical ones where youth interest was lacking. However, Respondents in certain areas, such as Eastern Syria, SDF controlled territories, experienced an uptick in engagement, interest and participation rates in public affairs across all sectors, in comparison to other areas surveyed inside Syria. It was observed that respondents residing outside Syria showed a high interest in engagement with Syria's affairs, they lacked by far interest in engaging with public affairs endeavors holding a lot of reservations about the current political climate in the country.

The place of residence, whether inside or outside the country, emerged as a factor. This would appear to illustrate the issue of population dispersion and the deportation of political and civil life outside the country; the opportunities for participation in civil or political activities are more available to, for example, a Syrian refugee living in Turkey than a Syrian living in a regime-held area. It was also observed that those who were more inclined to engage in public affairs in eastern Syria tended to get involved in political and civil work to a greater degree after their release than those from other surveyed areas. The study showed- for instance, with the exception of eastern Syria- respondents living in Syria seem more interested in public affairs, while those abroad are more active.

The analysis also showed a prominent social gap in terms of gender issues. Less male deemed the aspect of gender impact to disadvantage women's role and participation in the public arena. The gap becomes more explicit inside Syria. While the eastern part of Syria shows a more gender balanced perspective on gender sensitive questions, the western part downplays gender considerations and the inequalities that derive from it. In contrast to the mainstream notion of women's lack of participation or hostility towards them in the public sphere, they consider women now are more empowered and enjoy more rights than men. Furthermore, the results show that the percentage difference between those interested in public affairs and those actually engaged in public affairs is higher for men than women among respondents. A wide array of challenges was identified throughout the questionnaire providing a glimpse of lived barriers that continue to undermine youth's interest in participating in the public sphere. The survey did not only raise a broad question on the wider challenges youth face, but also touch on the challenges female youth face and the social stigma that surrounds them when they engage in public areas and how to better encounter these challenges. While the challenges were diverse, there was a wide consensus about the lack of cohesive institutional and civil society efforts to build youth capacity and absence of a friendly environment whereby youth are able to express their opinions, and fear no repressive reprecuation. Lack of institutional and legal protection was also amongst the main obstacles. Unless decrees and law enforcement are consolidated to safeguard youth's rights and freedoms, youth's participation in the public sphere will remain at its current levels. In regard to the gender consideration, youth called for a nationwide constructive social awareness campaigns aimed at raising public awareness on female role in the society as well as eradicating the mainstream patriarchal stereotype which significantly undermines their participation and leave a wider segment of Syrian female youth undereducated, underrepresented and discriminated against. While this makes females more vulnerable to gender-based violence and other types of violence, youth respondents conveyed those laws should be decreed and punishments enforced to protect females' population in general and youth in particular since they comprise one of the biggest segments of Syria's overall population. Besides, decreeing a binding law whereby females have a quota across all governmental sectors, namely executive and high-ranking roles.

In line with the purpose of this study, understanding best practices participation enhancement in the public sphere, the questionnaire asked youth about suggestions that they see need implementation to push for more youth leaders in the public arena. A significant proportion of the respondents addressed the socioeconomic inequalities in the country as one of the main hurdles. With more development and employment opportunities, youth inside Syria will have economic security and those outsidess will be encouraged to return, and ultimately reshape their views about participating in public affairs. Another major step that youth inside and outside Syria outlined is a holistic institutional reform that would unroot corruption and underpin human rights and freedoms for people. Such steps, according to the respondents, will accelerate Syria's rebuilding process and further encourage Syrians to return and partake in rebuilding their home country. Furthermore, a clemency decree dropping human rights, or freedom of speech related charges would foster a friendly environment whereby youth are

more able to exercise political, civic or societal activities, or establish parties without fearing repercussions from state security intelligence. Furthermore, decreeing laws that would protect youth's participation by legislating a fixed quota, and applying the same quota for female youth to safeguard their representation across the state institutions.

Towards the end of the study, researchers explored youth's solutions to youth discouragement and absences from public affairs phenomena. This phase documented a brief on the various perspectives, which will provide a guideline for decision makers drawing future politics serving their interest in the best way possible.

## Methodology

The study adopted a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach based on a well-diverse strand of Syrian society. The field researchers carried out interviews with (523) Syrian from inside and outside Syria with 108 female and (415) male and female. The data collection process was carried out through standardized interviews conducted by a team of researchers. The study-cases were taken from Syria's neighboring countries allowing a wider array of youth insight into the study in pursuit of encapsulating- albeit proportionally- a host of perspectives representing a glimpse of Syria youth understanding, interest and vision of public sphere participation. This gave the study a unique ability to address different layers of the Syrian youths' lived experiences, aiming to help decision makers who are working to invest in youth empowerment and capacity building in Syrian youth.

At the onset, the study questionnaire investigated a set of indicators and factors that together give us a coherent picture of each sample individual knowledge on what participation in the public sphere stands for. This will allow us to map a proportionate awareness level, which will later help decide on what are the best practices to and, perhaps, knowledge each segment needs in order to boost up them challenge their inherited thoughts on the importance of public participation and being active citizens. And ultimately cater for the purpose of the study allowing notation of prominent patterns or associations, namely the issues of youth absence in leadership position in the political mediums.

The research questionnaire consisted of X questions, divided into two main sections. Both of which are examined at the start using a quantitative analysis-based approach and followed with quantitative oriented questions. The first section is geared towards mapping the current status of youth comprehension of participation in the public sphere in Syria and their experience, interest, as well as the key reasons that sways Syria's new generation from being involved in such endeavors, such as their engagement in civil, political or political activities.

The second section was crafted to stimulate youth's thoughts and forward-looking vision on how stagnation of youth participation in the public sphere can better be addressed and solved

in order to achieve more youth representation and leaders in the country. General information about the respondents and searched for some indicators of their engagement in public affairs, on the civil, social, political, artistic, and humanitarian levels. The questionnaire also endeavored to measure youth's knowledge of key information related to the Syrian constitution in terms of Syrian rights to elect, be elected in the parliament and the age of military conscription liability. This aims to examine youth's knowledge gap and interest in the absence of information to understand if they will be more likely to be susceptible to search for information, only when it does substantially affect their future or not.

The data collection process started in September 2021 and lasted for 7 weeks. Given that the process took place during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic—with its accompanying prevention and social distancing measures, audio interviews were adopted instead of direct field interviews between researchers and respondents. This was the biggest difficulty faced by data collectors, which was solved through specialized training to enable field researchers to conduct this type of interview and ensure the greatest amount and quality of communication with the respondents.

# First Chapter

Introduction

Syria's youths are a reliable human resource and are accessible in large quantities. Youth in Syria hold-in an enormous quantity of energy that can be used in the country's cultural, financial, political, and ideological growth. The significance of Youth understanding of the importance of their role in the public sphere has particularly experienced a new dimension in the ongoing conflict occurring in Syria. Where youth contribution in public affairs practices in the country is obvious and taken attention across all social institutions. There are many democratic activities for the youth to participate in, depending on the youth's concerns, interests, and whether they can feel they are a key player in the political process depends on their involvement.

Political stability requires every individual to participate in democratic activities. Though, to embark in a political activity one should be firstly aware of the fundamental principles, the meaning and most important of all has clear comprehension and holds a high regard to their contribution to their engagement.

### **Stage one:**

#### **What does Taking part in the public sphere look like Currently in Syria?**

As the novelty of this paper aims to address the youth interest in public life in Syria with a grassroots-based approach has been used throughout the survey to understand youth's awareness, engagement, vision, and reasons of either partaking or drifting away from public affairs.

The study endeavours to address and understand the following questions:

1- Have you been approached or consulted by official entities regarding your views on political, economic, and social matters, and who is it?

2- To what extent do you think you are interested in participating in the public sphere, in a political, economic, and social capacity?

3- Do you take part in political seminar discussions or workshops, news discussion, conferences, or other means of engagement?

4- Do you attend any of the following?

- a. Discussion seminars groups with activists or political actors.
- b. Or took part in training workshops.
- c. Or discussion seminars in your local social groups; or social media engagement with political public affair subjects.
- d. Or keeping up to date with the news in Syria.
- e. Or took part in volunteering activities in the past year? And have these activities been engaging with community building; civil; artistic and intellectual; political activities
- f. Or do you engage with political activities or entities?



5- What do you think of the following statement: the reason for youth low engagement in the public sphere is due to?

- Lack of interest
- Inability to make an impact or make a difference in the political process such as policies, laws, or others
- Existing gap between the youth and old generation who dominate the public sphere such as parties, official and unofficial leadership roles, and dismiss youth's contribution inside those entities
- The economical struggle and unemployment contribute to making youth's role and participation at the bottom of their priorities
- Lack of democratic practices inside the Syrian official entities and political parties
- Social low tolerance to have a youth member in a high-leadership position at any sector

6- Gender Sensitive Issue: Do you concur with the following statement: female youth encounter multiplied challenges due to their gender, and why?

### **Stage Two: How Do You Think Taking Part in the Public Sphere should be like in Syria?**

7- What are the most significant challenges that you think youth face to effectively participate in the public sphere in Syria?

8- While a lot of discourse about activating youth roles and their importance leading their society, yet no practical application has yet been applied to achieve youth inclusivity and incorporation in leadership roles.

A vital question here arises: What are the practical steps that should be undertaken to achieve more proactive youth leaders in the society at all levels, political, educational, civil, social and economic?

9- While a lot of Syrians left Syria, especially youth; do you think involving them in rebuilding and crafting Syria's future is essential or not, if so, how can they be included?

10- What are the credible entities that are trustworthy to animate youth's role?

11- What is the legal age to be eligible for being a candidate in the Parliament in Syria? Vs What is the legal age for military conscription?

12- How important do you think the following entities to bring about proper inclusive youth active role in their societies?

13- The United Nations Security Council decision regarding youth's empowerment

- An active youth-centric national entity or association which role is advance youth role into leadership positions;
- Supporting independent youth initiatives and creating a private youth-inclusive platform to empower their role plays a pivotal role to advance their leadership role;
- A nationwide governmental policy adopted by the state;
- Advocacy and lobbying campaigns;
- A fixed youth-quota Solution Across Governmental Institutions;

14- What are the needed steps to guarantee female-youth participation in the public sphere?

15- In an imaginary scenario: If you had the power to take three decisions to uphold the youth role in Syria, what would those decisions be?

# Second Chapter

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**Stage one:** Deep dive into youth's perspective on the root causes of the Syrian young generation's lack of interest in Syria's public sphere.

What does Taking part in the public sphere look like Currently in Syria?

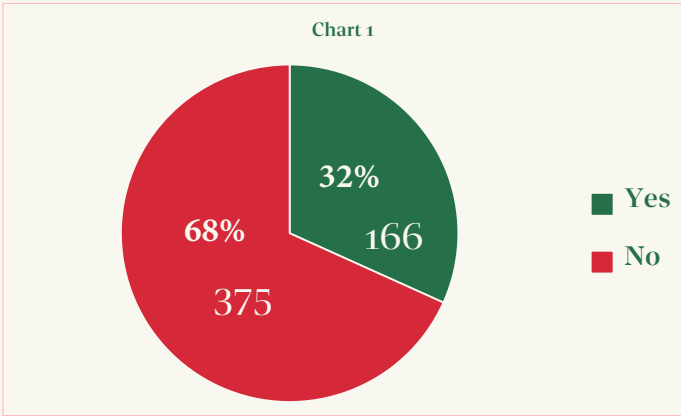
Understanding Syrian youths' stance on the value of their opinion and role contributing to the public sphere has a prerequisite assumption of this segment's awareness of the idea of public sphere participation. If the surveyed segment lacks that awareness, their image of their role in the society could be faulty addressed. Hence, we firstly asked them about what they think "participation in the public sphere" is all about. In pursuit of an insightful answer the survey asked samples of Syrian youths inside and outside their country simply the following question,

## 1- What Does Public Affairs Mean in Your perspective?

Across the survey segments, the study data shows that Syrians hold a mixed conception of public affairs and relate it in some cases to "being involved in the political behaviours throughout the past ten years of war" in Syria. While a significant proportion of the surveyed youth explained that public affairs mean partaking in the public social, economic, political life, others believe that it only refers to being part of the state's institutions or holding an executive governmental role.

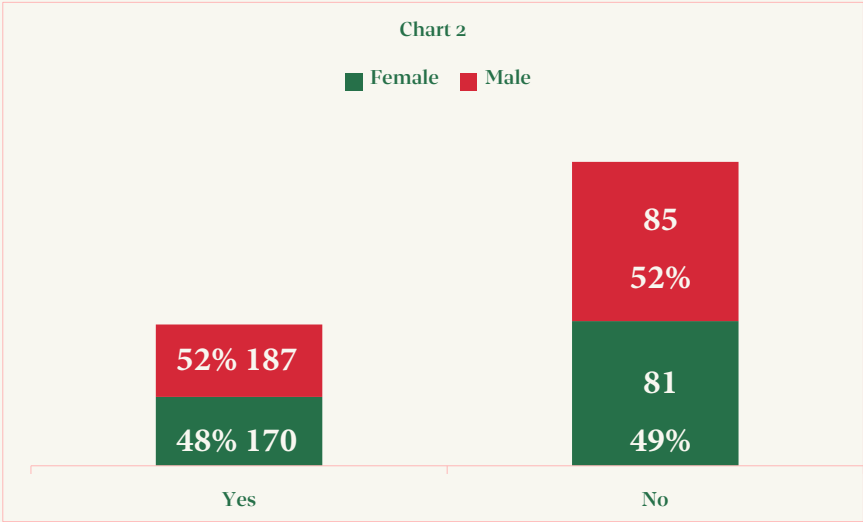
Others outlined that partaking in public affairs means engaging with elections on the national local or municipal scale. Also, actively engaging with local political parties and engaging with public discussion about a national interest such, social, economic, educational, and political affairs. Furthermore, a considerable portion of youth conveyed that public affairs indicates engaging with societal interest concerns, interacting and working to benefit the country's welfare.

## 2- Have you been contacted or consulted via an official entity inquiring about your political, social, economic, or service-related perspective?

