

Presidential Elections Between reality and the Syrians opinions

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Executive Summary:

Before the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, the renewal of the presidential term of the head of the Syrian regime Bashar Al-Assad and Al-Assad the Father before him was conducted through a public referendum conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Permanent Syrian Constitution of 1973, which did not limit the number of presidential terms which the president can run for, and as the case is in various dictatorial regimes, it was certain that the results of the referendum will be the approval of the Syrian people to renew the presidential term.

In March 2011, the first protests calling for political reform, freedom and dignity in Syria started, and the Syrian regime adopted the security force-based solution to face these protests along with conducting some nominal reforms, as it adopted a new constitution in 2012, which stipulated multipartism and stipulated the number of presidential terms for the president to be two terms only. In fact, these attempts by the regime did not succeed to extinguish the demands of Syrians, on the contrary, the excessive violence and violations committed by the regime against Syrians caused them to use weapons, which turned the situation in Syria into an armed conflict, and the military operations and confrontations between the regime and armed groups have increased, and the regime has used all types of weapons, including the air force, targeting all areas beyond its control, and in fact, civilians have been the most affected by the conflict, as the number of casualties and injured people have significantly increased, along with the massive destruction of cities and towns, forcing millions of Syrians to flee their areas of origin towards safer areas inside or outside Syria.

In the face of the massive humanitarian disaster in Syria, the international community has intervened in the conflict in an effort to find a political solution to end the fighting taking place in the country since the early years of the revolution, as in 2012, the Geneva 1 Statement condemned the escalation of military operations, destruction and violation of human rights, and recommended ending the armed violence and to intensify the pace of releasing arbitrarily arrested detainees, including detainees who were arrested for participating in peaceful political activities, the statement has also called for forming a transitional governing body and a review of Syria's constitutional system and legal system. For its part, the Security Council issued resolution 2254 of 2015, which is the main reference for the political solution in Syria, and confirmed that the Syrian people is the party which shall decide the future of the country, demanded ceasing attacks on civilians, expressed support for starting a political process in Syria facilitated by the United Nations to establish a credible and non-sectarian governance that includes all parties, and set a timetable for drafting a new constitution for the country and holding free and fair elections pursuant to the new constitution under the supervision of the United Nations in a safe and neutral environment that includes all Syrians, including Syrians living in countries of refuge.

In accordance with Resolution 2254, a constitutional committee was formed to draft a new constitution for the country, but no timetable was set for the work of that committee, which allowed the Syrian regime to procrastinate and disrupt its work in an effort to hinder the adoption of the new constitution before the presidential elections, as in 2014, the regime issued General Elections Law No. 5, which prevented Syrians who left Syria illegally from participating in the elections, the regime recently announced its intention to hold presidential elections in May 2021, which will be conducted in accordance with the Syrian Constitution of 2012.

Given the importance of the presidential elections and its impact on the future of Syria and Syrians, we conducted this study during April and the first half of May 2021, which

aims to explore the views of Syrian citizens in areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces in Deir ez-Zor Governorate about the elections and the extent of its legitimacy, and to know whether they support holding them under the current circumstances in Syria, and to determine the impact of these elections on the path of the solution in Syria from their point of view.

During the study, 152 individual interviews were conducted with males and females residing in the eastern, western and northern countryside of Deir ez-Zor, and the interviews were conducted using a questionnaire for individuals with closed-ended questions, and the simple random sampling method was adopted for selecting participants. Also, five key informant interviews were conducted with political and jurists concerned with public affairs in Syria.

The study concluded with a number of key findings, the most prominent of which was that more than two-thirds of the study participants reject holding the presidential elections according to the current situation, as the elections from the point of view of the majority of those who reject holding it will be nominal and that the results are predetermined, in addition to the necessity of solving the issue of detainees, creating a safe environment for the return of refugees and IDPs to their original areas, drafting a new constitution for Syria and forming a transitional governing body to govern the country before holding the elections, and the study results showed that the vast majority of participants will not participate in the elections because they do not believe in its integrity in the first place.

The vast majority also deem the upcoming presidential elections illegitimate, and about three-quarters of them believe that many countries will not recognize their results, and experts also said that the elections contradict international resolutions, foremost among them Resolution 2254. Experts and study participants have also mentioned some results that in their point of view may be caused by unrecognizing the results of the elections, namely: suspending Syria's membership in international bodies, closing diplomatic missions of the Syrian regime in countries that will reject the results of the elections, unrecognizing the official documents that will be issued by the regime after the elections, and the tightening of sanctions imposed on it.

On the other hand, the results of the study showed that the vast majority of participants rejection of Bashar al-Assad's standing for elections because he is responsible from their point of view for the conflict in Syria, and both of them and the experts believe that holding the presidential elections will have a negative impact on the path of the political solution in Syria, and will lead to the escalation of the conflict and the deterioration of the Syrian economy, which will negatively affect Syrians and cause new waves of displacement and asylum.

Based on the above, the study recommends that it is necessary for the international community to pressure the Syrian regime and its supporters to postpone holding presidential elections, and work to solve the issue of detainees before holding it, and to facilitate the work of the Constitutional Committee to draft a new constitution for the country to hold the elections in accordance with its provisions, and to create a safe environment for the return of displaced persons to their original areas, and allow them to participate in the elections to be done under the auspices and supervision of the United Nations.

Key Findings:

First- Regarding the position of Syrians regarding the elections:

- 1- More than two-thirds of the study participants reject holding presidential elections under the current circumstances, and 16% said that they are neutral about it, while the percentage of participants who said that they support or strongly support holding the elections was 6% and 8%, respectively, and 3% refused to answer.
- 2- The main reason for the participants' rejection of holding the presidential elections at the present time is because they believe that it will be nominal and that its results will be pre-determined, which is also confirmed by experts.
- 3- A high percentage of the study participants along with the experts stressed the necessity of working on addressing many issues before holding the presidential elections, such as solving the issue of detainees, creating a safe environment for the return of refugees and displaced persons to their areas of origin, drafting a new constitution, and forming a transitional governing body to govern the country.
- 4- Participants who support holding the presidential elections at the present time mainly attribute their support to their fear that the country will go into a state of chaos and a political vacuum.
- 5- The vast majority of the participants said that they would not participate in the elections, and the main reason for that was their lack of belief in its integrity.

Second- Regarding the legitimacy of the elections:

- 1- Nearly three-quarters of the study participants believe that the international community will be divided to two groups, the first of which will recognize the legitimacy of the elections and the other will refuse to recognize it, and the percentage of those who said they believe that the international community in general will reject the elections results was 15%, while the percentage of those who said they believe that the international community will recognize the results and legitimacy of the elections was only 3%.
- 2- Three of the experts said that the results and legitimacy of the elections in Syria will be recognized only by the countries supporting the Syrian regime, while two experts said that they believe that the international community may recognize the results and legitimacy of the elections.
- 3- The most prominent consequences that may result from the international community's unrecognizing of the results of the elections from the viewpoint of the participants are to suspending the membership of the Syrian regime in international bodies and agencies, closing the diplomatic missions of the regime in countries that refused to recognize the results of the elections, and stopping the recognition of official documents issued by the Syrian regime.

- 4- Experts believe that unrecognizing the results of the election will lead to tightening the sanctions imposed on the Syrian regime, increasing its isolation and further the collapse of the Syrian economy, which will have a negative impact on the living conditions of Syrians residing in the regime-controlled areas, and there will be more waves of immigration and asylum.
- 5- One of the experts confirmed that unrecognizing the results of the elections by the countries will lead to closing embassies and consulates of the Syria regime in those countries, and it will have negative repercussions on Syrians living abroad, as the documents issued by the regime may not be recognized after the elections.
- 6- The vast majority of the study participants believe that the presidential elections that will be held are illegitimate.
- 7- Experts also said that in the event that elections are held under the current circumstances, it will not be legitimate for many reasons, the most prominent of which is that it will not include the vast majority of refugees and displaced persons, the control of the security services over the electoral process, and the inconsistency of the elections with international decisions related to Syria, especially Resolution 2254 which stipulates the necessity of drafting a new constitution for the country and ensuring a safe and neutral environment, so that the elections will then be held under the auspices of the United Nations.

Third- Regarding the position of Syrians on presidential candidates:

- 1- Less than a fifth of the participants said that they know the names of the candidates for the presidential elections along with the head of the Syrian regime, Bashar al-Assad, and more than a third of them know the names of some of these candidates.
- 2- Most of the participants who said they know the names of all or some of the presidential candidates are not familiar with the electoral programs of the candidates.
- 3- More than two-thirds of the male participants refuse assuming the presidency by a woman, while nearly two-thirds of the female participants agree to this.
- 4- The vast majority of the study participants reject Bashar al-Assad's candidacy for the elections, mainly because he is responsible for the ongoing conflict in Syria.
- 5- Also, the vast majority of the participants do not know Bashar al-Assad's electoral program.

Fourth- Regarding the impact of the elections on the path of solution in Syria:

- 1- Four experts believe that holding the presidential elections at the moment will have a negative impact on the issues of the political solution, as the Syrian regime will refuse, according to them, to discuss the issue of governance and forming a transitional governing body, nor will it take any actions to release the detainees or reveal their fate, and even if a new constitution for the country is drafted, the regime will refuse to hold presidential elections before the end of the new presidential term.
- 2- The majority of study participants said they believe that holding presidential elections at the present time will have a negative impact on the rest of the political solution issues.