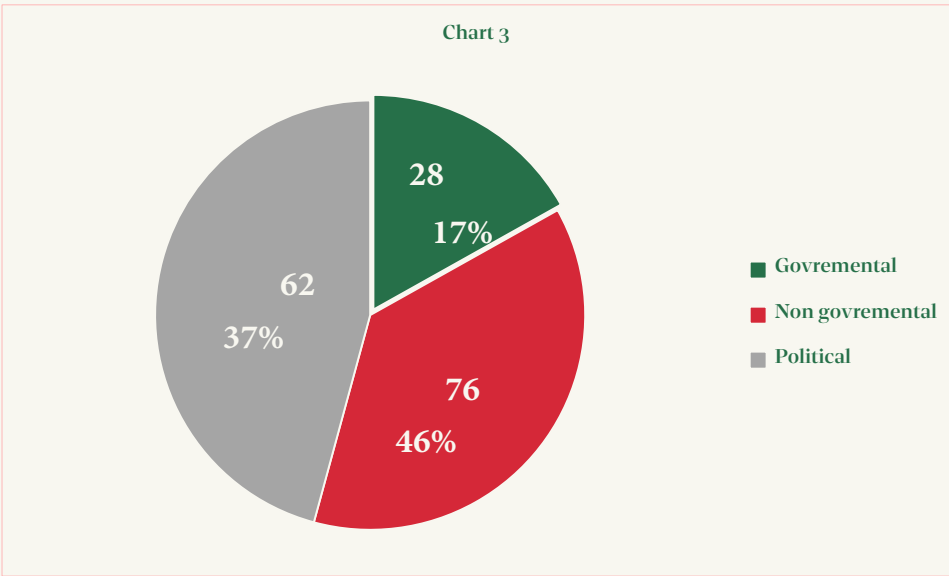


The study data show that most of the sample respondents were neither approached nor consulted in public affairs by Syrian official bodies. A whopping sixty-eight per-cent of the respondents said they were not approached, approximately 33 per-cent said they were reached out by official entities regarding public affairs concerns. (Chart 1)

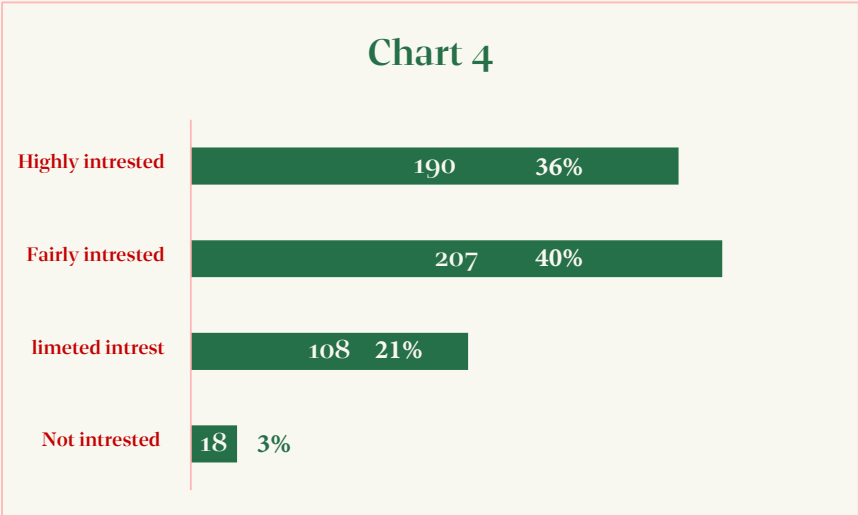
It was noted that two third of the surveyed Syrian youth inside and outside Syria and were not consulted at all outweigh those who were reached out via either governmental, non-governmental or non-profit organizations. The same dynamics applies on those who were consulted, albeit comprising approximately third of the total surveyed. Considering the issue from a gender-balanced perspective, both surveyed male and female demonstrated nearly identical figures with 49% vs 51% consulted one, and 48% vs 52% not consulted female and male respectively. (Chart 2)



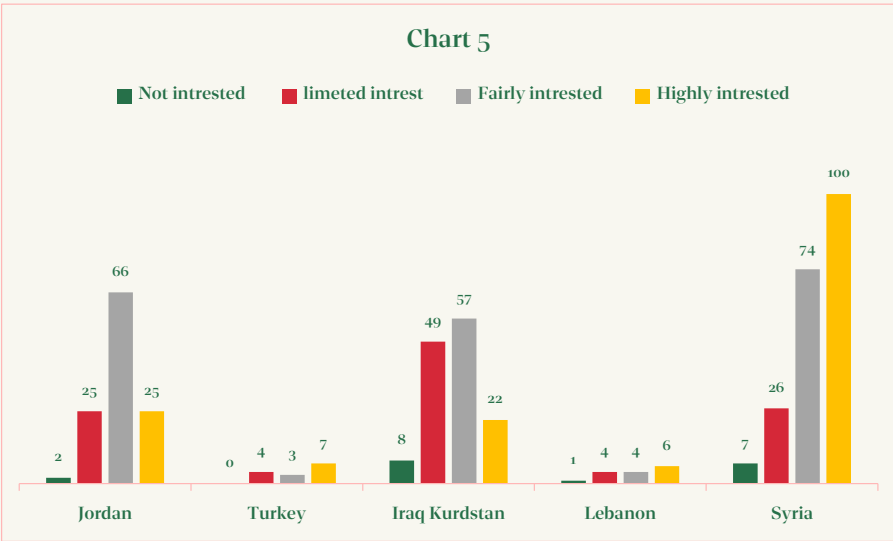
Respondents who said that they were consulted about their public affairs related views, which comprises 32 per-cent, less than half of them were consulted via political entities, then via non-governmental entity and right at the bottom comes those who were consulted via governmental entity with, 46%, 37%, 17% respectively, (Chart 3)



On the same token, surveyed Syrian youth were asked about the level of their interest in Syria's political, social, economic affairs nowadays. While a marginal 3% said they do not have any interest, the vast majority of the respondents showed a strong interest in Syria's affairs with 40% moderately interested and 36% percent strongly interested. While the survey also showed that youth outside Syria has a high interest engaging with Syria's politics, those outside showed a reluctance and lesser tendency to proactively engage with Syria's daily affairs interest, especially those residing in Lebanon and Turkey. (chart 4)

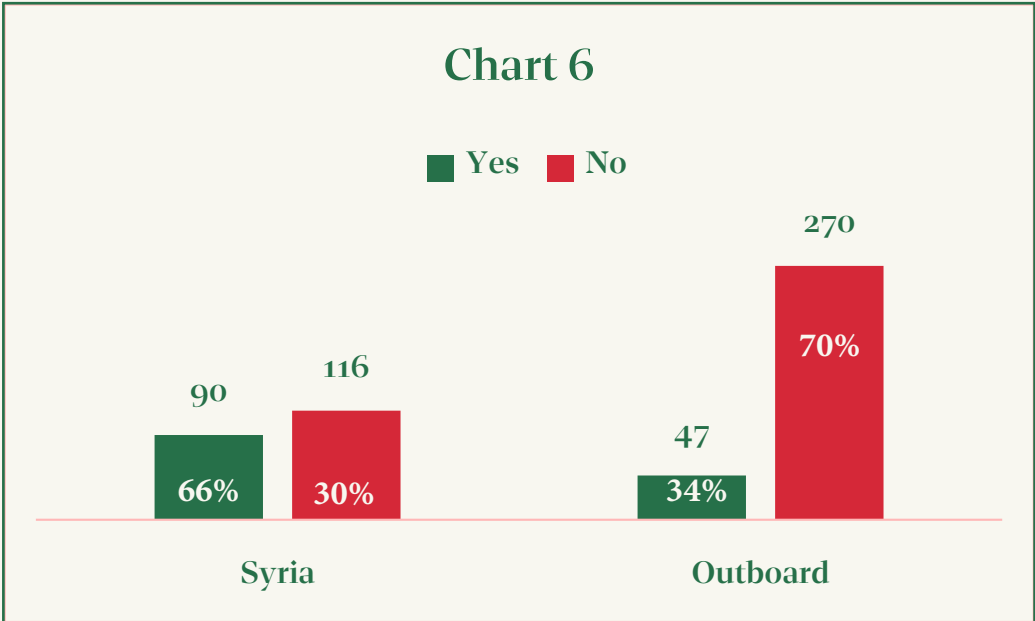


In contrast, surveyed youth in Kurdistan-Iraq and Jordan reflected a higher interest in Syria's political affairs. Similarly, more male's youth showed a higher interest in engaging with Syria's current public affairs. The surveyed females who said they are either greatly interested, or their interest is limited counted 43 per-cent, while 57 per-cent of males showed the same sentiment.



### 3- Have you managed to attend meeting or discourse seminars with politicians and activists?

Youth engagement with public discussion gatherings in Syria is very limited. This is due to the political fragmentation the country has been suffering from for consecutive generations. In addition, the dominance of pluralism or one-party rule discouraged a great majority of the contemporary generation from positivity partaking in such meetings. Though, it is worth mentioning that some areas in the country are more politically organized and political polarization is limited, albeit existing.



A whopping 74 per-cent of the surveyed youth indicated a negative engagement stance, and 26 per-cent said they have been attending such seminars. Approximately 70% of the respondents who were not active lived outside Syria and 66% of those who were active were inside the country. It is worth noting that youth surveyed inside the Syrian regime areas who were positively engaging with political activities mark only 17 per-cent of the total active respondents. The largest portion of those active youth, however, reside in north-east Syria scoring 50 per-cent of the total figure, while north-west Syria scored 33 per-cent. (chart 6)

Similarly, respondents who lacked engagement with politicians or activists were mostly in West and East Syria scoring 49, and 47 per-cent, while negative respondents in the regime areas comprised only 4 percent. Looking through an ethnic lens, it is noticed that Arabs take 83 per-cent of the surveyed who were active, then Kurds with 14 per-cent and Turkman 3 per-cent, leaving Armenia and Syriac ethnicities as a fully negative youth respondent. (charts 7- 8)

Chart 7

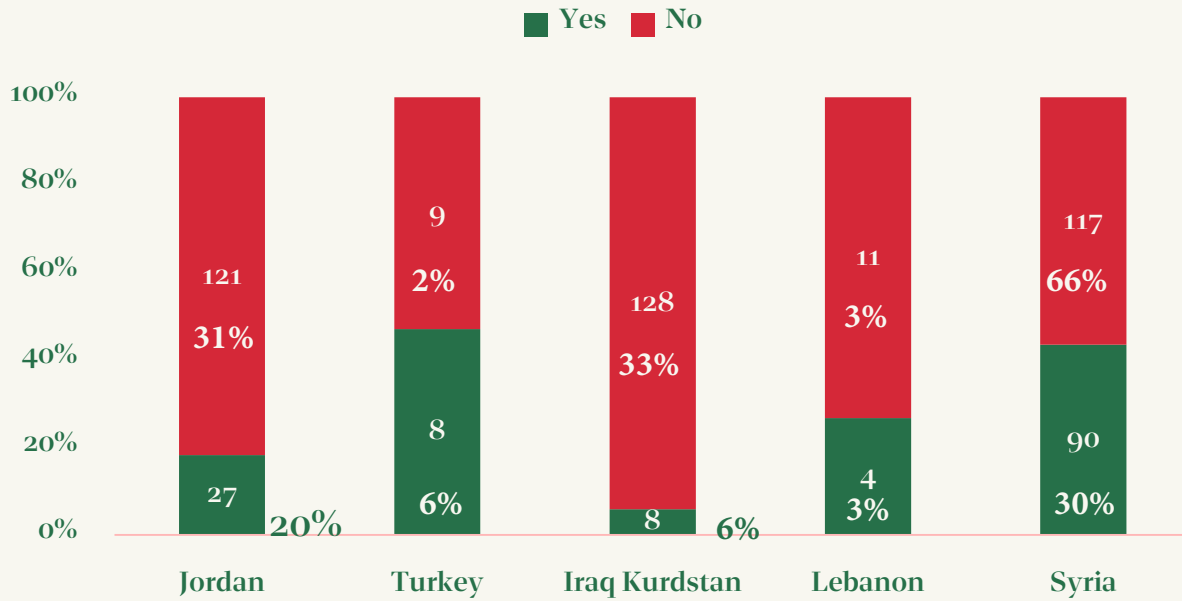
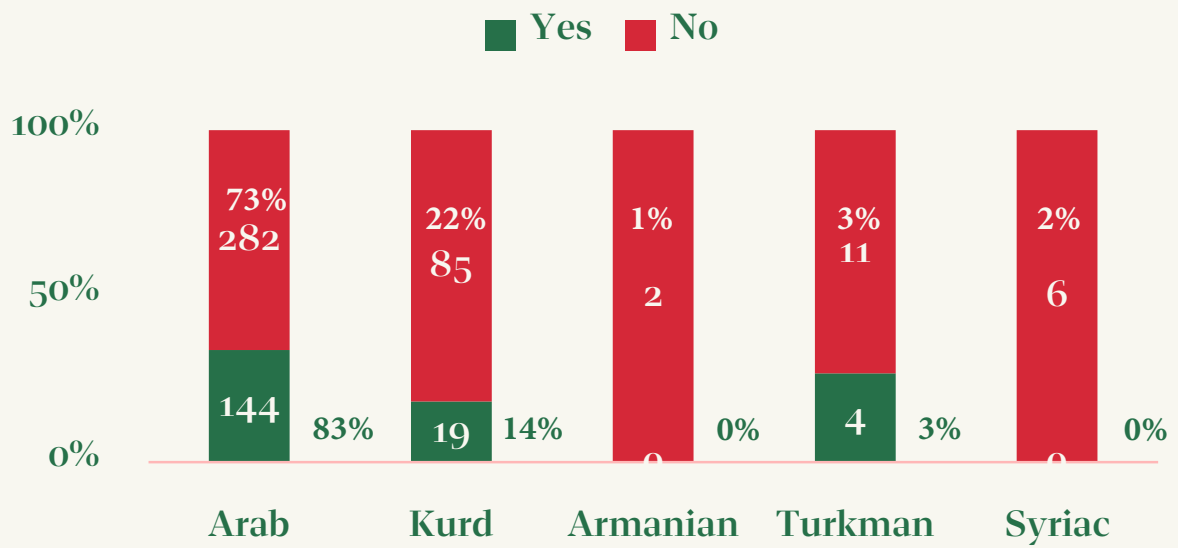


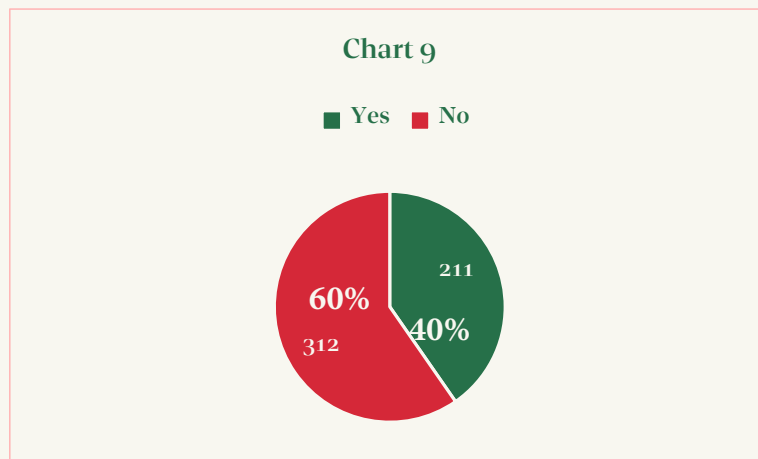
Chart 8



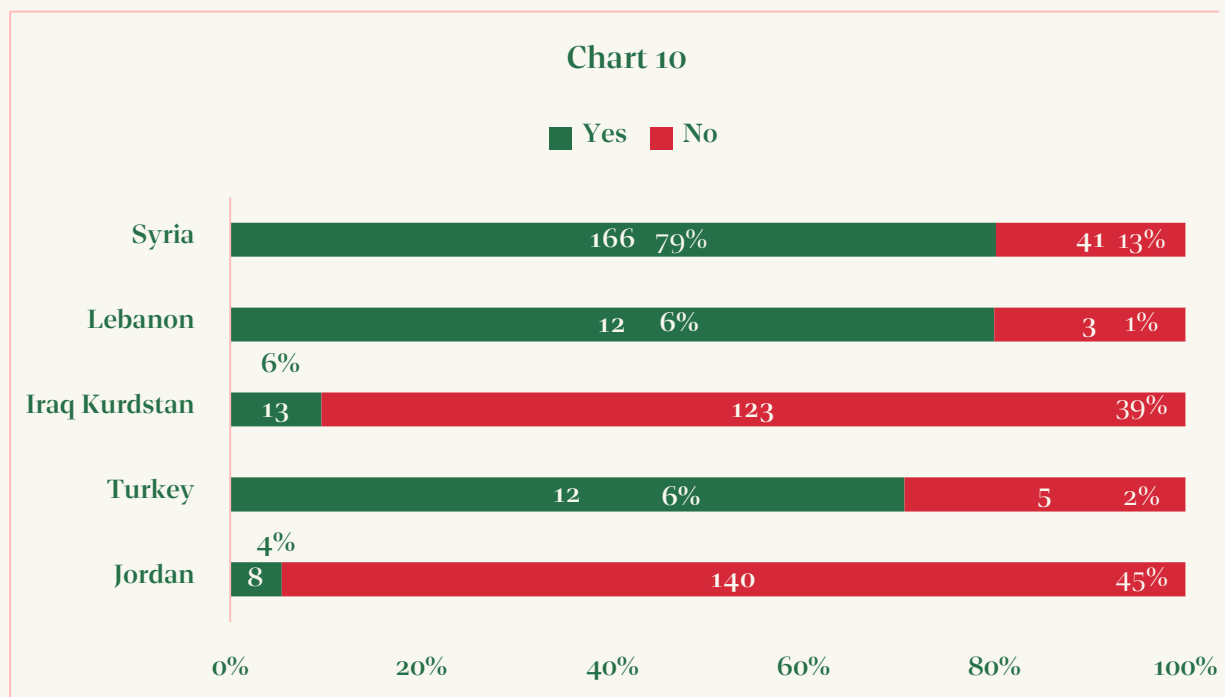


## 4- Have you been Participating in training workshops?

Throughout the survey study, youth engagement with cross social workshops and training sessions, in comparison to their interest in engaging with politicians and activists, appears to tell a different story. While the majority of youth respondents, humbly, engaged with the former, they did with the latter. Though the none-active respondents continued to hold a lower proportion than the active ones.



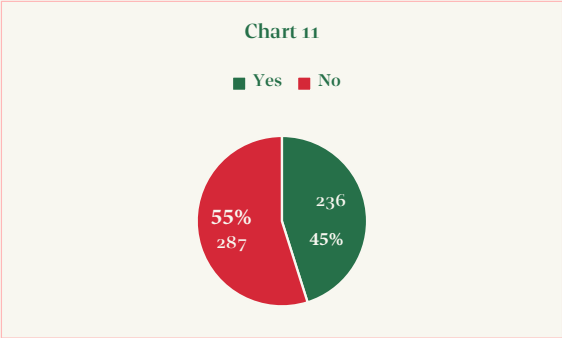
According to the study, 60 per-cent of youth across all ethnic segments, genders, ages and areas did not take part in seminars or training workshops, and 40 per-cent said they actively engaged with the abovementioned activities (chart 9).



As per the previous question, those who were inside Syria comprised the majority of the active respondents, and those residing outside made about the none-active ones with 78 and 83 per-cent respectively. Respondents in both Jordan and Kurdistan-Iraq experienced the highest figures of non-active youth, while those inside Syria comprised more than two third of the active respondents with 48%, 39% and 79% respectively. Furthermore, those residing in East-Syria made up more than half of the active respondent with 52 per-cent, followed by those in West-Syria 36%, and finally regime areas with 12%. Looking at both genders' responses, females stand up as a majority of the active respondent, while male comprise the majority of the non-active respondents scoring 58 and 59 per-cent respectively. In addition, what stood out as a notable finding asking this question to youth was how young youth aged between 18-25 made up 65 per-cent of the none-active respondents, while those aged 26 years old and above were most of the active ones comprising 53 per-cent. (chart 10)

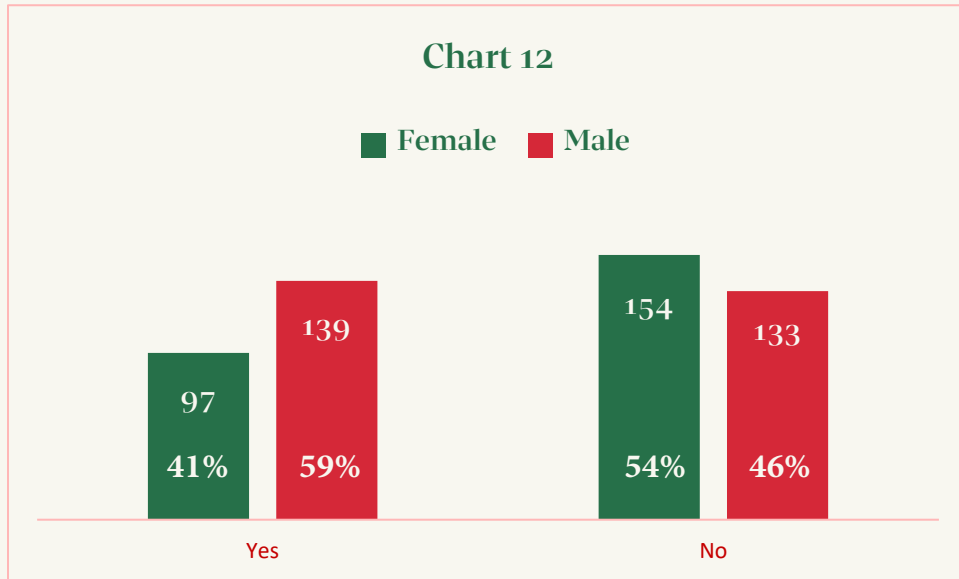
### 5- Do you engage with political discussions within your social circle?

Prior to the 2012 Syrian civil right movement, the mainstream Syrian society not only lacked conversing about political affairs, yet they were petrified from even whispering about it. This was due to the Ba'ath lead repression of Syrian opposition since the 80s shying away Syrians from such exercise. However, the survey displays a positive attitude transiting amongst Syria's youth generation.



Overall, the data revealed that more than nearly two of the respondents have been engaging with political discussions with 55 per-cent, while 45 per-cent said that they have not. (chart 11)

A notable observation has been that the majority of active respondents reside outside Syria comprising 69 per-cent, while those outside comprise 31 per-cent. Though, respondents who have not been engaging inside the country in comparison to those outside it, converge with one another scoring 47% and 53% respectively. It is worth mentioning that the overall proportion of the active respondents reside in Jordan with 45 per-cent, while most of the non-active respondents reside in Syria, then Kurdistan-Iraq with 47% and 32% respectively. Looking through the gender lens, 59 per-cent of the respondents who have been engaging in political decisions within their social circle, while 54 per-cent of the non-engaging respondents appeared to be females. (chart 12)



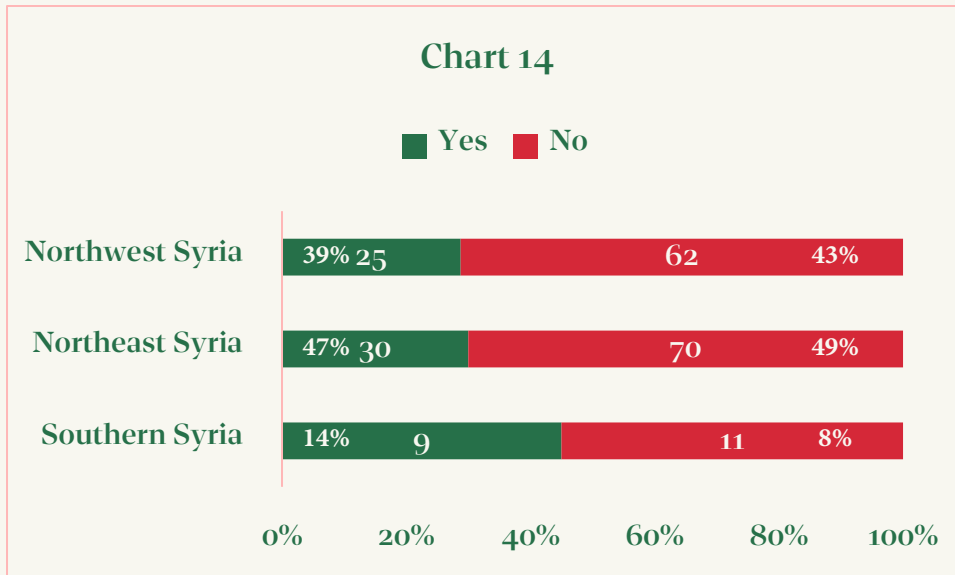
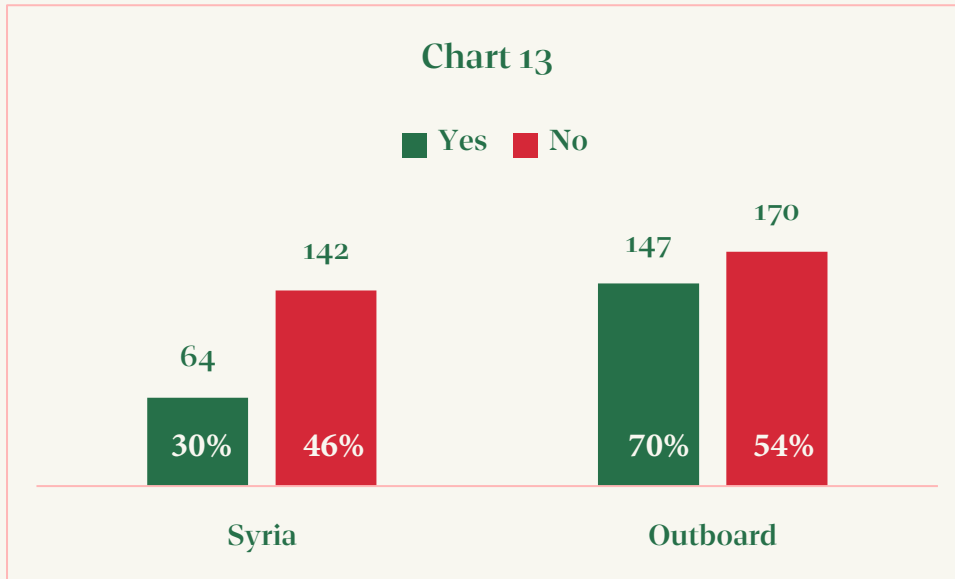
## 6- Have you been Sharing Opinion Political Content on social media?

Post-2011 revolution ushered in new scopes for utilizing social media in liberated ways that haven't been used before. The fear chain that disbarred Syrians of all generations from expressing their views began to break and became a lesser overwhelming fear. The widespread access to internet and social media as well as the fallback of the Syrian regime played a vital role enhancing Syrian's tolerance to use social media for political engagement purposes.

According to the study, the number of youths who said they do engage with political discussions on social media reached 60 per-cent. The vast majority of them reside outside Syria with 70 per-cent, while the non-engaging surveyed youth is nearly fifty-fifty inside and outside Syria.

On the one hand, while comprising 30 percent of the total active engagement proportion, engaging youth inside Syria were mainly from the East scoring 47%. However, those in the regime areas were at the bottom with only 14% online active respondents. On the same token, non-engaging respondents appeared to be either residing in Eastern or Western part of Syria with 49%, 43% respectively.

Outside Syria those who were active, on the other hand, the numbers of engaging youth were by far from Jordan reaching 51% of the total non-respondents' figures, while Kurdistan-Iraq came after with 13%. Furthermore, while an equal figure of the respondents from both genders comprised the non-active social media users, male active respondents outnumbered the females' ones marking 55% for males, and 45% for females. (chart 13 - 14)

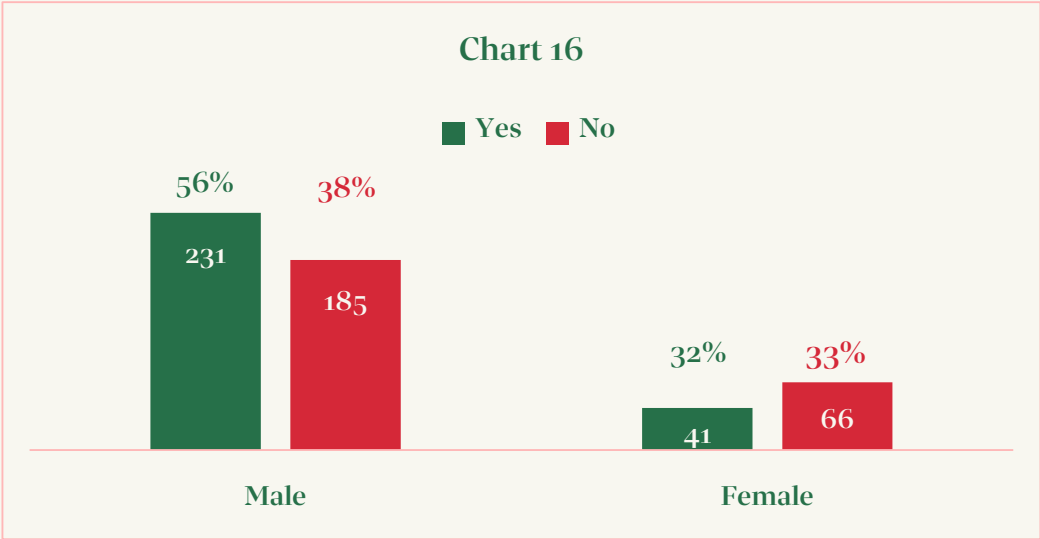
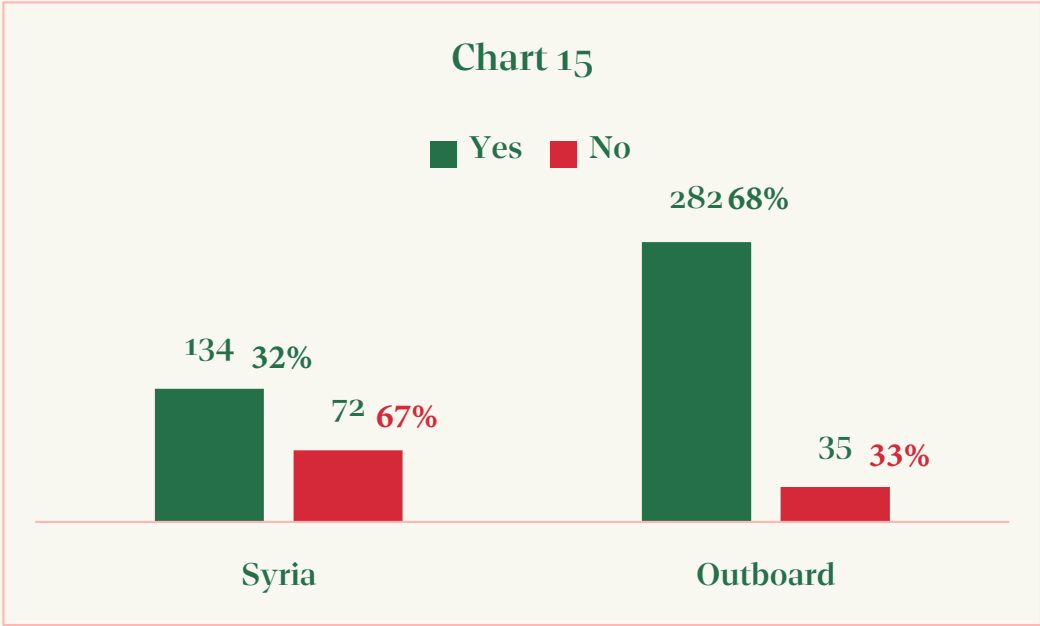


## 7- Do you Keep Up with the Unfolding News from Syria?

Unlike engagement's humble levels shown in the previous section, the vast majority of surveyed Syrian youth demonstrated, by far, a high percentage of actively following news on the latest news and coverage of the circumstances of Syria. A whopping 80 per-cent of the respondents were active news consumers or followers, while 20 per-cent were not actively following Syria's news.