- 3- The majority of the study participants, along with experts, said that holding the presidential elections at the present time and Assad's winning will have a negative impact on the economic and field conditions inside Syria and will result in many problems, such as the deterioration of the economic situation and the depreciation of the Syrian pound, which will increase the difficulty of the living conditions of Syrians, and will lead to an escalation in military operations and increase the intensity of the conflict in Syria, which will lead to more waves of displacement and asylum.

Recommendations:

Based on the results of the study, we recommend the following:

- 1- The international community should pressure the Syrian regime to postpone the presidential elections.
- 2- Taking the following steps before holding the elections:
 - a. Releasing political prisoners and working to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared persons.
 - b. Posing pressure to facilitate the work of the Constitutional Committee to reach the drafting of a new constitution for the country so the elections will be held in accordance with its provisions.
 - c. Creating proper conditions for the return of the displaced persons and refugees to their areas of origin.
 - d. Forming a transitional governing body to govern the country.
 - e. Ensuring that elections are held under the auspices and supervision of the United Nations.
 - f. Ensuring the participation of refugees and displaced persons in presidential elections.
- 3- If the results of the presidential election are not recognized, the implications expected to face Syrians due to that should be mitigated by recognizing the documents and credentials issued by the Syrian opposition.

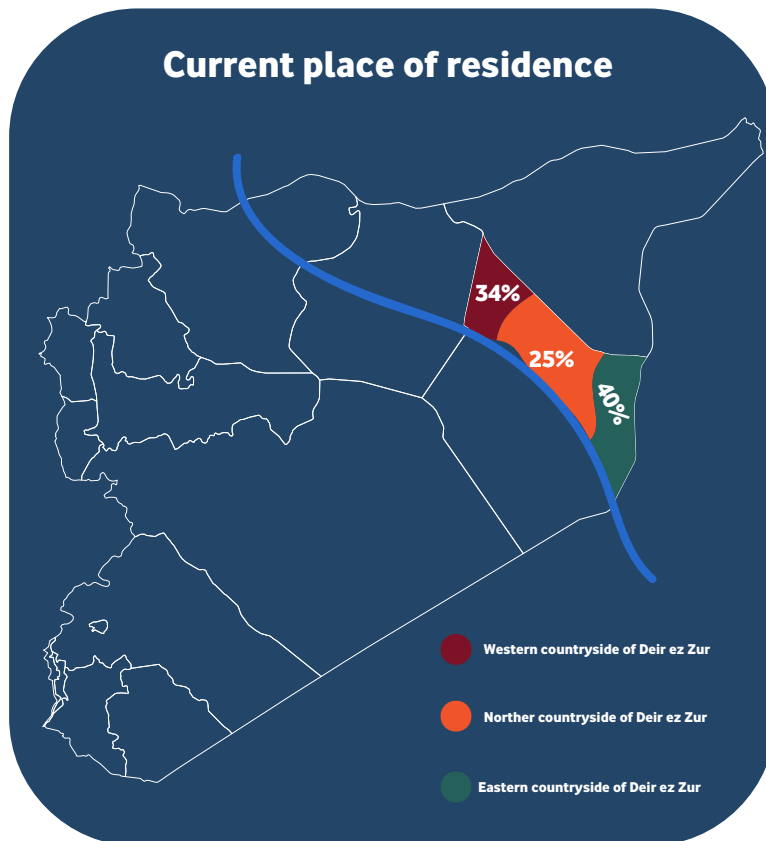
Methodology of the Study:

First- Objectives of the study:

This study aims to survey the opinions of Syrian citizens residing in the areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces in Deir ez-Zor Governorate about the presidential elections that the Syrian regime announced its intention to hold during May 2021, and the extent of their support for holding those elections under the current circumstances Syria is living, the study also aims to reveal the extent of Syrians' knowledge of the candidates for the elections and their electoral programs, and whether they consider that the elections will be legitimate and include guarantees that ensure that they will be held in a free and fair form, and the extent to which holding the elections will affect other political solution issues from the viewpoint of the participants and the international community's reactions to them.

Second- Scope of the study:

- 1- Time range: The study was conducted during April and the first half of May 2021.
- 2- Geographical scope: The study covered the northern, western and eastern countryside of Deir ez-Zor which are under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces.



Third- Data sources:

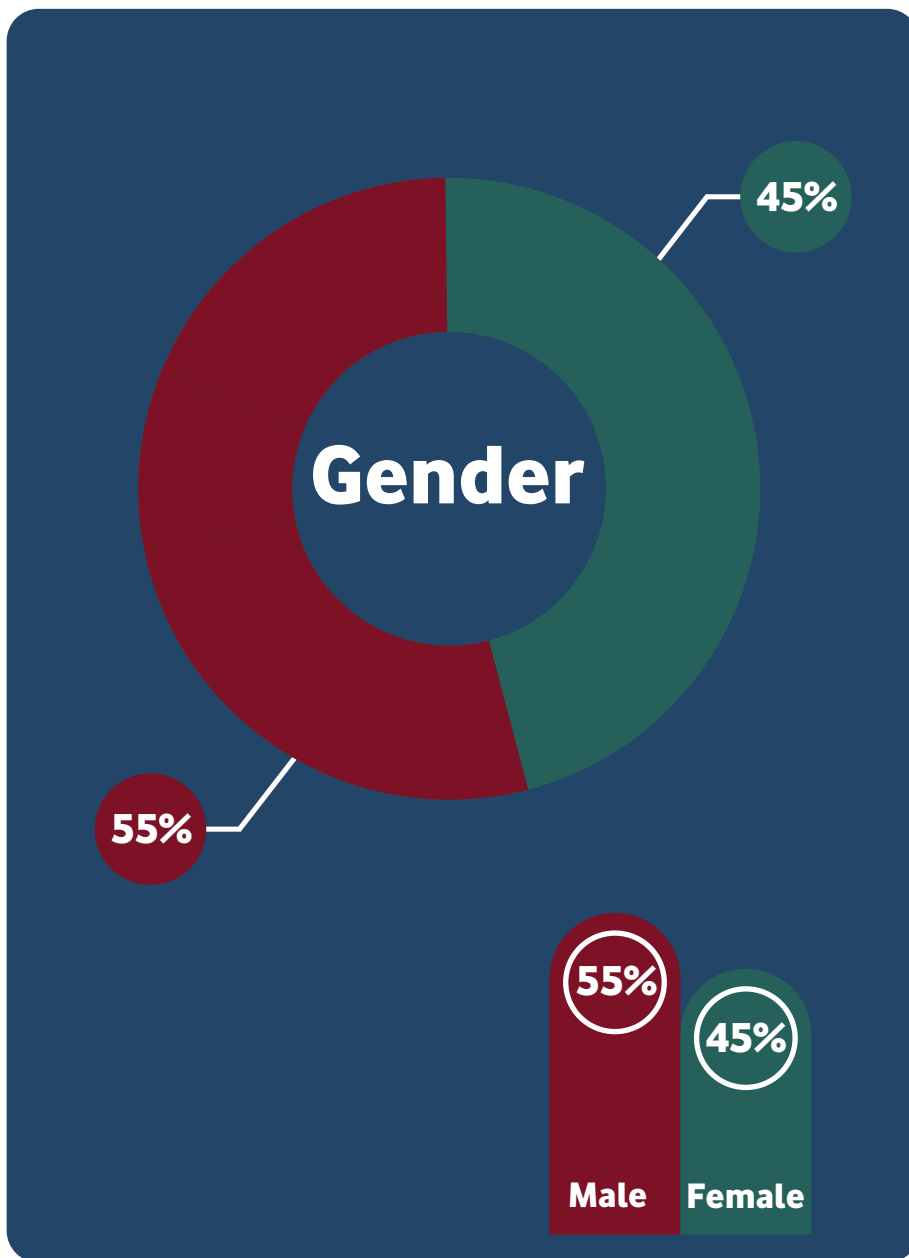
- 1- Syrians residing within the study areas to know their opinions about the electoral process.
- 2- Experts, including politicians and jurists, to precisely identify the electoral process, its results, its legitimacy and its impact on other political solution issues, and the extent to which it is possible for the international community not to recognize these elections and the results that may result from not recognizing it.
- 3- Secondary sources: including texts of the Syrian constitution and laws, reports issued by UN bodies and bodies concerned with legal affairs, and other researches and studies related to the subject of study.

Fourth-Sample of the study:

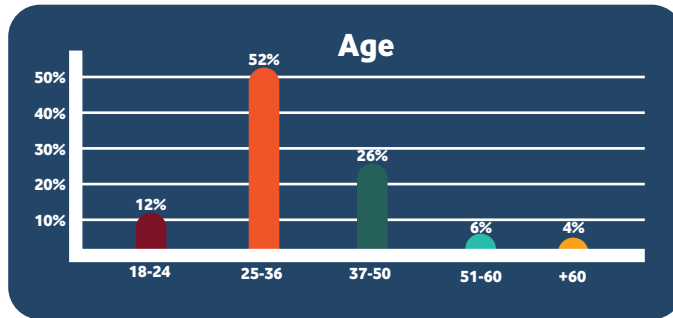
During the study, five experts including politicians and jurists concerned with public affairs in Syria were interviewed using an interview guide containing open-ended questions, and 152 individual interviews were conducted with male and female citizens residing in the study areas using a questionnaire containing closed-ended questions, and the researchers adopted the simple random sampling method for selecting participants.