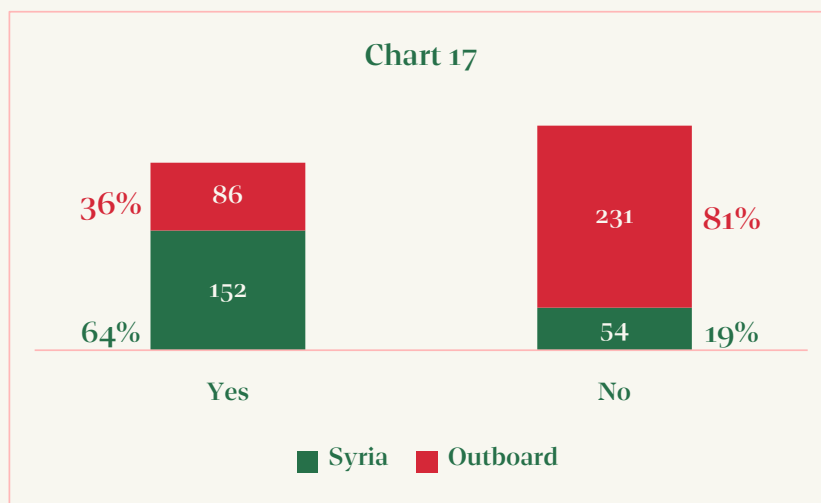
Interestingly, the active news followers, in large, are mainly youth from outside Syria, while inactive news followers are from outside Syria with 68 and 67 per-cent respectively. A coun-

try-based examination reveals that active news consumers from outside Syria are mainly based in Jordan 34%, and Kurdistan-Iraq 29%. The gender dimensions in this section also reflect similar results to the previous question. More male respondents followed the news about Syria, and more females on the non-interested front with 56% and 62% respectively. (chart 15 - 16)

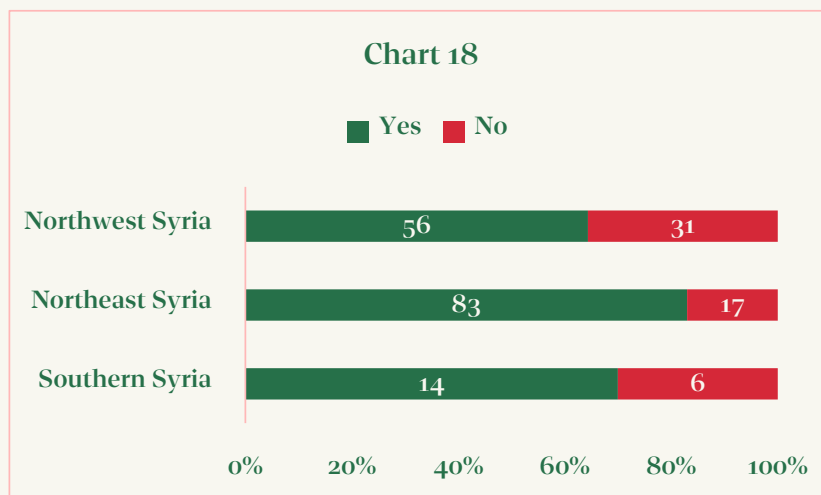


## 8- Have you been Part in Volunteering Activities?

When asked if they have taken part in social volunteering activities, respondents were mixed and near evening. Most of the surveyed respondents were in the negative inactive side just beyond the active one with 54% and 46% respectively of the overall percentage. Most of those who have been active in volunteering deeds were inside Syria with 64%, while those inactive were mainly outside Syria comprising 81% of the total surveyed. Furthermore, the study showed that those outside Syria active respondents were in Jordan with 21%; though those who were inactive were mainly residents of Kurdistan-Iraq comprising 44%, followed by Jordan with 34 per-cent. (chart 17)



Inside Syria, active participants in volunteering social initiatives and other aspects of campaigning, were in the Eastern part of the country followed by the west then the regime side with 54%, 37%, 9% respectively. On the opposite side, inactive ones were mainly in the Western part of Syria with 54%, followed by Eastern with 31%, and finally the regime side at the bottom with 11%. (chart 18)



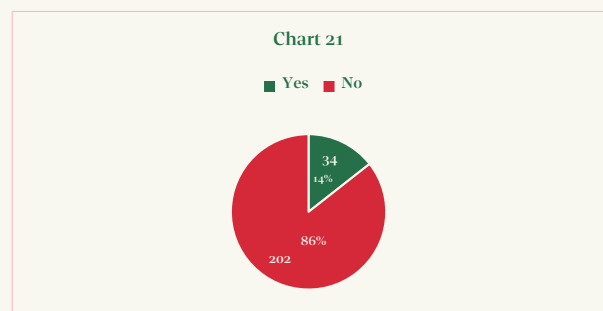
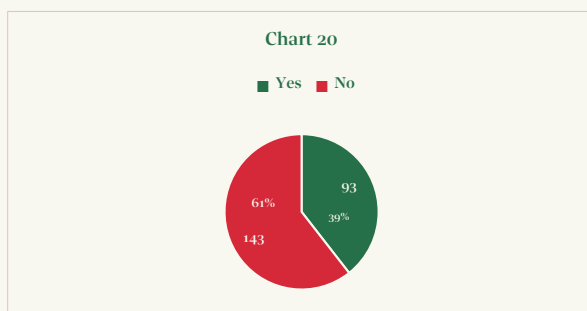
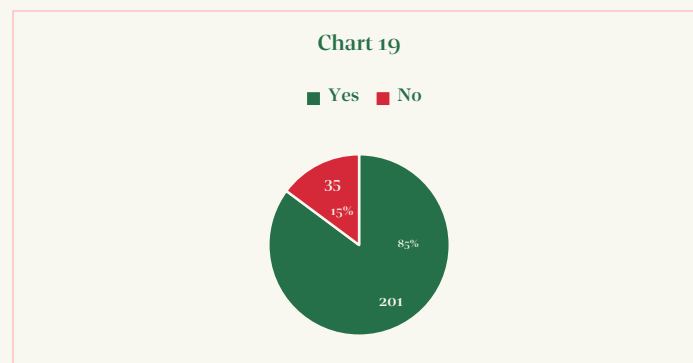
## 9- Have you taken part in civic activities helping your community, artistic, political?

Due to well-known reasons related to the authoritarian nature of the state, civil society as entities inside Syria were rare or exclusive to the regime circle pre-2012. However, post-2012, civic society revised, and its activities became widespread across all Syrian segments. This development opened new dimensions for Syrians to exercise civic activities.

When asked about their contribution to their local communities, surveyed youth conveyed a high proportion of engagement in civil oriented activities that contribute to their communities. Youth inside and outside Syria- as the survey showed- an overwhelming majority of active sentiment amongst them with 85%, while the non-active ones were minority comprising 15%. (chart 19)

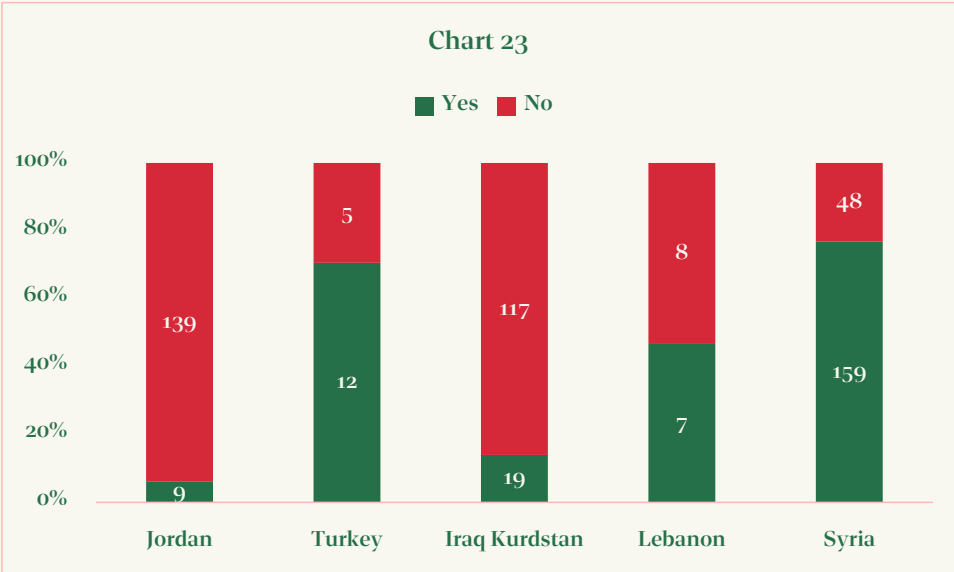
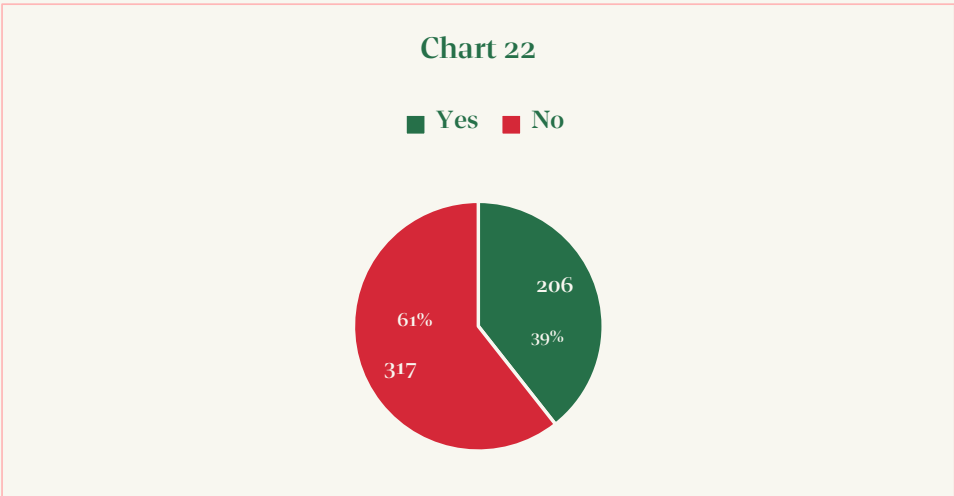
Those taking part in intellectual and artistic activities, however, were a minority scoring only 39 per-cent, while 61 per-cent said they did participate in such exercise. (chart 20)

On the political activities front, the study showed a conventional output, showing that the vast majority of respondents have not taken part in any political pursuit comprising 86 per-cent of the total surveyed respondents. (chart 21)



# 10- Have you been engaging with active citizens with an organized entity whether political, humanitarian, civically or else?

The study shows that the numbers of the active respondents who have been exercising their activities with a cohort organization comprise only 39%, while the vast majority of the respondents appears to be working independently without political affiliation or organization. The latter mostly reside outside Syria with 85 per-cent, while the former respondents are inside Syria with 77 per-cent. It is worth noting that the non-organized respondents outside Syria reside mainly in Jordan with 44 per-cent, and Kurdistan-Iraq scored 37 per-cent. (chart 22 - 23)

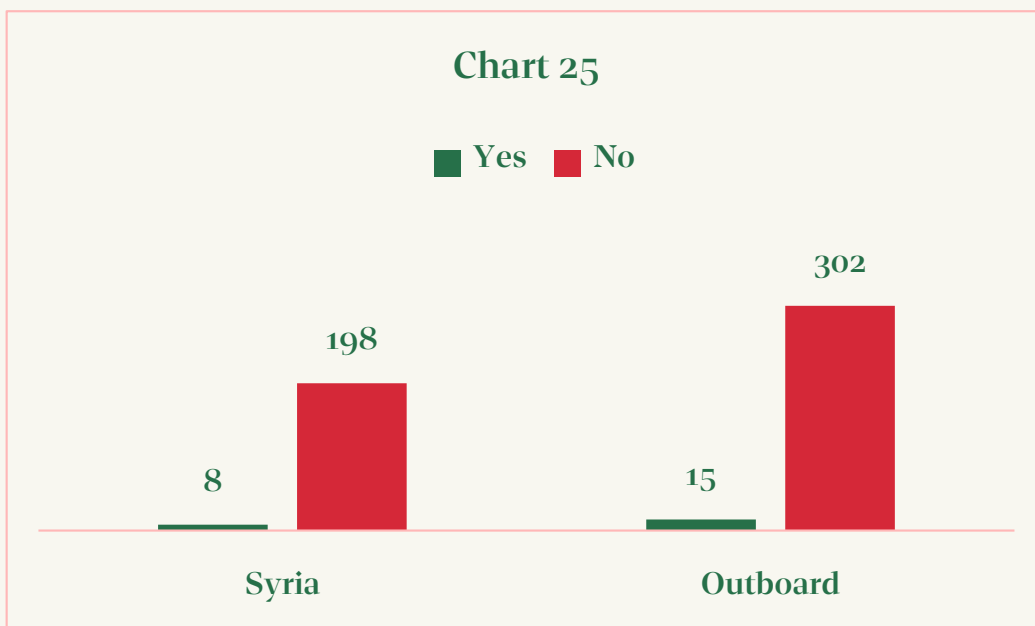
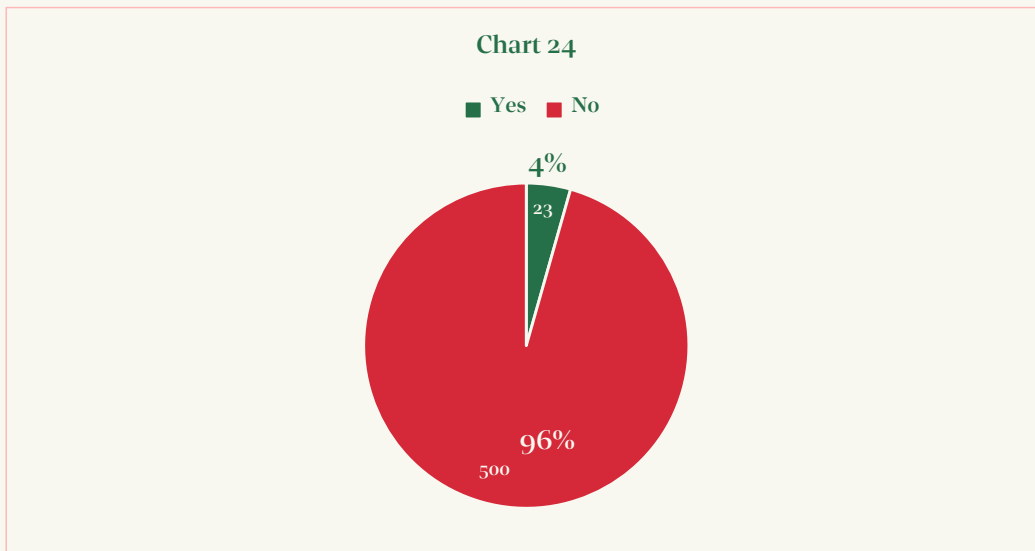




## 11- Have you been politically active with an organized political entity?

The study shows that only a fraction of the respondents has been active, while the vast majority of them have not actively participated in any political activity or engaged with a political party, scoring 4% and 96% respectively. (chart 24)

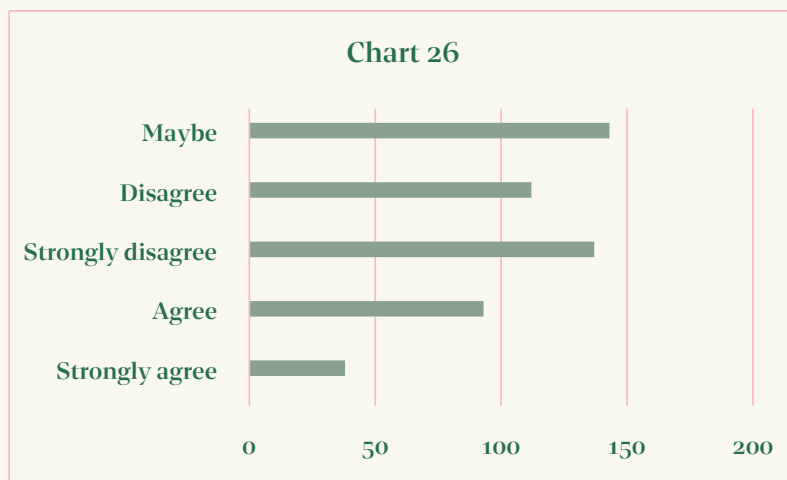
It is noted that the vast majority of the active respondents are from the Kurdish ethnicity then followed by Arab ethnicity with 61 per-cent and 39 per-cent respectively. (chart 25)



## 12- To what extent do you concur with the following statements:

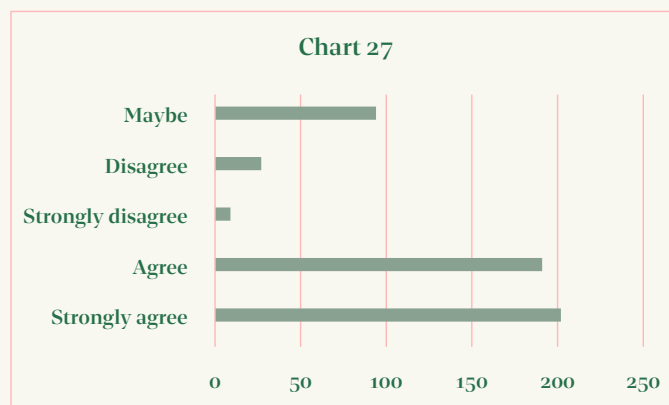
### a. Youth lack of interest is the main reason for their absence from participating in the public sphere.

The study shows that the respondents' stance regarding the reasons for youth's absences in the public sphere phenomena have been mixed. In fact, respondents who said "Maybe" or "highly opposed" the above statement scored the highest proportion with 27 per-cent and 26 per-cent respectively. While those who said they "opposed" the statement comprised 21%, respondents who "highly agree" or "agree" with the statement marked the lowest with only 7%, and 18%. (chart 26)



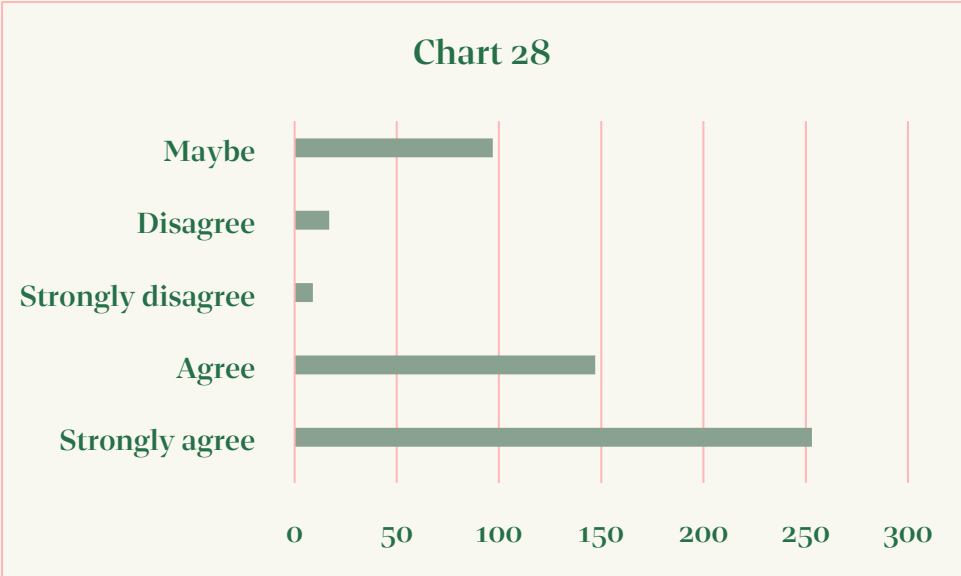
### b. The mainstream youth population in Syrian feels incapable of influencing decision makers, laws, or anything else

The study shows that the respondents' stance regarding the reasons for youth's lack of sense of contribution in Syria's current public sphere due to their lack of interest have been straightforward, confirming either highly or just agree with the reason stated above. The surveyed youth who said "highly agree" or "agree" scored the highest proportion with 39 and 37 per-cent respectively. While a considerable 18 per-cent of them were not quite sure about the statement, only 7 per-cent either opposed it or highly opposed it. (chart 27)



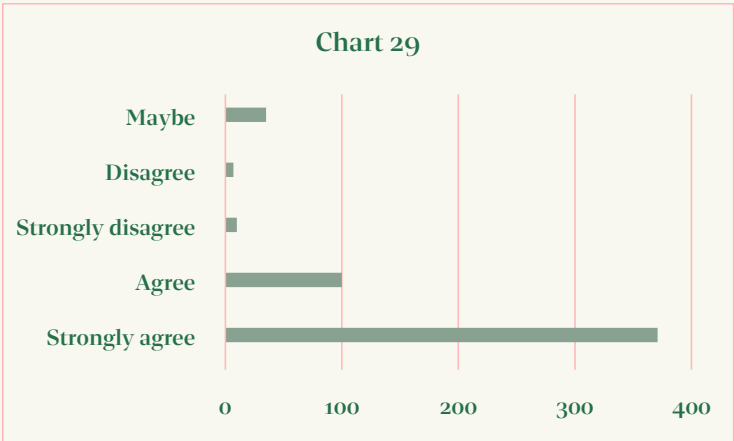
**c. There is an existing gap between the younger and old generation where older people are in-charge of most of the leadership roles across political parties, official and non-official institutions leaving youth excluded and without an opportunity to effectively engage inside those entities**

As per the previous statement, surveyed youth by far “agreed” or “highly-agreed” with this statement comprising in sum around 76 per-cent of the total respondents, while only 5 per-cent disagreed with the above claim, and the remaining 19% was reluctant and said “maybe” in response to the question. (chart 28)



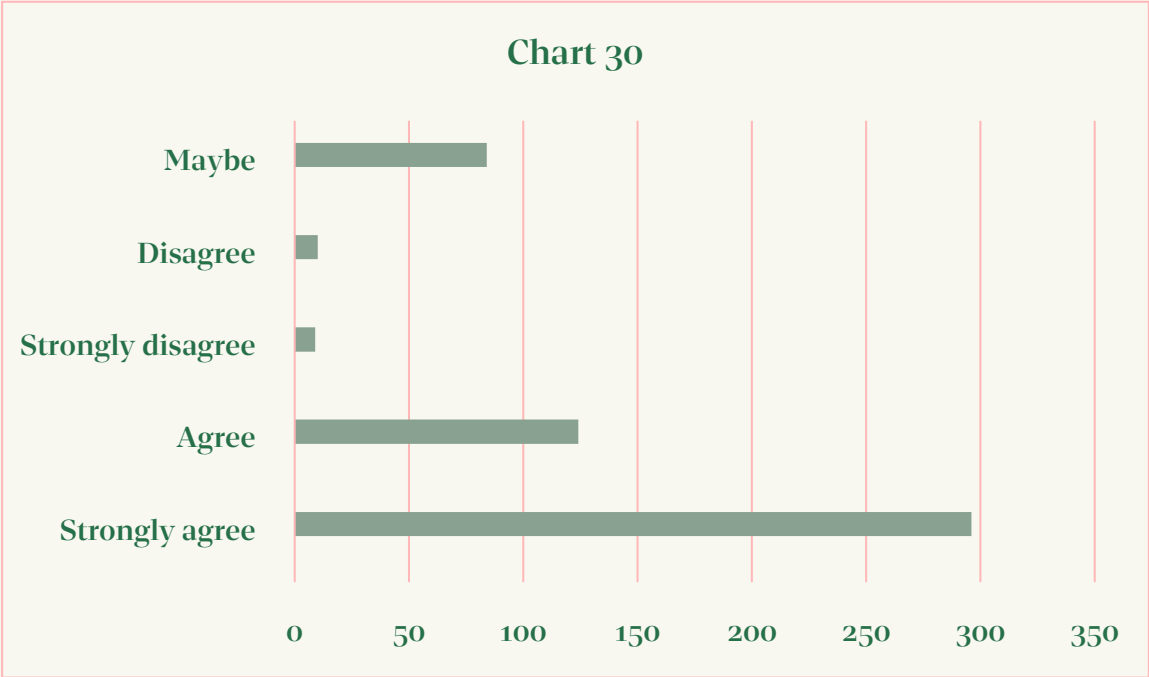
**d. Youth’s poor economic circumstances and lack of employment opportunities made youth’s interest to participate in the public sphere on the bottom of their priorities**

As per the previous statement, surveyed youth by far “agreed” or “highly-agreed” with this statement comprising in sum around 76 per-cent of the total respondents, while only 5 per-cent disagreed with the above claim. (chart 29)



**e. Lack of democratic frameworks inside Syria’s political parties, official and non-official institutions**

Surveyed youth by far “agreed” or “highly-agreed” with the lack of democratic cultures and habits in Syria, comprising jointly around 81 per-cent of the total respondents, while only 4 per-cent disagreed with the above claim. (chart 30)



**f. Societal intolerance to youth’s mere existence in leadership roles across all sectors**

In contrast to the previous statements, the surveyed youth by far “agreed” or “highly-agreed” on the outlined statements, in this case, respondents not sure about the statement and voted “maybe” comprised 29 per-cent. Though, those who agreed or highly agreed with it, outweigh those who disagreed or disagreed with it comprising 39%, and 31% respectively. It is worth noting that the concurred side was mainly formed of Syrians inside Syria, while the disagreeing side was formed by Syrians outside the country. Further, those who voted “perhaps” were mainly residing outside Syria, comprising 59 per-cent, while those inside counted 41 per-cent.

Interestingly, disagreeing respondents outside Syria were mainly in Jordan, while Kurdistan-Iraq equaled Syria’s figures with 54% and 22% respectively. Similarly, those who highly disagreed with the statement were mainly residing in Syria, then Jordan and Kurdistan-Iraq followed with 55%, 21%, and 16% respectively. (chart 31 - 32)

Chart 31

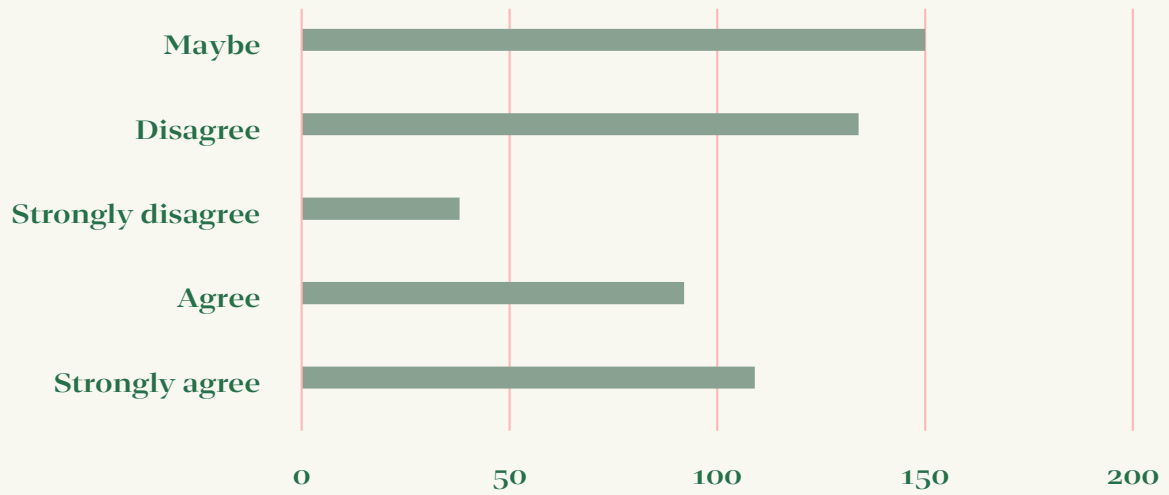
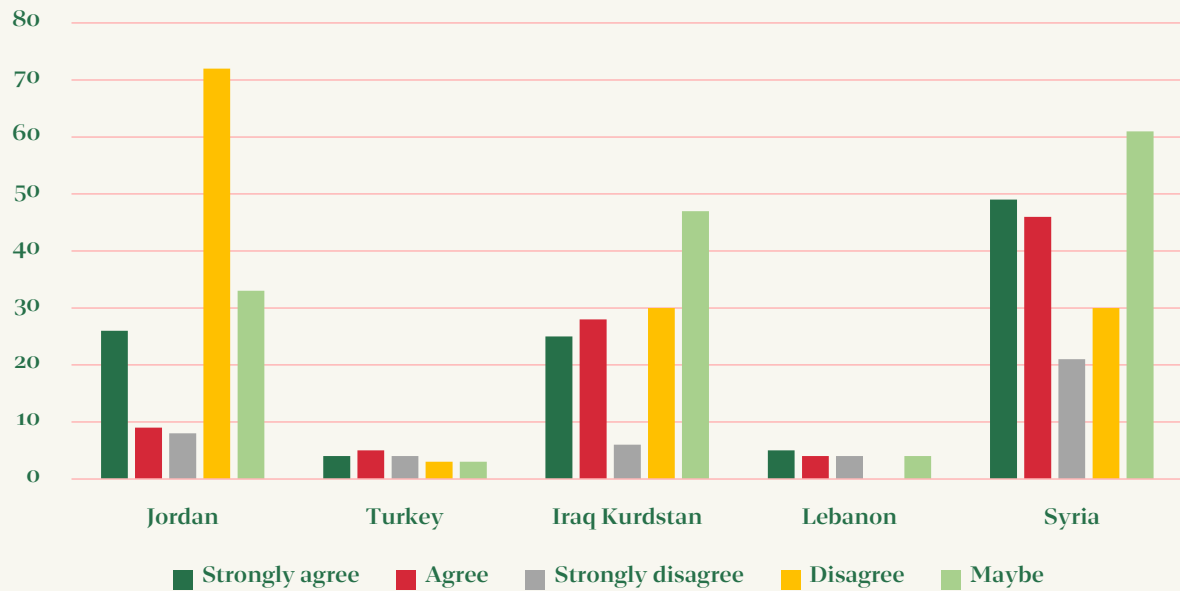
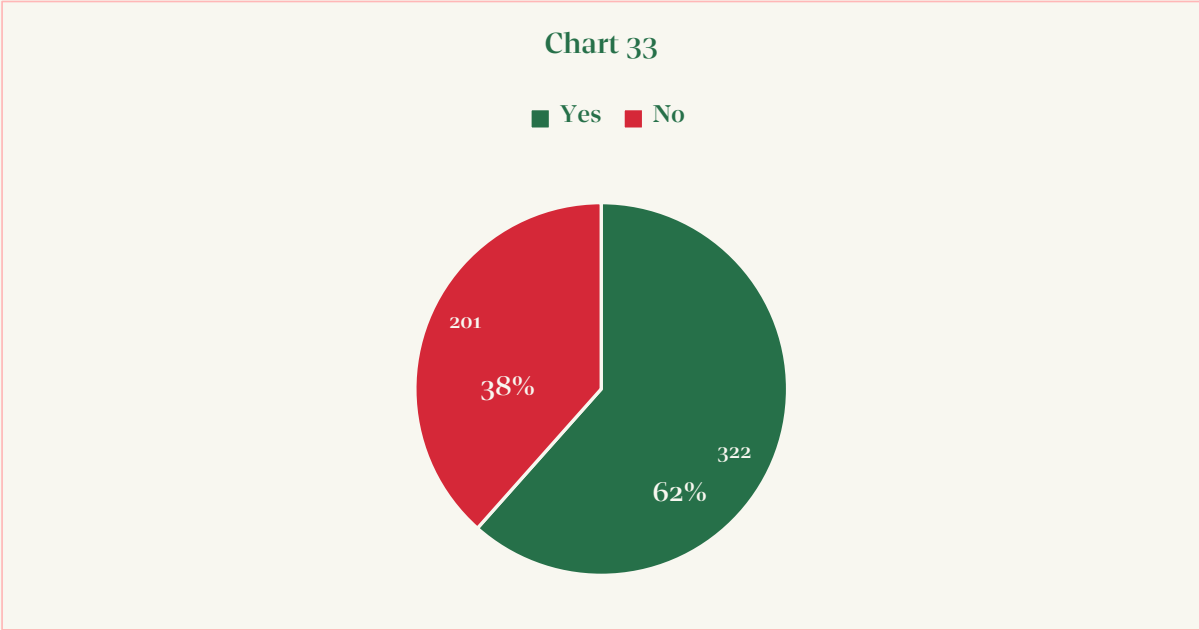


Chart 32



**g. Gender Sensitive: youth females face more challenges due to their gender and age; do you agree or disagree?**

The survey reveals that more Syrian youth believe that gender issues hinder women’s role in society and disadvantage her opportunities in comparison to their male counterparts. According to the study, 61% of respondents agreed with the statement, while a considerable 39% did not think that gender consideration stands as a mainstream challenge for women in Syria. Interestingly, the vast majority of the disagreeing respondents reside outside Syria with 71%, in Jordan 42%, and Kurdistan-Iraq 25%; while the agreeing respondents were nearly equal between inside and outside Syria with 55% and 45% respectively. (chart 33 - 34)



Furthermore, dissecting the respondents through a gender lens, it was clear that there was a female majority, albeit not a striking one, that gender inequality hindered women’s role, while males were the majority in the disagreeing segment comprising 59 per-cent, and 71 per-cent respectively. (chart 35)