Fifth-Characteristics of the study sample:

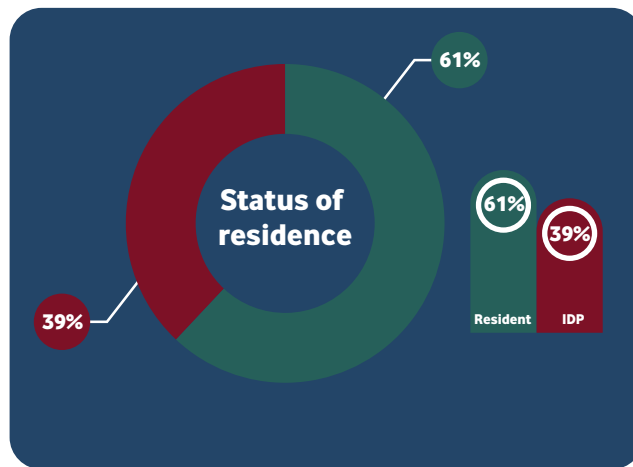
A. Sample members in terms of gender:



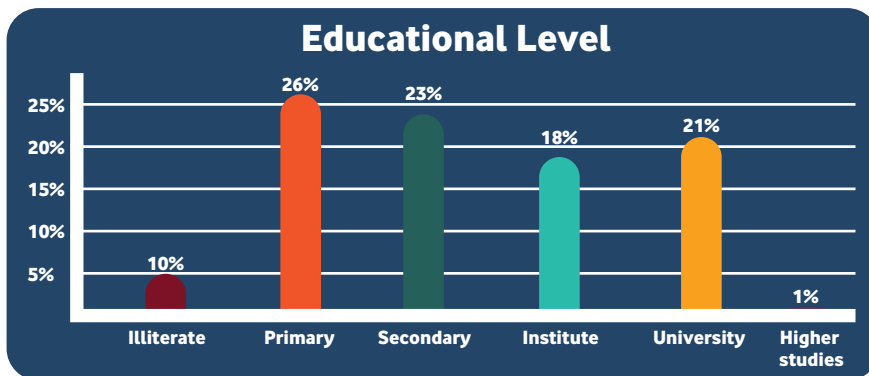
B. Sample members in terms of age:



C. Sample members in terms of the status of residence:



D. Sample members in terms of educational level:



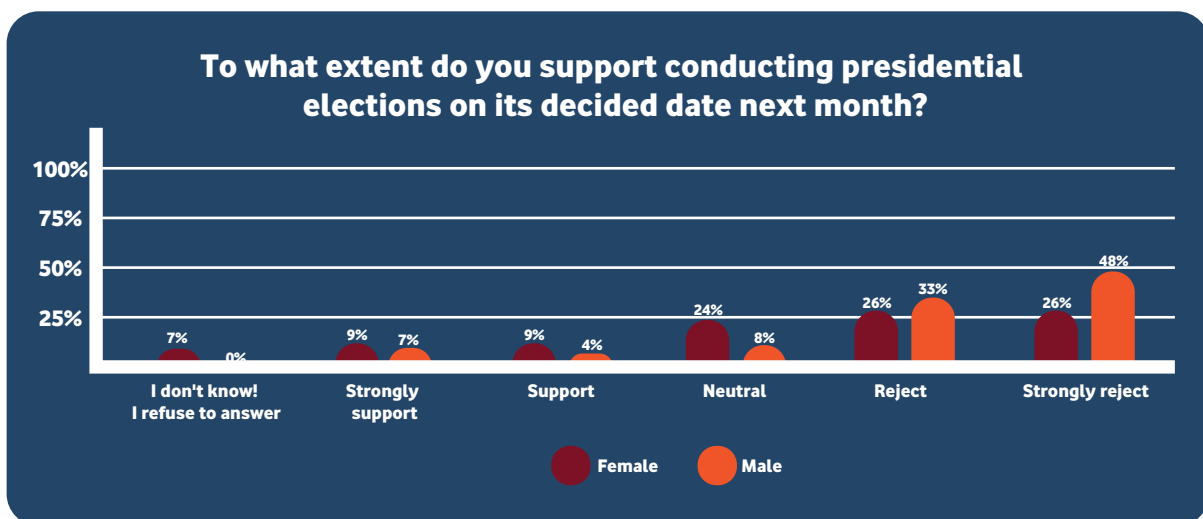
Difficulties and challenges:

- 1- Researchers faced a set of difficulties and challenges during the data collection process: Some citizens refused to participate in the study because they feared expressing their opinions for security reasons.
- 2- Some citizens stated that they were not interested in political affairs, therefore, they refused to participate in the study.

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First- Syrians' position on the elections:

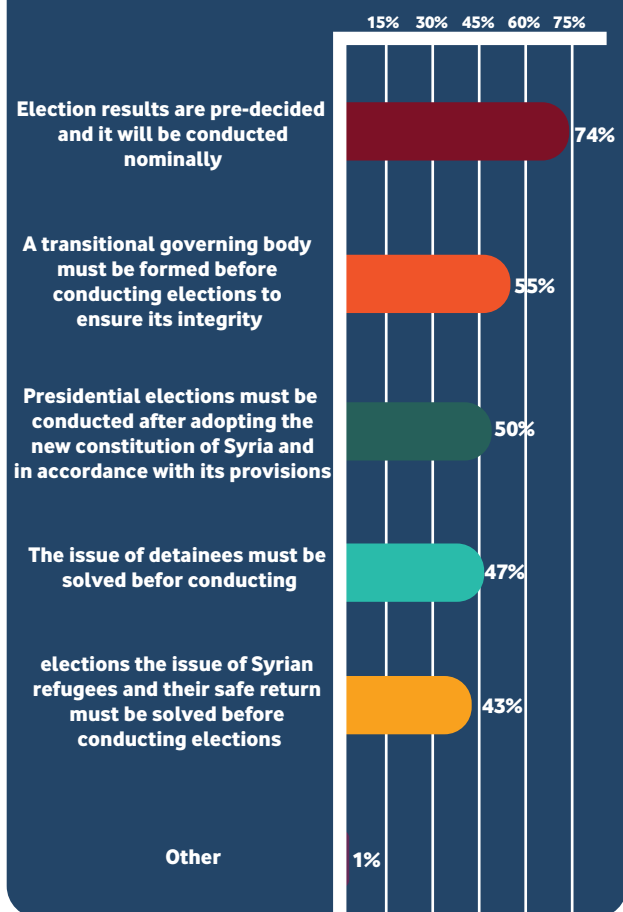
On April 18, 2021, The People's Assembly announced the twenty-sixth of May of the same year as the date of holding the presidential elections in Syria, after seven years have passed since the presidential elections that were held in 2014, which is the presidential term as stipulated in the constitution of 2012, the study participants differ in terms of their position towards the elections as some of them reject holding elections on the date set by the People's Assembly and according to the current situation, and others who support holding it, knowing that the largest percentage said that they reject holding the elections, as the percentage of those who said that they reject or strongly reject it was 30% and 38% respectively, while 16% of them expressed their neutrality regarding this issue, while the percentage of those who said that they support holding the elections or strongly support it was 14%, while 3% refused to answer. It is worth noting here that the percentages of those who said they reject holding elections, or strongly reject it, were almost identical among the displaced and the members of the host community, and in terms of areas of residence, the degree of rejection among the participants residing in the western countryside of Deir ez-Zor was higher, reaching three-quarters of them, while it remained at about two-thirds among the participants in the northern and eastern countryside areas of Deir ez-Zor, and in terms of gender, the degree of rejection was higher among the male participants compared to the female participants.



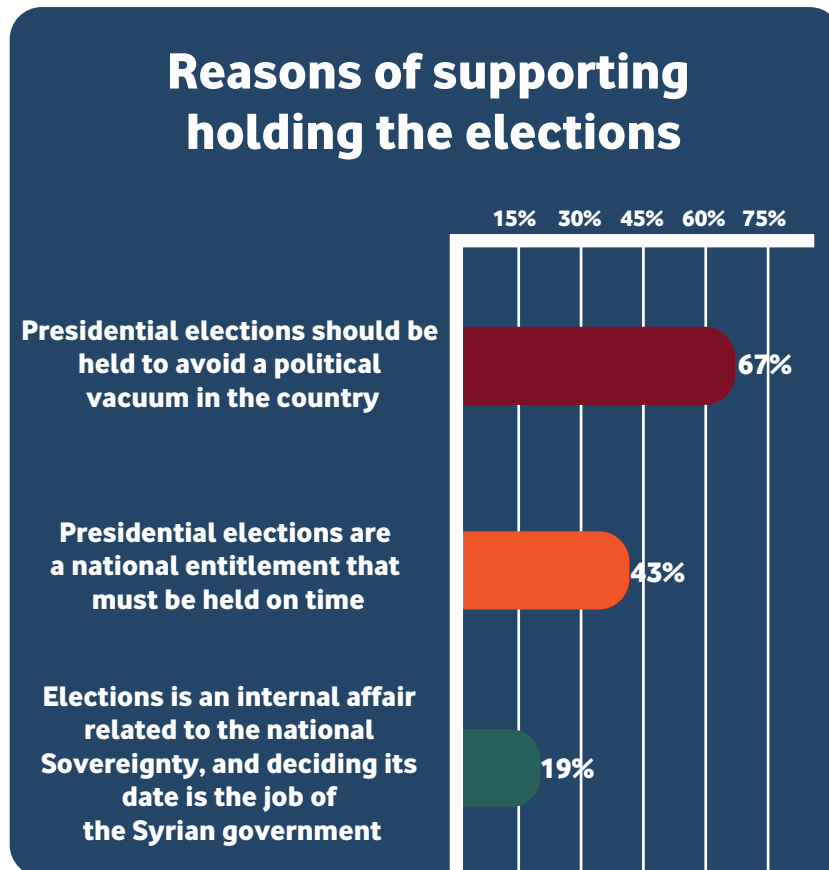
The participants who reject holding the elections attributed this to many reasons, as about three-quarters of them consider that the elections would be nominal, and that its results would be predetermined if they were held under the current circumstances, which was also confirmed by experts, as one of them described the elections as a "skit", and that its results are known in advance, as they would be held only in areas controlled by the Syrian regime and under the control of the security services, and that voters would not dare to vote in favor of any candidate except for the head of the Syrian regime Bashar al-Assad, and even if they voted for another candidate, the result would be that Al-Assad won the elections.