Chart 34

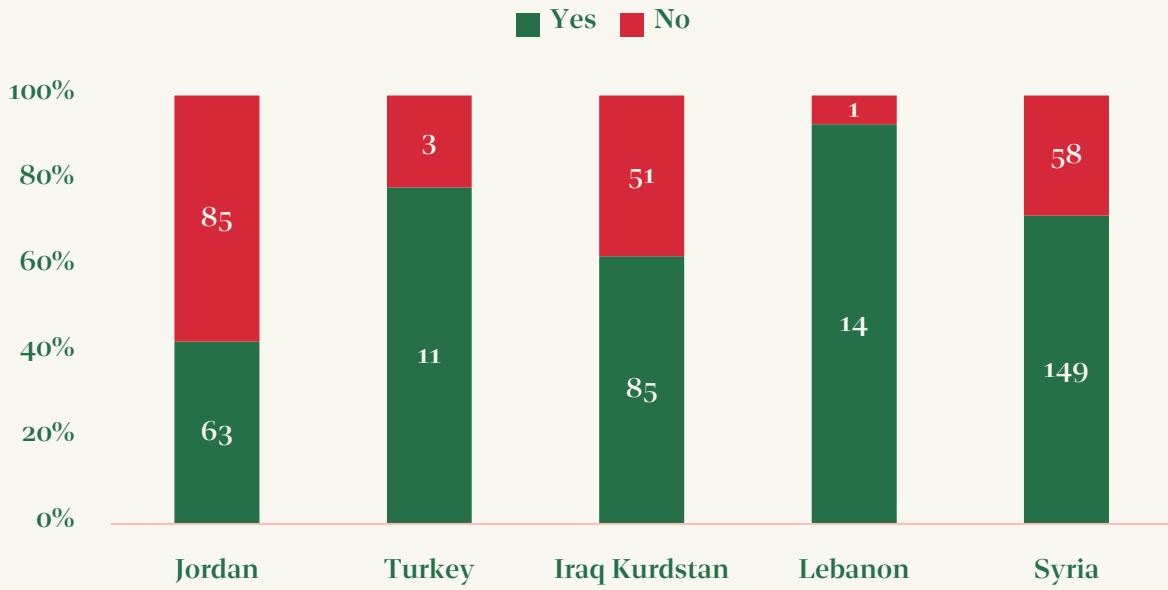
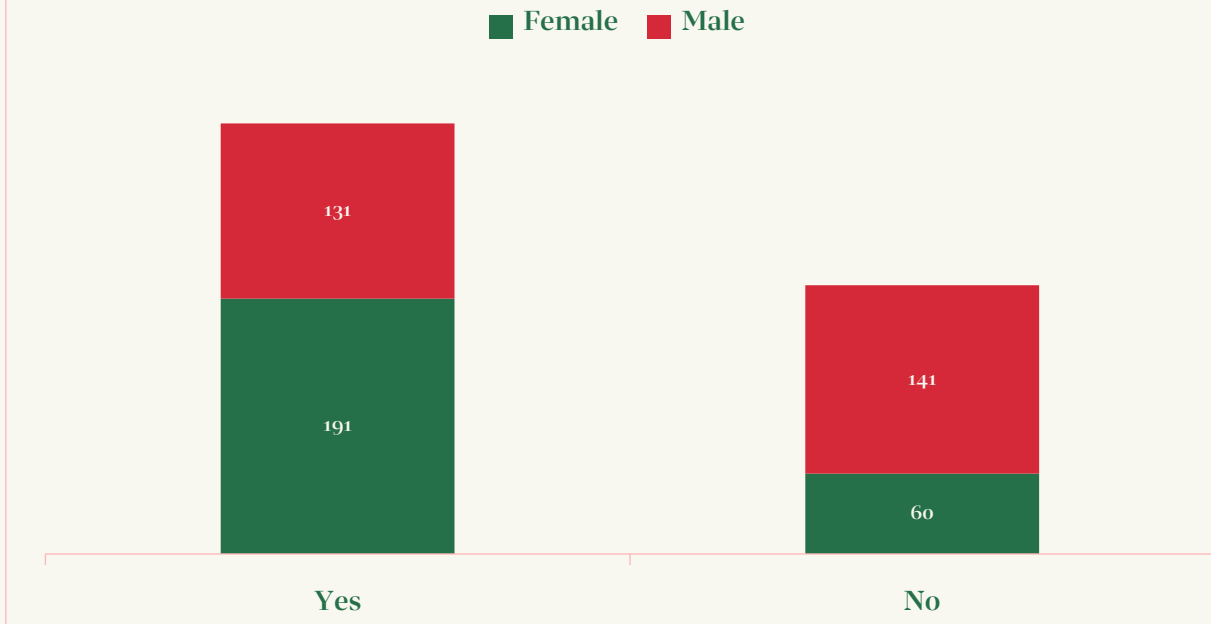


Chart 35



On the one hand, when asked about the reasons for their answers, male respondents who said that gender is an issue that continues to hinder women's participation conveyed that the Syrian society sees women as a non-fit leader and cannot handle pressure. Others said that Syrian societies, namely in the countryside, have a rigid patriarchal traditions and customs system, which play a core role in women's marginalization, namely when it comes to their participation in public affairs issues, which they deem inclusive to the female. On the other hand, surveyed male and females who begged to disagree with the abovementioned statement, argued that female youth have already obtained a high role and participation in the society and are being empowered more than their male counterparts in the society. Others argued the nature of the political high-ranking leadership roles encompasses a lot of pressure and capacity in which females are not able to handle, hence they are better be directed to work in other avenues that do not have such pressurizing work environments.

Female respondents who agreed with the statement conveyed that gender and age continues to be a hurdle for women's marginalization from having an effective precedence in leadership positions. They argue that society deems women unable to understand the world of politics. The Syrian society, they argue, framework women's role in the society with a fixed misogynist, patriarchal thoughts and ideas that presuppose women's inability to engage with or work effectively in the political sphere. Some sum it up saying that the mainstream of Syrian society thinks that working in the political fields is men-exclusive, and men are egotistical power-hungry creatures whose eagerness is to make women's role be centralized around soft, caring roles in the society.



# Third Chapter

**Stage Two:** A rundown over youth's vision of what they deem as an aiding component that would encourage them to actively engage in Syria's public affairs

How Do You Think Taking Part in the Public Sphere should be like in Syria?

*AV:* Speaking of youth empowerment in their societies, It has always been a superficial and application-lacking talk in the Syrian political landscape.

In your views, what are the prime practical lines of actions that need to be upheld across all the sectors, economic, social, political, civil, and educational?

In response to this question, the vast majority of youth across all countries cited implementation of a nationwide economic reform and enhancement of the economic situation in Syria as one of the key steps that needs to be taken into account in order to restore effective youth participation. They asserted that this support should include all Syria, especially areas where destruction of the war had taken a heavy toll on its residents. And most importantly, creating more jobs and facilitating capacity building programs to help youth rebuild Syria, and rely on themselves.

Respondents also addressed the following key measures that ought to be implemented, to boost-up youth participation in Syria's public affairs

- Amending Syria's constitution and laws to include a mandatory youth quota especially in leadership positions, and facilitate a youth-friendly environment for their inclusivity in the public affairs
- Hold an authentic election and improve transparency application across all state institutions and public entities
- Mandatory military conscription removal
- Political change, and harness more democratic, political rights and freedoms in the country

AU: What are the prime hurdles that hinder youth's effective participation in the public sphere?

According to the study, the vast majority of the surveyed youth consider the following reasons as the main hurdle that obstruct their participation in the public sphere.

- Security intelligence.
- Deteriorating economic challenges
- Lack of social acceptance to youth participation or selection to be in high ranking leadership roles
- The older generation control of most of the leadership roles
- Lack of organizational efforts by governmental entities or civil society actors to boost and encourage youth participation
- Lack of youth-friendly environment for youth to participate in public sphere across all sectors

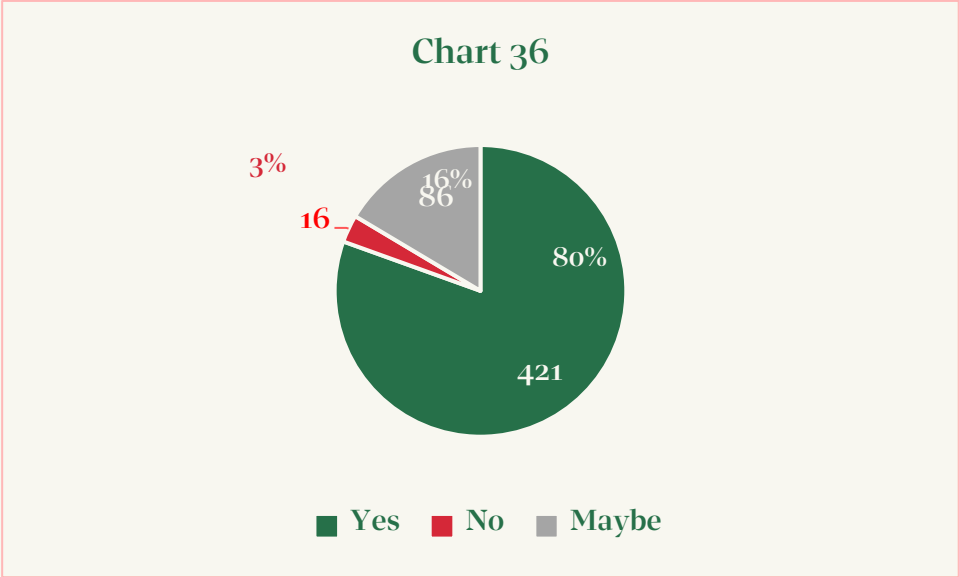
· The destruction and war in the country swayed youth away from any participation to improve living conditions in Syria, to think of leaving the country for better opportunities

Others believed that military conscription is a major obstacle that youth face nowadays and lack of institutional government support. They also believe that Al-Ba'ath party role in discriminating against local social groups, and discriminate based on ethnic background in government jobs took a major toll on youth's hopes of a better future, let alone of participation in the public arena. Furthermore, the widespread unemployment, drugs, insecurity proliferation were amongst the reasons youth respondents cited as a reason from youth's mere presence in public sphere

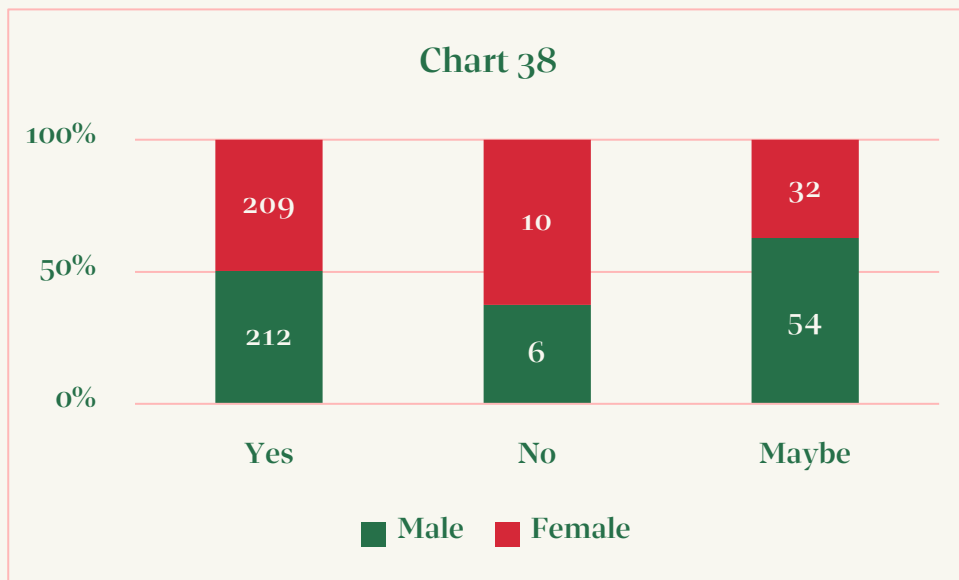
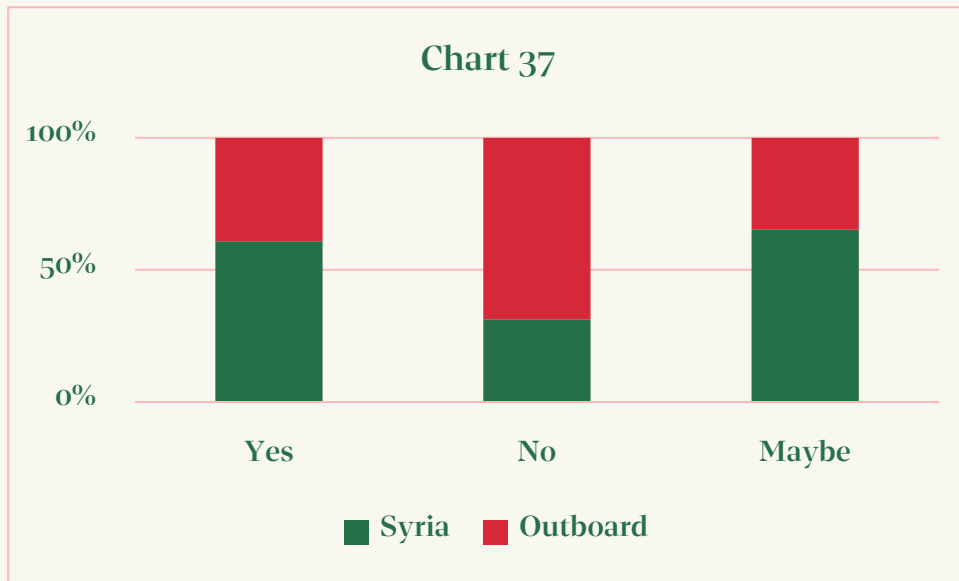
### 13- Over the past ten-years, thousands of Syrian youths left Syria. Do you think that their inclusion in rebuilding Syria is necessary?

A Whopping 80 per-cent of the total surveyed youth in and outside Syria conveyed their support of inclusive participation and non-exclusion of Syrians residing outside the country. (chart 36)

Those who were in opposition comprised only 3 per-cent. While the vast majority of those in support of the statement were outside Syria, with 61%, those who were in opposition were mainly from inside Syria with 69%. Those who were unsure and voted “perhaps” resided as follows; 65 per-cent inside Syria, 35 per-cent outside Syria. (chart 37)



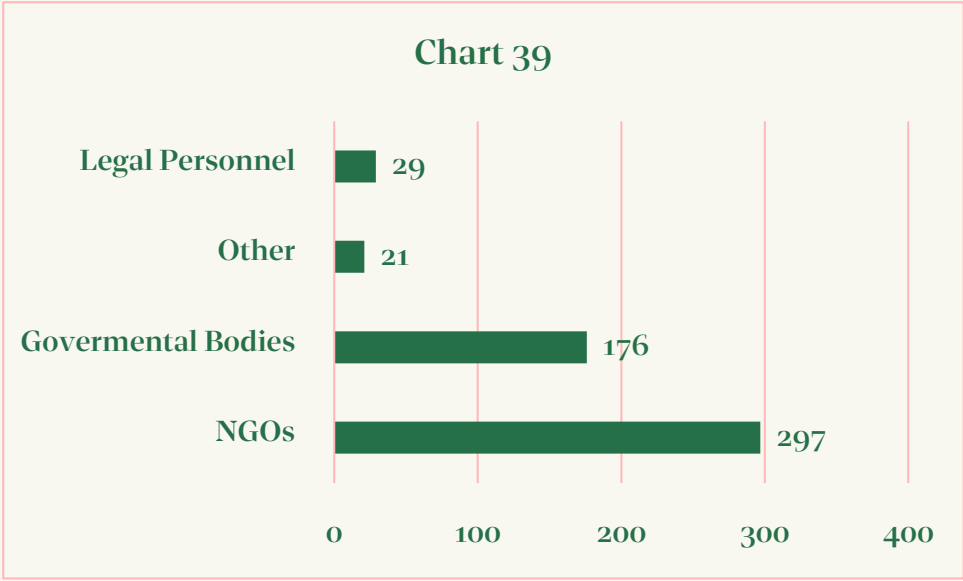
When asked how this could be achieved, they conveyed that more inclusive laws, embracing democratic practices, cancelling emergency law, as well as fixing the economy in Syria would significantly encourage youth to go back to Syria. Others, considered that a holistic judiciary, legal and political reform would contribute to the desired outcome. This can also be achieved via activating Syrian political consultants across the world and inviting Syrians to partake in cross socio-political activities abroad aimed at increasing their engagement and sense of belonging to Syria so that they consider going back to Syria. (chart 38)



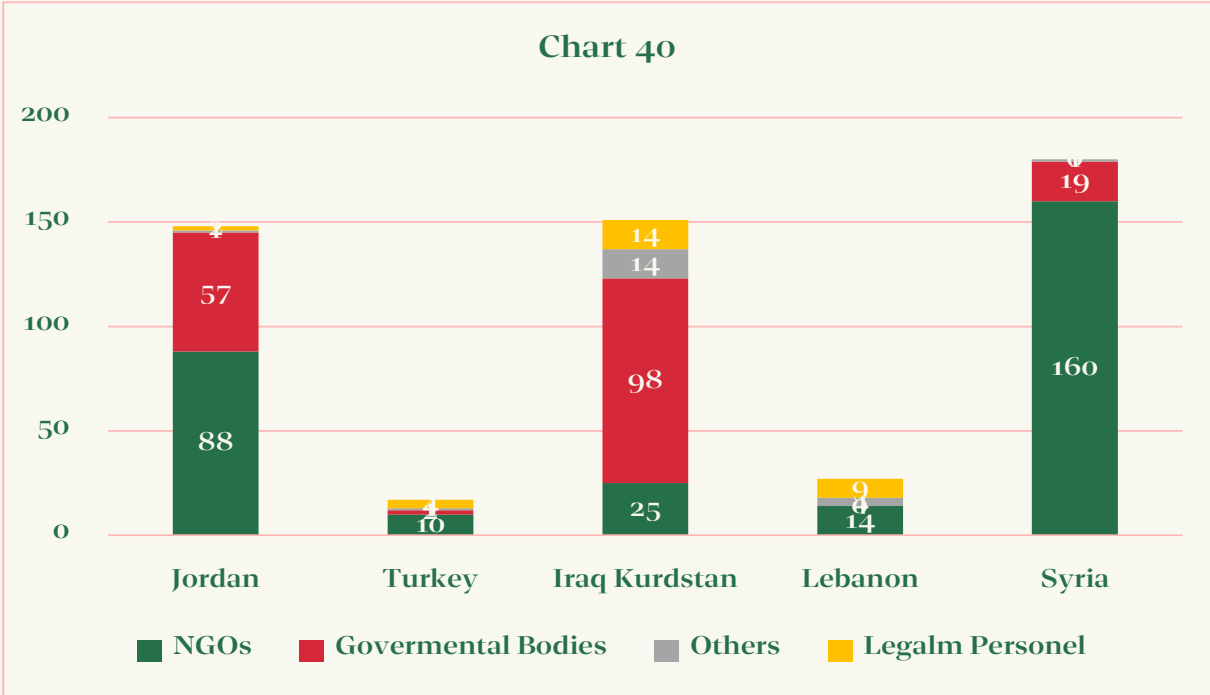
## 14- Who are the organizations which you consider trustworthy to work on youth capacity-building?

Youth capacity building has been one of the most important considerations for developing, and forward looking a better future in post-war Syria. Given its significance and impact on Syria's future, the study addressed youth's vision in regard to whom they think is most suitable to undertake this task.

(chart 39)



A considerable proportion of them considered-Civil Society Organizations- at the top of the trustworthiness with 57 per-cent. A great number of them were from outside Syria, with 54 per-cent. Interestingly, 34 per-cent of the respondents considered that -Governmental Organizations- are best suited to uphold this mission, most of which from inside Syria, with 89 per-cent. Furthermore, respondents outside Syria who thought that Governmental Organizations were mainly in Jordan and Kurdistan-Iraq, with 56%, and 32% respectively. (chart 40)

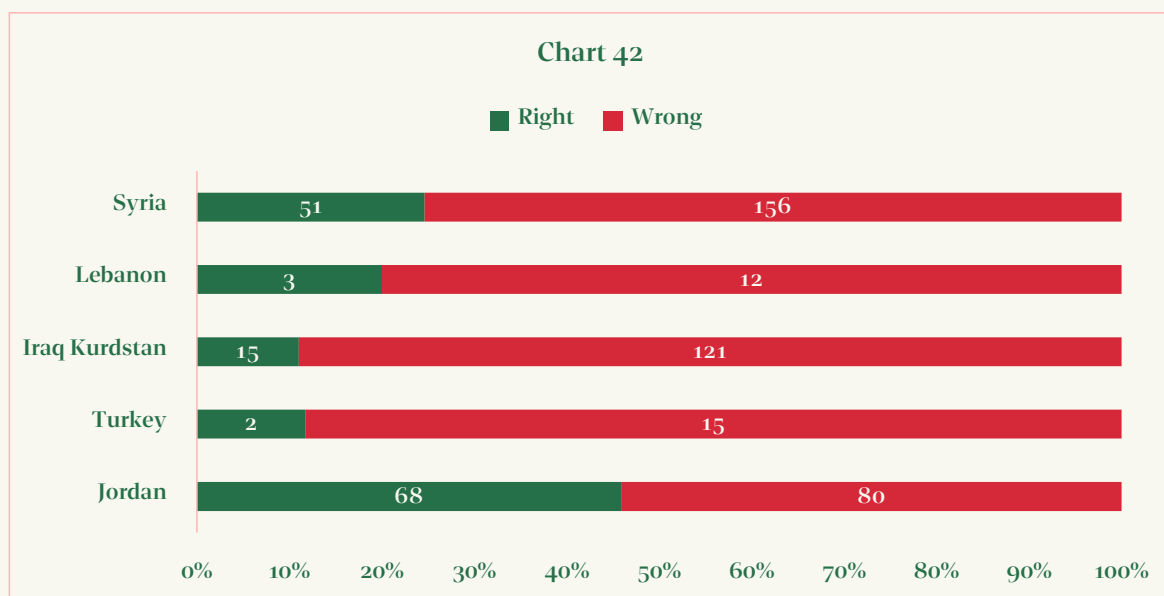
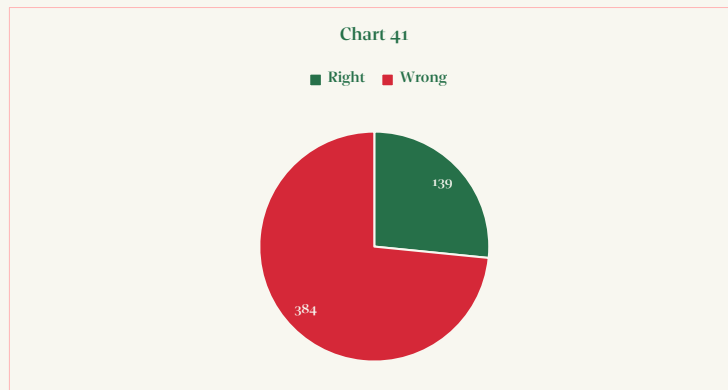


# 15- Do you happen to know the answers for the following questions,

## a. The Legal Age for Candidacy for The People's Assembly in Syria

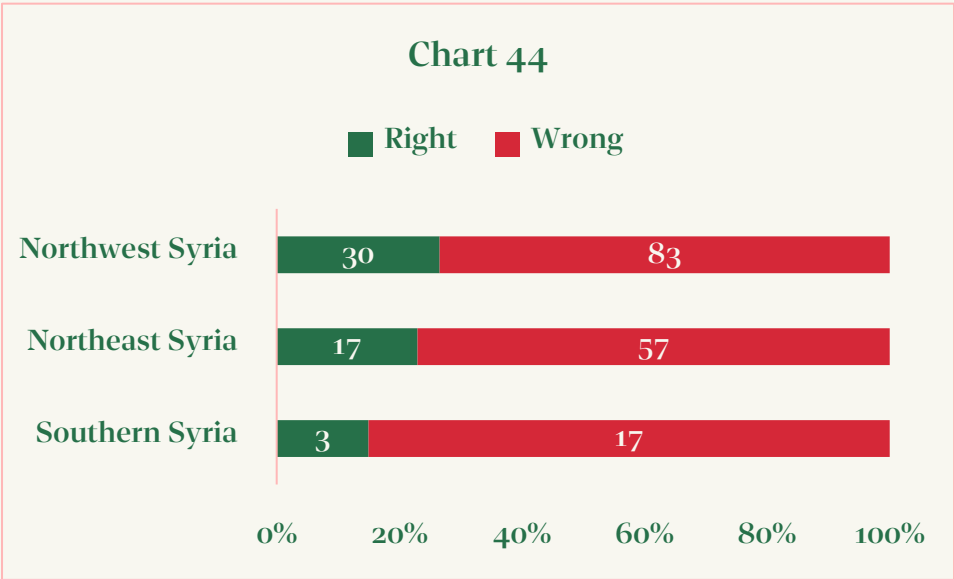
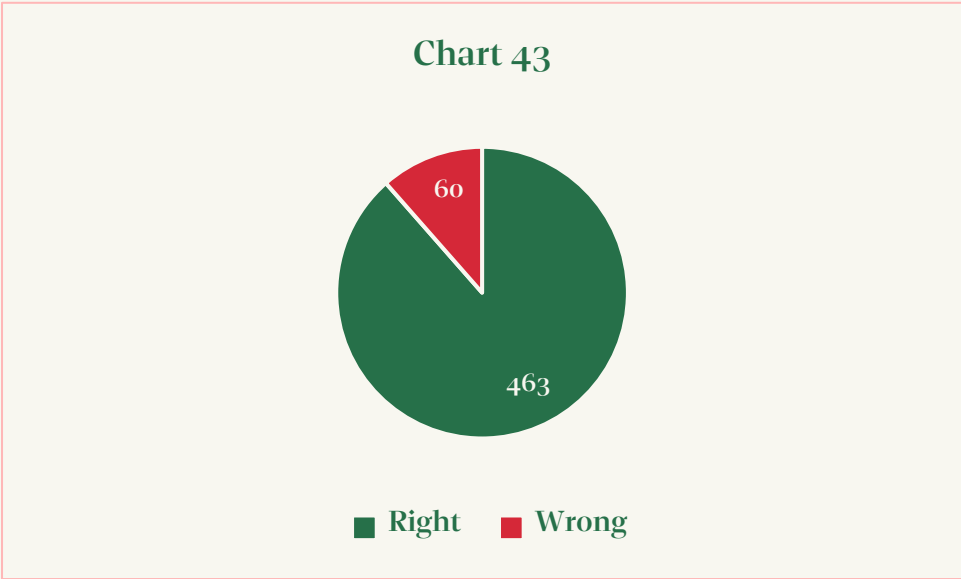
According to the survey, the majority of youth respondents failed to guess the legal age the Syrian constitution addressed for The People's Assembly Candidacy, while nearly a quarter of them knew the right answer. The total number of respondents were mainly university students with nearly 58%.

Those who were inside Syria scored less right, and wrong answers with 40% only, while those outside Syria, scored more in the wrong and right answer, with 60%. Within the outside respondents, Kurdistan-Syria scored the highest wrong answers figures with 32%, while Lebanon scored the lowest with only 3%. Inside Syria, respondents from Eastern part of the country scored the highest right answers figures with 63%, while those in the western part scored the highest wrong answers figures with 47%. It's worth noting that a nearly equal quota of both genders knew the right age, while a less female gave the wrong answer, although with a fraction difference, with 47 per-cent. (chart 41-42)



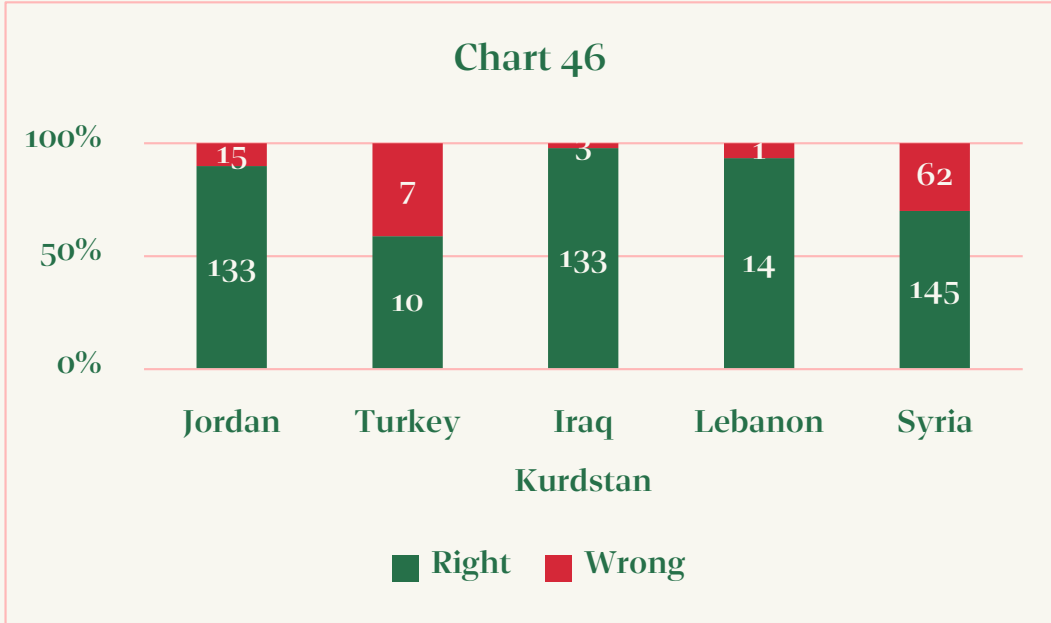
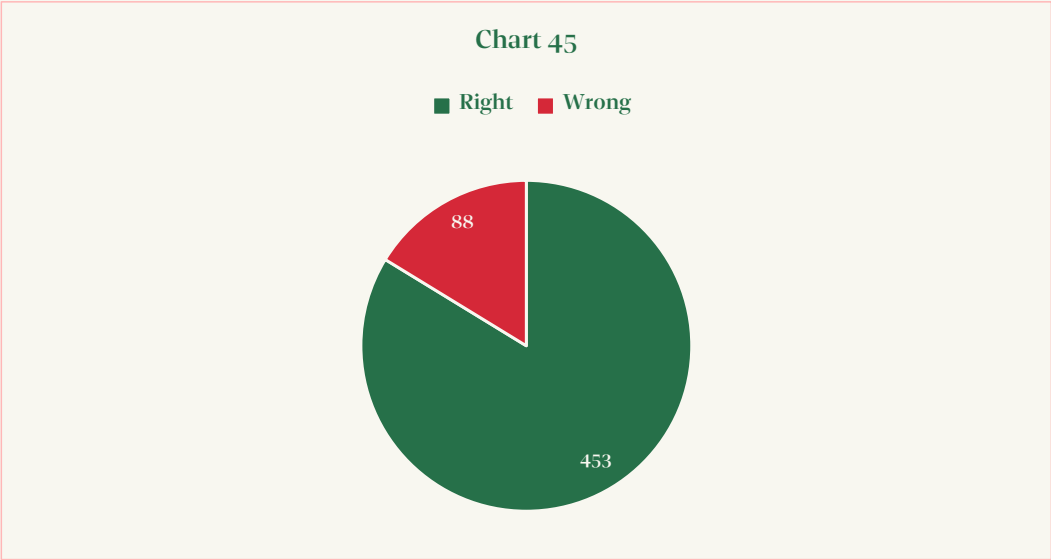
**b. The Legal Age to Have the Right to Vote in Syria?**

According to the survey, the majority of youth respondents failed to guess the legal age the Syrian constitution addressed for The Right to Vote, while only 11 per-cent knew the right answer. Similar to the previous question, respondents inside Syria who answered the right answer held the highest proportion, while those outside Syria comprised the majority of those who wrongly answered the question with 66%, and 83% respectively. Those residing inside Syria in the Eastern part of it, answered the highest number of right answers, while those in the Western part of the country answered the highest percentage of wrong answers with 53%, 60% respectively. (chart 43 - 44)