Also, a high percentage of those who reject holding the elections attributed this to the fact that they believe it is necessary to work on moving forward with other political solution issues before holding the elections, as more than half of those who reject holding the elections said that a transitional governing body should be formed to govern the country before the elections are held to ensure its integrity. On the other hand, about half of them said that the priority should be drafting a new constitution for the country that elections would be held in accordance with its provisions, and similarly, nearly half of the participants stressed the necessity of solving the issue of the detainees, release them, and reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared persons, and finally, 43% said that it is necessary to work on solving the issue of Syrian refugees and providing a safe environment for their return to Syria before the elections. For their part, experts also stressed that Syrians' rejection of holding elections is due to the existence of many issues that must be resolved before the elections, such as releasing detainees and the revealing the fate of the forcibly disappeared persons, providing a safe environment for the return of displaced persons to their areas of origin or at least ensuring their participation in the elections, achieving stability of the security situation in the country and drafting a new constitution for the country. Experts have also mentioned some additional reasons for the citizens' rejection of holding elections, including fear from the collapse of the Syrian economy and the further depreciation of the Syrian pound, and the rejection of Syrians of the regime practices that caused their displacement and the killing and disappearance of thousands

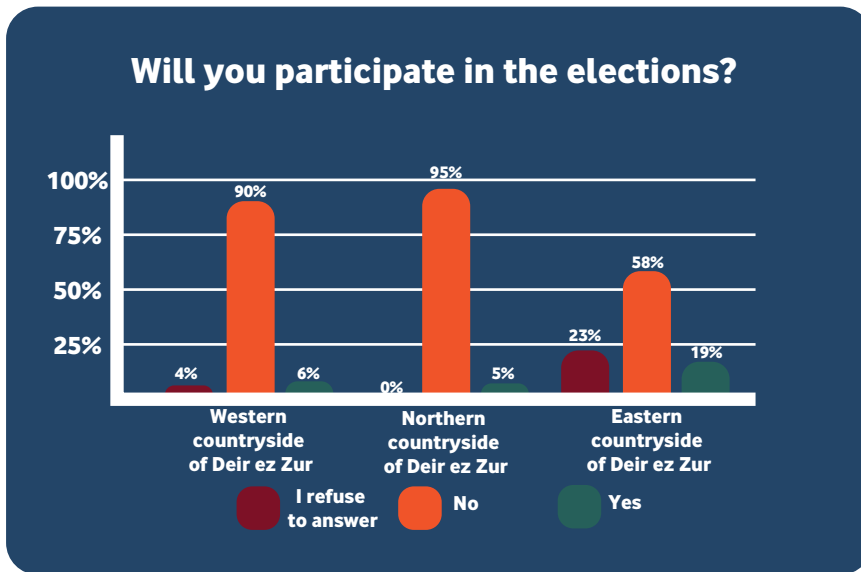
Reasons of participants' rejection of conducting elections



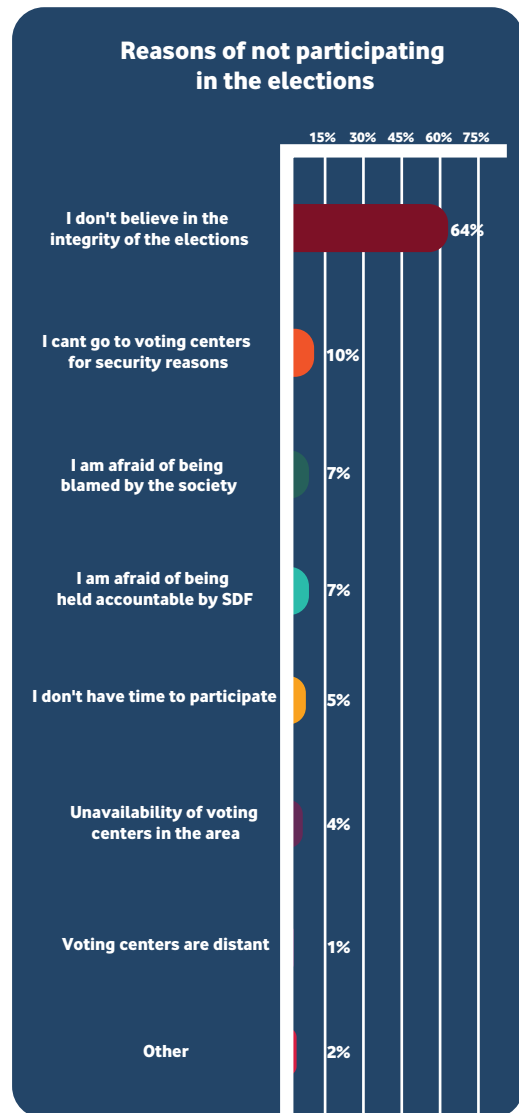
In contrast to the aforementioned, the participants who support holding the elections mentioned a number of reasons that make them support it, as two-thirds of them considered that not holding the presidential elections on its date would make the country go into a status of chaos and political vacuum, and some of them believe that deciding the date of the elections and holding it is an internal affair related to the national sovereignty of the Syrian state. Experts added that some Syrians support holding elections because they are influential within the Syrian regime and thus they benefit if it stays in office, and some of them fear its demise (such as some minorities) because it has spread rumors that link their security and protection to it.



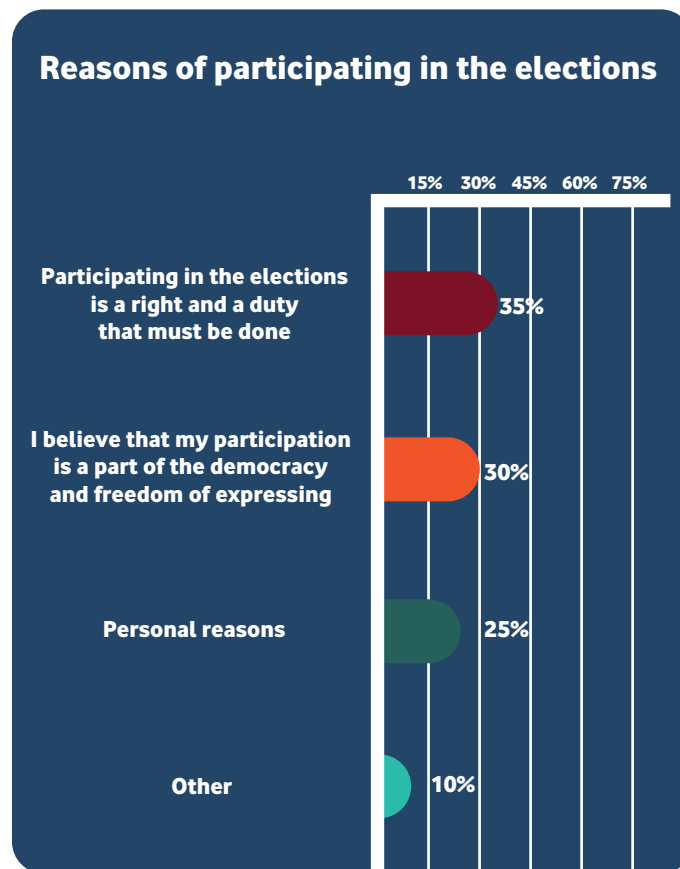
In general, and whatever the position of the participants on holding the presidential elections, the results of the study showed a remarkable increase in the percentage of those who said that they would not participate in the elections, as this percentage reached 79% compared to 11% who said they would participate, while 10% refused to answer, which means that some of the participants who support holding the elections will not participate in it, and in fact, the aforementioned percentages are consistent with the opinions of experts, as they estimated the percentage of those who would participate in the elections between 10% to 20% of the total number of those entitled to vote. It is worth mentioning here that those who expressed their intention to participate in the elections are significantly higher among participants residing in the eastern countryside of Deir ez-Zor compared to those residing in both the northern and western countryside.



Having asked the participants who said that they will not participate in the elections about the reason for their abstaining from participating, the majority of them said that this is due to their lack of belief in its integrity, while the rest attributed this to a number of reasons, such as their fear of going to voting centers for security reasons, such as the possibility of being arrested by the Syrian regime forces and its security services, or the fear of being held accountable by the Syrian Democratic Forces, in addition to a number of reasons related to the lack of voting centers in their areas.



On the other hand, those who said that they will participate in the presidential elections attributed this to a number of reasons, as some of them considered that participation in the elections is a right for all citizens and at the same time it is a duty that they should do, and some of them said that they will participate because they deem this as a kind of freedom of opinion and expression, and that it is a part of democratic practice, and a quarter of them attributed that to personal reasons without disclosing them, and two of them (who constitute 10% of the total number of participants who said they would participate in the elections) selected the option (OTHER), as one of them said that he will participate only if the elections are to be held under the supervision and auspices of the international community, while the other said that he will participate in the elections as a form of revenge because one of the militant groups killed his brothers.