**c. The Legal Age for Military Conscription in Syria**

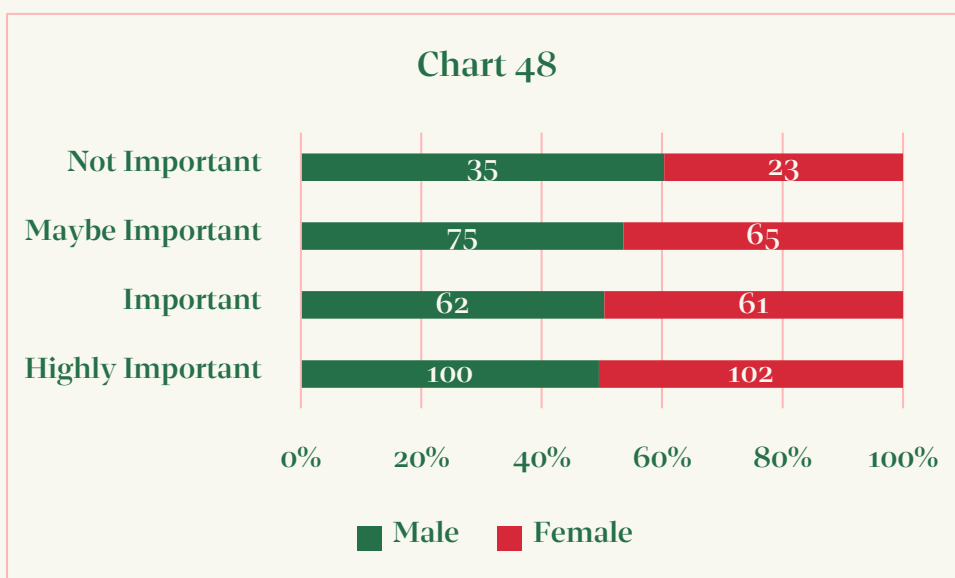
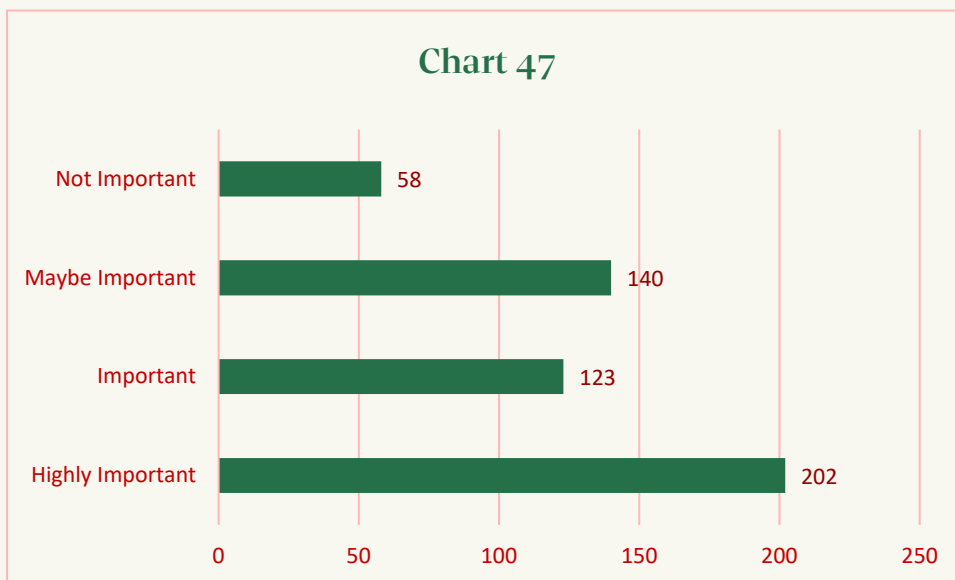
According to the survey, the majority of youth respondents failed to guess the legal age for military conscription while only 17 per-cent a quarter of them knew the right answer. In contrast to the previous question, respondents based inside comprised the highest percentage of the wrong answers with 70%. Respondents from outside scored the highest percentage of right answers with 67%, with Kurdistan-Iraq and Jordan comprising the highest with 31% for each. (chart 45 - 46)





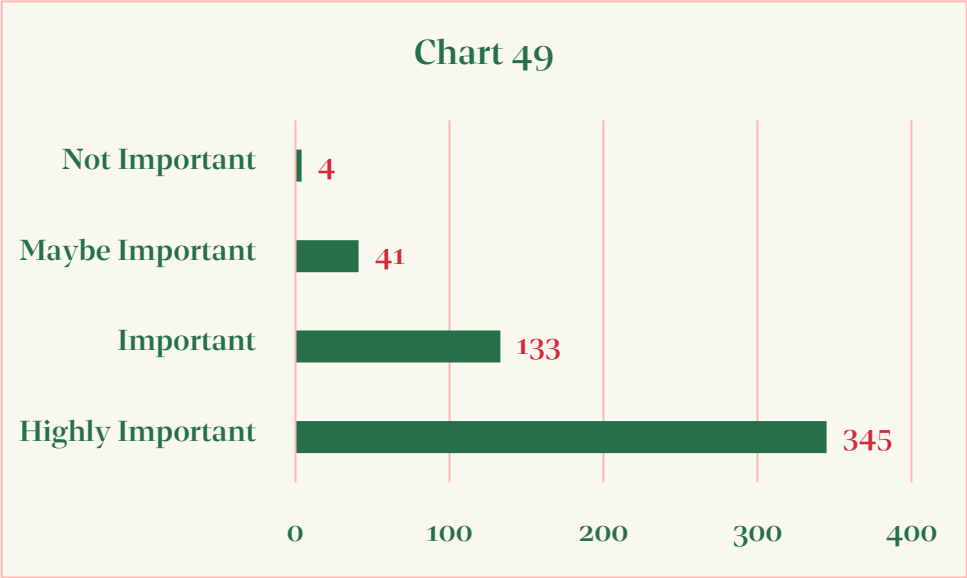
## 16- How Important is the following statement to you?

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) decisions in regard to youth empowerment. The study shows that Syrian youth hold a high regard to the UNSC's decisions to underpin youth's empowerment and support, scoring 63%. While 24% thought the UNSC could potentially have a positive impact, only 11% said they have zero impact on Syrian youth. It was worth mentioning that those who showed skepticism and were not quite convinced of the statement above or were completely negative about it were from outside Syria with 81%, and 91% respectively. Furthermore, most of them were residing either in Jordan with 63%, or Kurdistan-Iraq with 43%. Gender wise, while comprising an equal quota on the positive perspective, more males were on the negative side than females who comprised around 43%, and males with 57%. (chart 47 - 48)



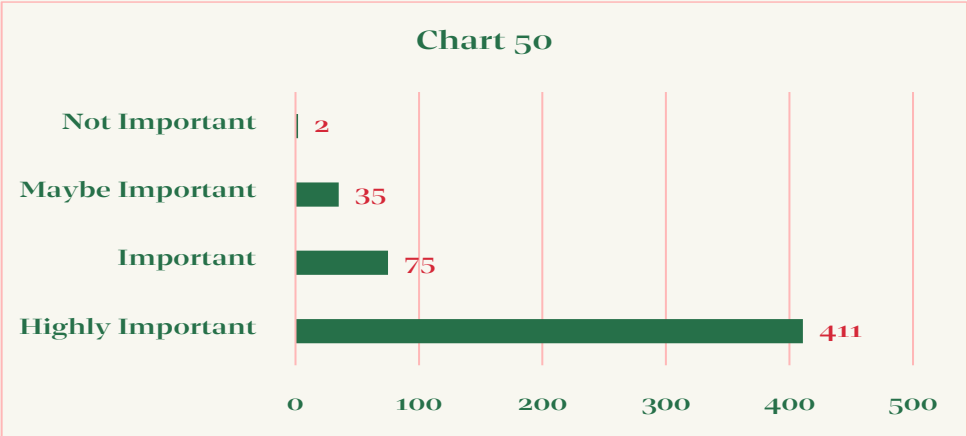
**b. An active youth-centric national entity or association which role is advance youth role into leadership positions.**

The study shows that the majority of surveyed youth support, more than the UNSC's decisions, the idea of a national union or entity that works to consolidate and strengthen their role in the future. Those who said that the statement above is important or highly important, scored 91%, while only 8% said such an entity might have an impact, and only 1% was completely negative. (chart 49)



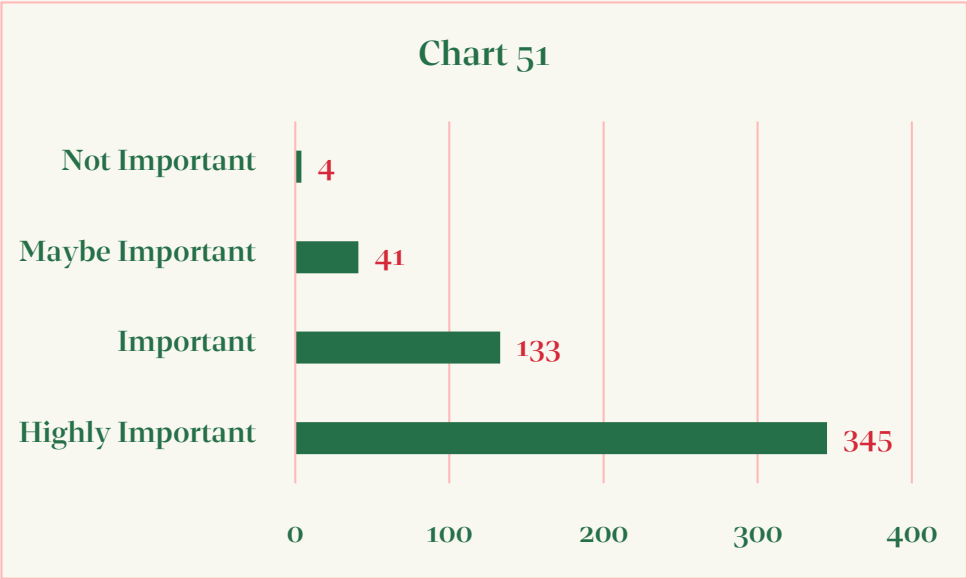
**c. Supporting independent youth initiatives and creating a private youth-inclusive platform to empower their role plays a pivotal role to advance their leadership role**

The study shows that the majority of surveyed youth are also in favor of the idea whereby providing them with an independent platform or supporting a youth initiative would aid to the ultimate aim of enhancing their role in the society. Those who said that the statement above is important scored 14% and those who said it is highly important scored 79%. While only 7% said such an entity might have an impact, and 2% who deemed its importance lacking. (chart 50)



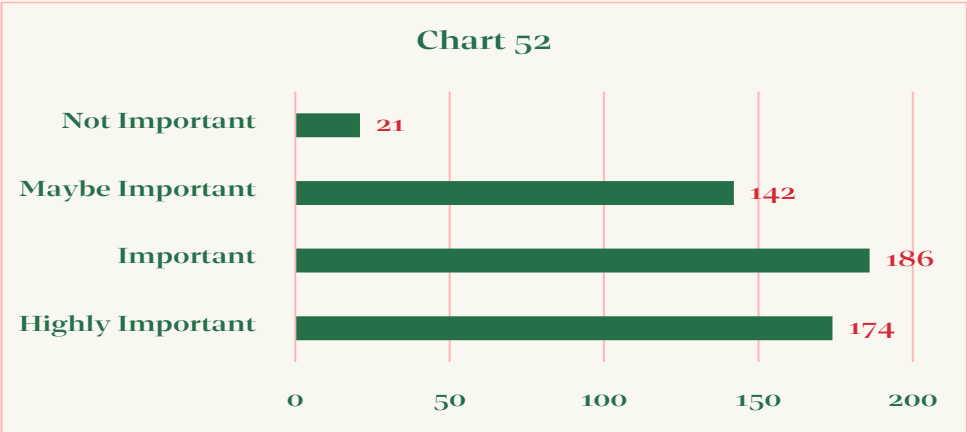
**d. A nationwide governmental policy adopted by the state**

The study shows that the majority of surveyed youth are also in favor of the idea that the lobbying and advocacy campaigning has a high contribution to Syrian youth empowerment. Those who said that the statement above is important scored 33% and those who said it is highly important scored 36%. Though a considerable proportion conveyed that such action could potentially have an impact scoring only 27%, while only 4% said such an endeavor would not have an impact at all. (Chart 51)



**e. A fixed youth-quota Solution Across Official Governmental Institutions**

The study shows that the majority of surveyed youth are also in favor of implementing a fixed quota for youth in state institutions and more youth representations at the official level would contribute to their empowerment. Those who said that the statement above is important scored 26% and those who said it is highly important scored 57%. Nearly 15% of the surveyed inside and outside Syria, conveyed that quota adoption, uncertainly, while only 2% said that this step would positively lead to youth empowerment in Syria. (Chart 52)



## 17- (BL) What do you think Could be implemented to ensure female participate effectively in the public sphere

Respondents to this question agreed by far that to guarantee women's participation in Syria's public arenas, women capacity building and empowerment policies by the ruling government should be upheld, and culture changes harnessed by local society groups. According to the surveyed youth, this can be particularly achieved through proper education, adopting laws that safeguard women's interest and guarantee an inclusive and effective participation in government leadership roles across all sectors. They also underscored establishing a mandatory quota, between 30% and 40% where women take a diverse spectrum of roles and responsibilities governing side by side to their male counterparts, namely at the executive level.

On the same token, other respondents called upon increasing efforts undertaken to motivate the young female generation to participate in the public sphere and train them to be a cornerstone of Syria's future and set a legally binding punitive consequences for any discriminatory action against them. Furthermore, raise locals' awareness to get rid of the embedded hostility, which continues to funnel women's efforts to contribute to their local communities making them neither motive nor active.

## Quotes



(10) Said that, "Laws should be decreed to safeguard women's interest, and set a minimum female staff quota across all governmental sectors between 30 & 40 per-cent."

(21) "Encourage female youth to enroll in higher education and incorporate them in the employment state programs. Foster women friendly environment in state institutions and work to appoint more women in executive roles as well as engaging and active civil society organisations that seek to underscore women role, and safeguard and advocate for their rights".

(114) "Work to incorporate laws that truly protect women's rights, and guarantee their effective participation in the public sphere. Enforce economic reforms and development programs that focus on women's capacity building and empowerment, so that they become dependent on themselves, rather than stay codependent."

(250), "Work towards a more inclusive bottom-up awareness program that tackles societal patriarchal and gendered traditions. Work to end social hostility towards women's participation and occupation of political public affairs roles".



## 18- (BL) In an imaginary scenario: If you had the power to take three decisions to uphold the youth role in Syria, what would those decisions be?

The vast majority of respondents in the survey called in the vast majority of respondents for a youth-centric policy change in Syria where politics, legal, political and economic reforms enable them with the needed tools to build themselves and ultimately rebuild Syria. Given that it was a major issue of concerns youth addressed in a previous section, they said they would, if they ever had the power, abolish security intelligence's control on state institutions, end forced military conscription, and make it optional. Others conveyed that they would introduce and work to incorporate a set of new laws that safeguard youth's agency and protect them from other homogenic entities that have all the money and resources.

They also focused on youth capacity building programs incorporation through civil society actors aimed at crafting youth's awareness of social and public affairs and providing them with the means they need to engage effectively with their representatives as well as representing their grassroots stakeholders in an authentic transparent framework. Youth addressed a comprehensive procedure that encompasses a holistic bottom-up reformist approach where corruption at the political, economic, and social levels are not only touched upon, but uprooted and resolved. In addition, a considerable number of the surveyed youth said that they would work to craft special laws that safeguard youth's representation, as well as female representation across all state institutions, especially on the executive levels such as house of parliament, and cabinet ministers.

A significant proportion of the surveyed youth conveyed that they would endeavor to form an inclusive ruling system where all Syrians are represented, their rights are protected, and services and equality of opportunities are guaranteed for all Syrians regardless of their ethnic, religious, familial backgrounds or else. Others focused on empowering the key grassroots marginalized societies by introducing key development economic projects and investments that would aid to their financial development and security so that they are reliable on themselves.

## Quotes

“ (21) A male youth from Homes who is residing in France said that he would, “bring about a holistic political reform in Syria, abolish all security intelligence branches across the country, and remove all occupying foreign actors and work to encourage Syrian youth to return so that Syria is rebuilt by its own young people”

(64) A female Kurdish youth said that she will work to implement a wide-scale economic reform and work to decrease and end poverty and unemployment through creating job opportunities in the country. Also, she said that she will

amend the laws to incorporate a fixed quota for youth in political positions. And work to build youth capacity and raise their awareness by giving more space to civil society actors.

(65) Another one said, “I would remove the mandatory military conscription, introduce a set of laws that safeguard youth’s quota and participation in the government, and work to create more jobs for youth since a lot of Syrians left due to the harsh economic conditions”.

(211) Another one said, “I would work to fix unemployment and attract youth in diaspora to return, fix the education system, and employ youth governmental high-ranking roles.”

(366), another one said, “I would adopt a nationwide policy geared more towards youth capacity building and prioritize their welfare across all the state institutions; support civil society actors, especially those working on youth empowerment, and guarantee and protect civil and political rights and freedoms in Syria.”