It should be noted here that those who want to participate in the elections from those residing in the areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces will face the challenge of difficulty in reaching the voting centers, as they must go to the centers within the areas of control of the Syrian regime, after the Council of Democratic Syria announced its rejection of holding the presidential elections within its areas of control, and the Council justified this by lacking the required conditions for holding it and not complying with Security Council Resolution 2254.¹

¹<https://bit.ly/3fbnoZe>

Second- Legitimacy of the elections:

Many of the world countries have condemned the Syrian regime's intention to hold the presidential elections and announced that they will not recognize the results of those elections unless they are held under the supervision and auspices of the United Nations, which was confirmed by Jeffrey DeLaurentis, the Acting US Alternate Representative to the United Nations, who said that the administration of US President Joe Biden will not recognize the results of the elections in Syria if the voting is not carried out under the supervision of the United Nations in a manner that includes all Syrians². And for its part, the European Union announced that the presidential elections to be held in Syria do not meet international standards and will not contribute to settling the conflict and will not lead to the restoration of international relations with the Syrian regime, also, the European Union confirmed its willingness to support holding free and fair elections in Syria in accordance with Security Council Resolution No. 2254 and under the supervision of the United Nations³, which means that the European Union will not recognize the legitimacy of the elections and their results. Turkey also announced through its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, that the presidential elections in Syria are illegitimate and will not be recognized, as recognition of the election results requires the participation of the Syrian opposition in the elections, not that the Syrian regime organizes the elections by itself⁴.

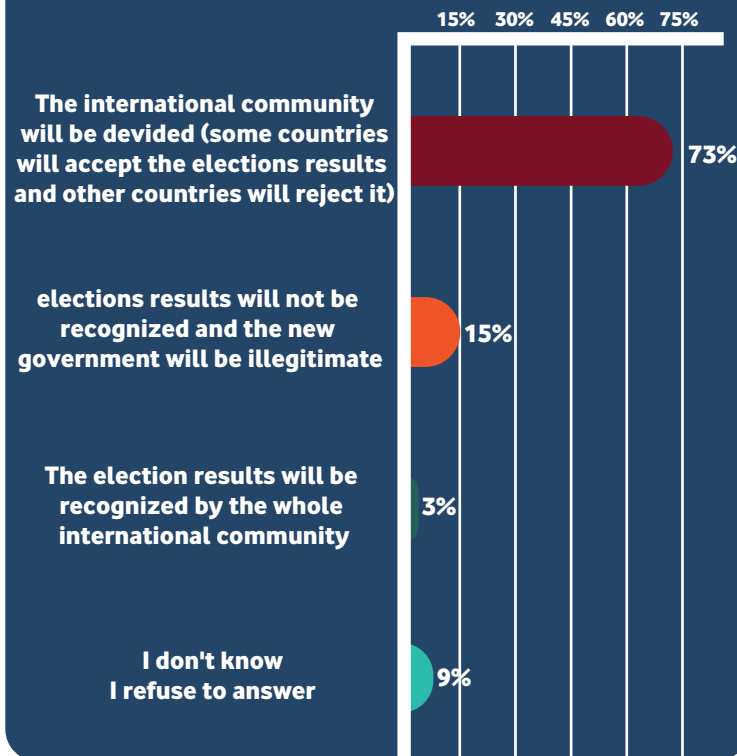
Regarding the opinion of the Syrians about these statements and whether they believe that the international community will recognize the results of the elections, about three-quarters of the participants expressed their belief that the international community will be divided for two groups; those who recognize the results and the legitimacy of the elections and those who will reject it, and the vast majority of them believe that the United States of America and Turkey are among the most prominent countries that will refuse to recognize the results of the elections, along with the European Union and Britain. Also, 4% of them believe that the Gulf countries in general and Saudi Arabia in particular will be among the countries that will reject the results of the elections, and the percentage of those who said they believe that the international community in general will reject the results of the elections has reached 15%, while the percentage of those who said that they believe that the international community will recognize the results and legitimacy of the elections was only 3%. For their part, experts' opinions differed, as some of them believe that the international community will be divided regarding the recognition of the elections results and the others who believe that the international community will generally recognize the results of the elections, as three experts said that only the countries that support the Syrian regime, such as Russia and Iran will recognize the elections, while an expert said that the international community will recognize the results of the elections, and accordingly, will call for new rounds of negotiations on the Syrian issue. Another expert said that recognition of the election results should not be ruled out, especially in light of the restoration of relations between the regime and some Arab countries such as the United Arab Emirates.

²<https://bit.ly/3hLONo7>

³<https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/464787>

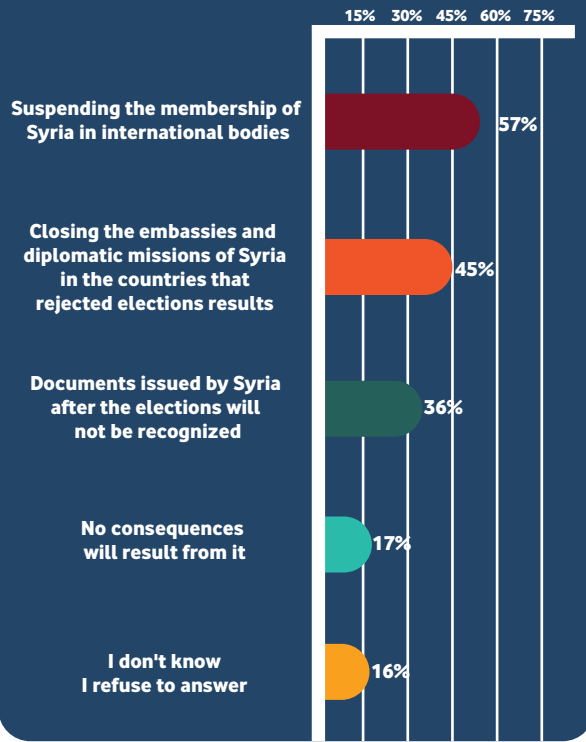
⁴<https://bit.ly/3ucYBly>

In your opinion, what would be the reaction of the international community for holding the elections?



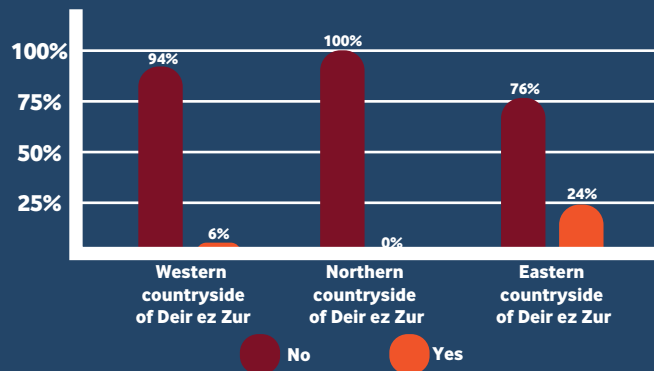
Regarding the most prominent results that the participants in the study expect will result from the countries' refusal of recognizing the legitimacy of the presidential elections, they included in the first place suspending the membership of the Syrian regime in international bodies and agencies, followed by closing embassies and diplomatic missions in countries that refused to recognize the results of the elections, and more than a third of the participants expect that the official documents issued by the Syrian regime after the elections will not be recognized, and the expectations of the study participants are consistent with what the experts said, as one of them said that failure to recognize the results of the elections will lead to the closure of embassies and consulates of the Syrian regime in many countries of the world, and it will also increase the isolation of the regime and tighten the sanctions imposed on it, which will lead to the collapse of the Syrian economy and the occurrence of new waves of immigration out of Syria, and the expert denoted here that unrecognizing the legitimacy of the elections and the closure of diplomatic missions will have negative effects on Syrians outside Syria due to their inability to obtain official documents in their countries of residence, and the documents that they can obtain from Syria may not be recognized. Another expert said that unrecognizing the results of the elections means suspending Syria's membership in international bodies and meetings, and he believes that this will be positive as it will increase the legitimacy of the Syrian opposition, which will contribute to pushing things towards the best for the Syrians. Two experts have also said that unrecognizing the legitimacy means tightening the sanctions imposed on the Syrian regime, the thing that will have a negative economic impact on the Syrians residing in the areas under its control.

In your opinion, what consequences may result from the rejection of the international community as a whole or of some countries of the elections results?



Regarding the opinion of Syrians themselves about the legitimacy of the upcoming presidential elections, the vast majority of study participants (88%) said that they deem it illegitimate, and this percentage is close among both the displaced and members of the host community. As for the place of residence, all the participants residing in the northern countryside of Deir ez-Zor said that they do not consider it legitimate, while that percentage decreased to about three quarters among the participants residing in the eastern countryside of Deir ez-Zor.

Do you consider the upcoming elections legitimate?

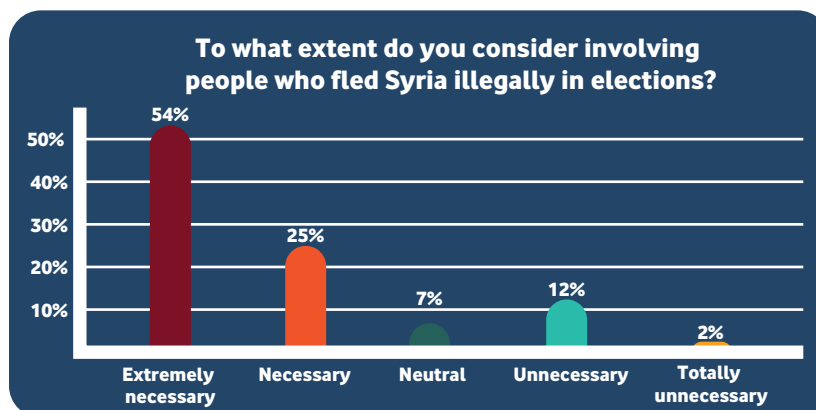


For their part, experts believe that the elections are illegitimate for many reasons, as holding the elections under the current circumstances will take place under the supervision of the security services, which will force citizens to vote for Bashar al-Assad.

"The elections will be as a toy in the hands of the Syrian intelligence services, even the candidates themselves will be forced to vote for Bashar al-Assad"
Key informant interview with a political activist

In addition, the inability of Syrian refugees to participate in the elections due to the fact that the election law stipulates that the participation of Syrians residing abroad is done through a valid passport, provided that this passport is stamped with a regular exit stamp from one of the border crossings⁵, which means that Syrians who fled Syria illegally (which is the case for the vast majority of refugees) will not be able to participate in the elections. On the other hand, the displaced persons inside Syria will not be able to participate due to fear of traveling to regime areas for security concerns, which means that more than half of the Syrians will not be able to participate in the elections⁶, and one of the experts confirmed that the percentage of Syrians who will participate in the elections throughout Syria does not exceed 40% of the total number of people who are entitled to vote, knowing that the vast majority of them will be from those residing within the areas of the regime, and those will be forced to vote for the head of the Syrian regime, Bashar al-Assad.

Experts believe that holding presidential elections under the current circumstances does not comply with international resolutions related to Syria, especially Security Council Resolution 2254, which stipulated that presidential elections must take place after the completion of the drafting of a new constitution for the country and in accordance with its provisions, and stipulates that elections must be held under the supervision of the United Nations in a safe and neutral environment, and that the elections should include all Syrians, including those living in the exile, and it should be noted here that the majority of the study participants also believe that those who left the country illegally should be allowed to participate in the elections.



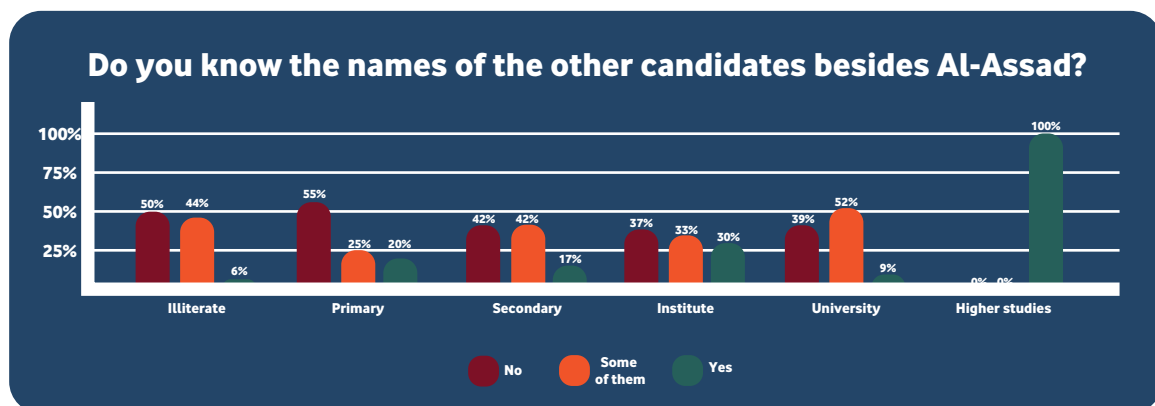
⁵ Article 105 of the General Elections Law No.5 of 2014.

⁶ The number of the displaced persons in Syria (IDPs and refugees) is 13 millions, which constitutes 60% of the total population before the conflict <https://arabicpost.shorthandstories.com/syrian-refugees-crisis/index.html>

Third- The position of citizens on presidential candidates:

In a precedent that is the first of its kind in Syria, the number of applicants for candidacy for the presidency of the Republic reached 51 persons, including seven women, and after the candidacy period ended, members of the People's Assembly voted regarding the names of candidacy applicants in accordance with the provisions of the Syrian Constitution, which stipulates that the candidate must obtain the support of 35 members of the Assembly as a requisite for candidacy, and the Supreme Constitutional Court then counted the votes of the members of the People's Assembly and announced the acceptance of the applications of three candidates, Bashar al-Assad as a candidate of the Baath Party along with Abdullah Salloum Abdullah and Mahmoud Mer'i.⁷

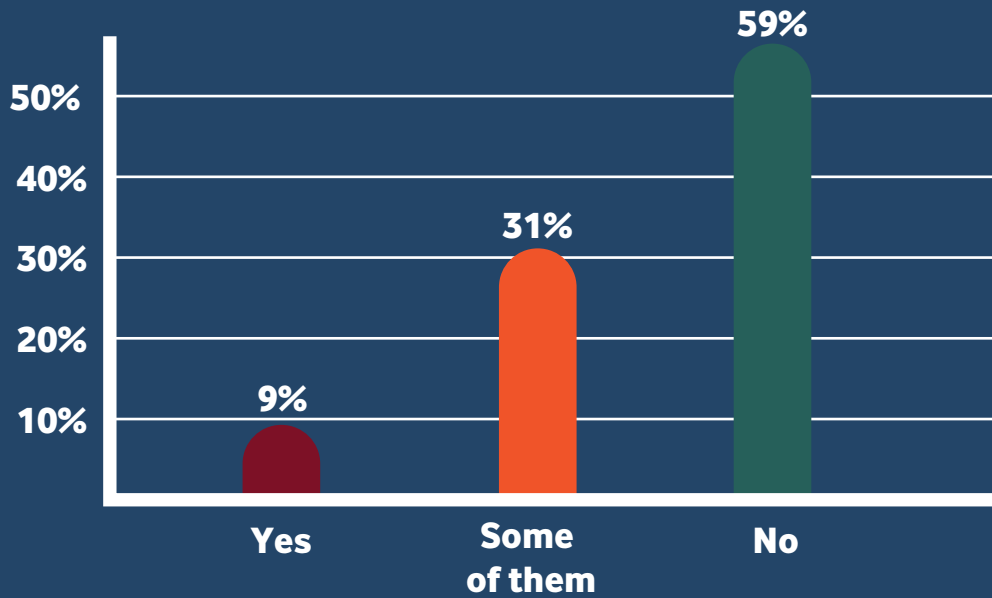
The results of the study showed that the degree of Syrians' interest in watching the news and developments related to the presidential elections is low as the largest percentage of respondents (44% of them) said that they do not know the names of any of the candidates or applicants who applied for candidacy besides the head of the Syrian regime, Bashar al-Assad, while 38% said that they know some of the candidates or applicants for candidacy, while the percentage of those who said that they know the names of all candidates is 18%, and the degree of knowledge of the participants of the names of presidency candidates is higher among participants with a higher educational level.



Having asked the participants who said they know the names of the candidates for the presidential elections or the names of some of them whether they know the political programs of those candidates, the largest percentage of them said no, as they said that they do not have any information about the political program of any of the candidates, while about a third of them said that they are aware of the programs of some candidates, and only 9% of them said they have information about the programs of all the candidates. Regarding the sources from which those who are familiar with the programs of the presidential candidates obtained their information, more than two-thirds of them said that they obtained it from social media networks, while more than a quarter said that they obtained it from their discussions with some of people who are concerned with political affairs in their society, and a quarter said that they searched for this information on the personal social networks pages of the candidates.

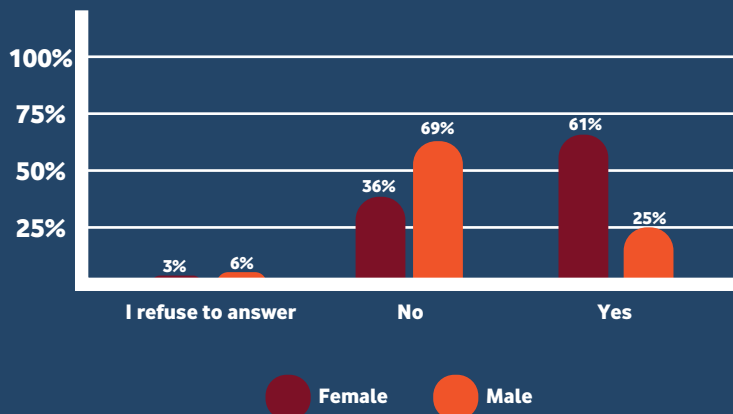
⁷Announcement of preliminary results of the selection of presidential candidates in Syria - Al-Manar Tv website - Lebanon (almanar.com.lb)

If he/she knows the names of the candidates: Do you know their electoral programs?



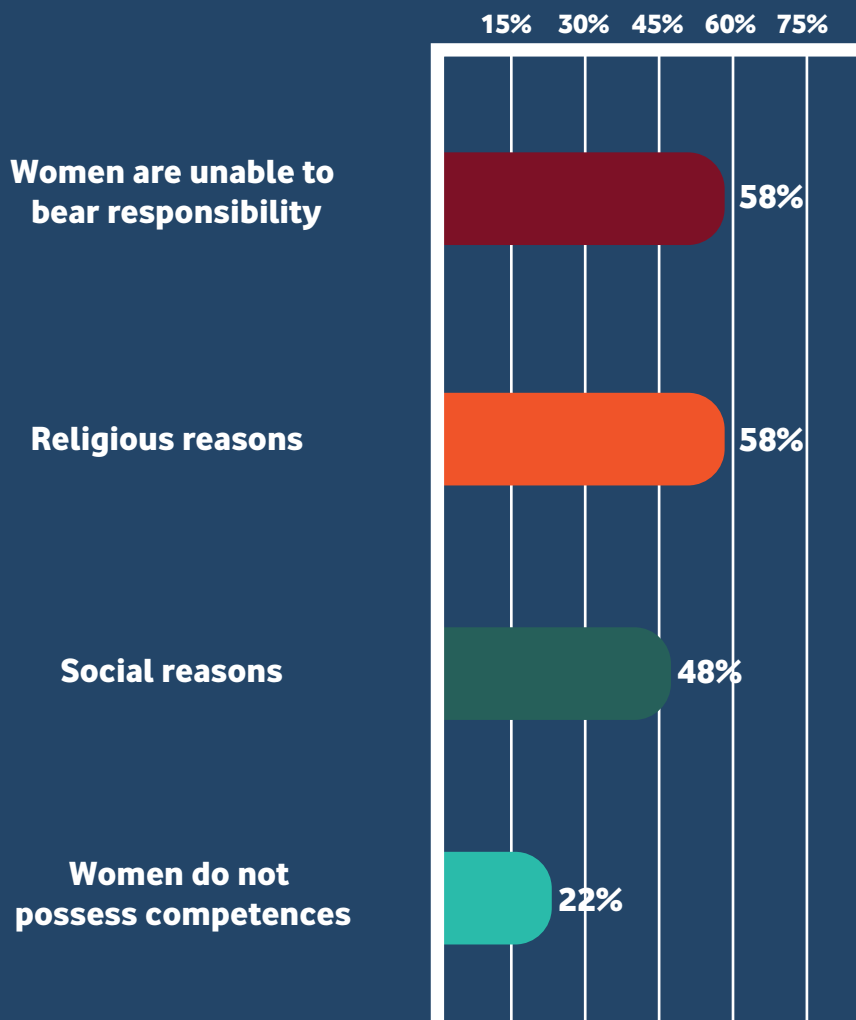
It should be noted here that since seven women applied for candidacy for the presidential elections, study participants were asked whether they support assuming the presidency by a woman, 54% said they did not mind that, while 42% said they reject it, and 5% refused to answer, and the degree of refusal of assuming the presidency by a woman was significantly higher among male participants, while the degree of support was higher among female participants.

Do you support assuming the presidency of the republic by a woman?

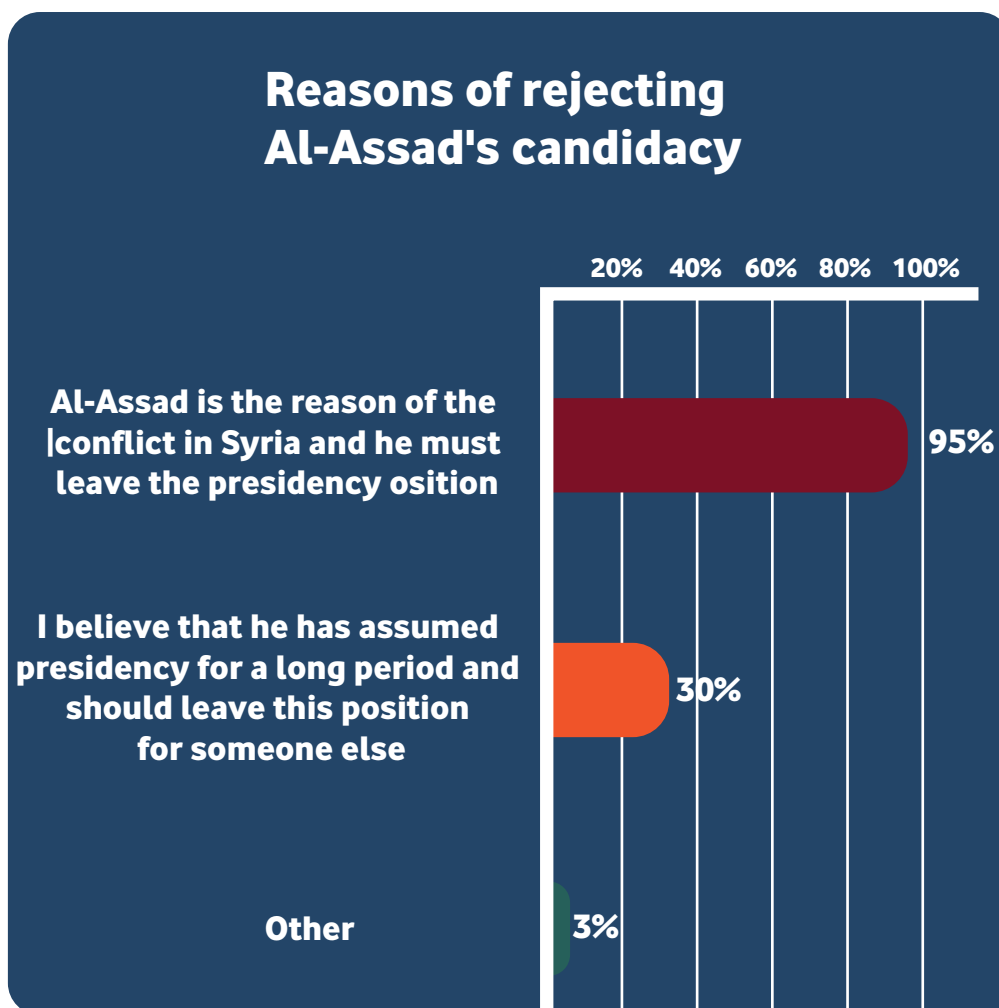


58% of participant who refuse assuming the presidency of the republic by a woman primarily attribute their rejection to the fact that they believe that women are unable to bear the responsibilities and burdens imposed by that position, and 58% of them also said that they refuse this for religious reasons, as the woman is not permissible to assume leadership, and nearly half of them attributed their refusal to social reasons represented by the customs and traditions that reject the work of women or their mingling with men, or because she will have to travel and attend conferences and meetings, which is a requirement of assuming the presidency of the republic.

Reasons of refusing assuming the presidency of the republic by a woman

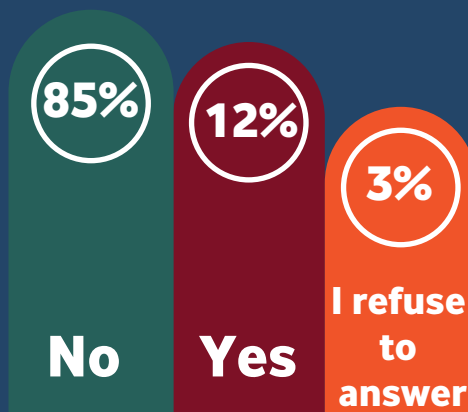
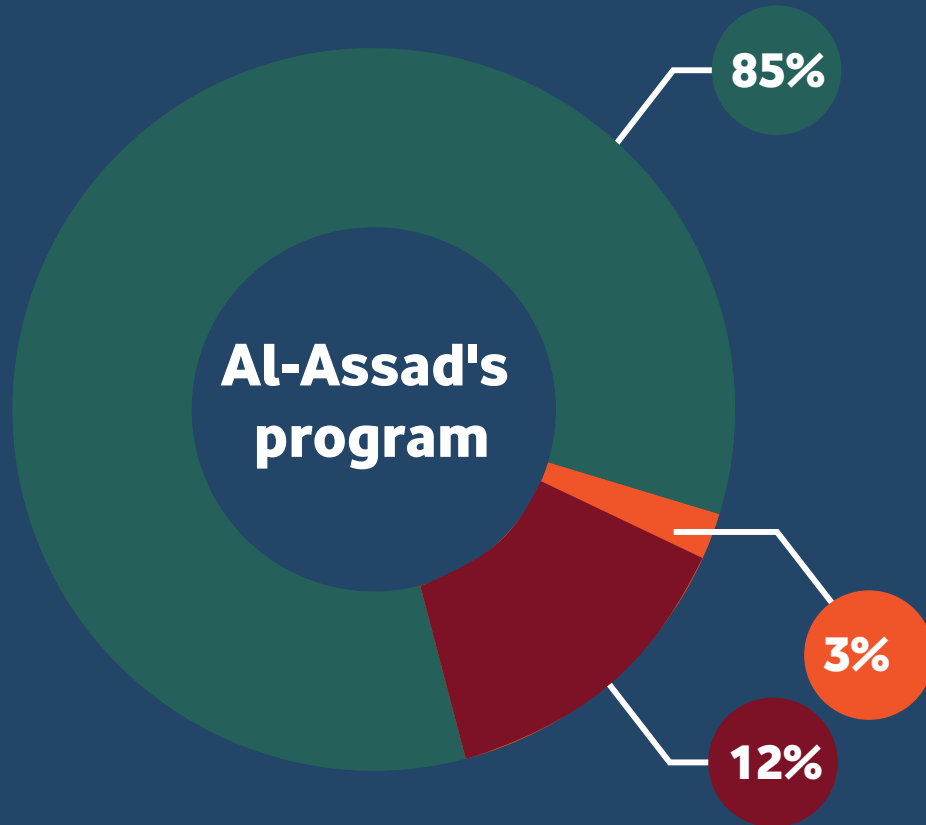


With regard to the candidacy of the head of the Syrian regime, Bashar al-Assad, for the presidential elections, the results of the study showed a very low percentage of participants who support his candidacy, as only eight participants said that they support it, which constitute 5% of the total number of study participants, and the reason which make these people support the candidacy of Al-Assad is that they believe that he has the right to run for this position just like any other citizen of the Syrian Arab Republic, and half of them said that they deem him as the only person capable of leading the country at the current phase, and only one person said that he believes in Al-Assad's electoral program. On the other hand, 80% of the participants said that they reject Al-Assad's candidacy, while 15% refrained from answering. As for the reasons for the participants' rejection of Al-Assad's candidacy for the elections, it is primarily, according to the vast majority, that they consider that he is the one responsible for what happened in Syria and that he should give up the presidency.



It is worth mentioning here that the vast majority of the participants said they are not familiar with Al-Assad's electoral program, and four people from those who said they would participate in the elections said that they would vote for any candidate other than Al-Assad regardless of that candidate's electoral program.

Do you know Al-Assad's electoral program?



Fourth- The impact of the elections on the path of the solution in Syria:

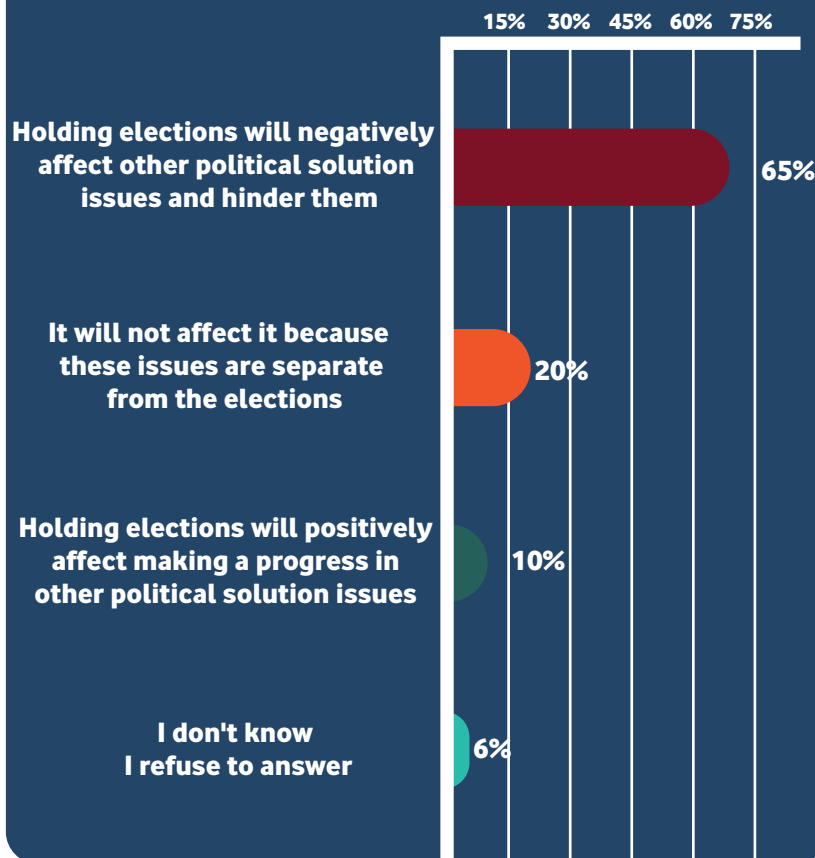
The international community has repeatedly emphasized that the solution of the conflict in Syria can never be military solution, but rather a political solution in which Syrians of all their political, ideological, religious and ethnic affiliations participate, and the international community has charted the path of the political solution in Syria through many international decisions, as in 2012, the Geneva 1 statement was issued, which adopted what was known at the time as the Annan Plan (the Six-Point Plan), and one of the most important points of this plan was the necessity of commitment to ceasing all acts of armed violence, including the use of heavy weapons, the withdrawal of military forces, and the stopping of the army's movements towards populated areas. The plan has also emphasized the necessity of releasing all people who have been arbitrarily arrested, including those detained for their peaceful political activities.

Later, in 2015, Security Council Resolution No. 2254 was issued, which is considered the main reference for a political solution, and that resolution arranged the steps that must be followed to end the conflict in Syria, as it stressed the necessity of starting a Syrian-led political process facilitated by the United Nations by working first on setting a timetable for drafting a new constitution for the country, provided that free and fair elections will be held in accordance with the new constitution, and under the supervision of the United Nations in a safe and neutral environment that includes all Syrians, including those living in exile, after that and in 2017 a roadmap for a political solution was approved in Syria based on UN resolutions No. 2254 of 2015 and 2118 of 2013 which includes the Geneva Statement. This roadmap stipulated working in parallel or consecutively on four issues, namely; governance, the constitution, elections, and a safe and neutral environment.

The first issue on which work was started was the constitution, as work has been done to form a committee to undertake the task of drafting a new constitution for the country, and this committee includes representatives from the Syrian regime, the Syrian opposition and civil society, but the work of that committee was not scheduled with a timetable as stipulated in Resolution No. 2254, which allowed the Syrian regime to delay and obstruct the committee's sessions in what appears to be an attempt to gain time to hold the presidential elections in accordance with Syrian Constitution of 2012. Indeed, the committee was unable to achieve any tangible progress in its tasks, and none of the other steps of the political solution which are releasing the detainees, the cessation of military operations, and the provision of a safe and neutral environment was addressed.

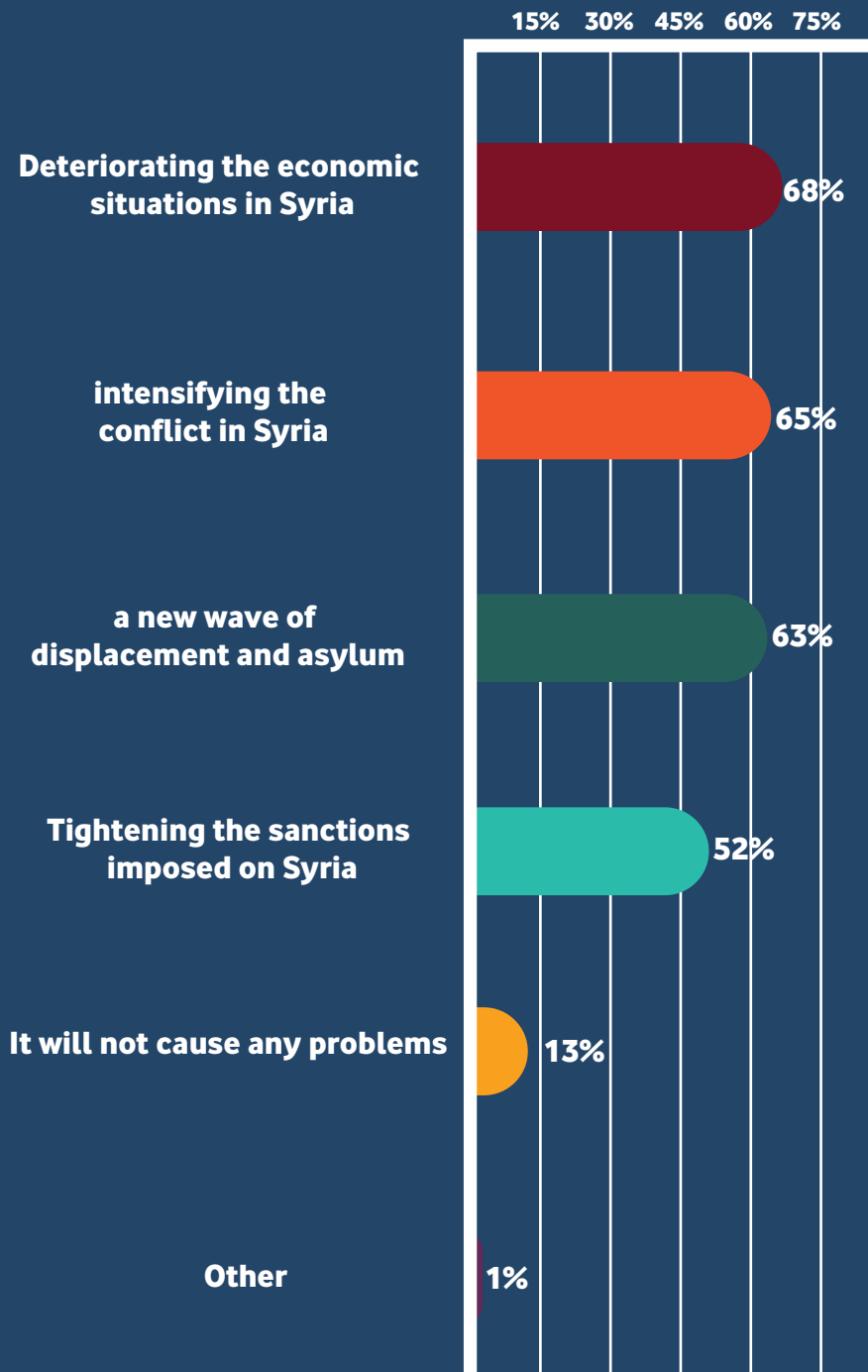
Four experts believe that holding the presidential elections at the present time will negatively affect other political solution issues, as the Syrian regime will increase its intransigence after holding the elections and hinder any efforts aimed at moving forward in the path of the solution, as it will refuse to go into the issue of governance and form a transitional governing body, and it will also not take any measures to release the detainees or reveal their fate, and even if drafting a new constitution for the country is achieved, the regime will refuse to hold presidential elections before the end of the new presidential term, while the fifth expert said that he believes that holding elections have no effect on others issues of the political solution, as according to him, these issues are separate from each other. As for the study participants, most of them said that they believe that holding the presidential elections at the present time will negatively affect the rest of the political solution issues.

**Do you think that holding the elections will
\ affect other political solution issues
(Constitution - Issue of the
detainees - Combating terrorism)**



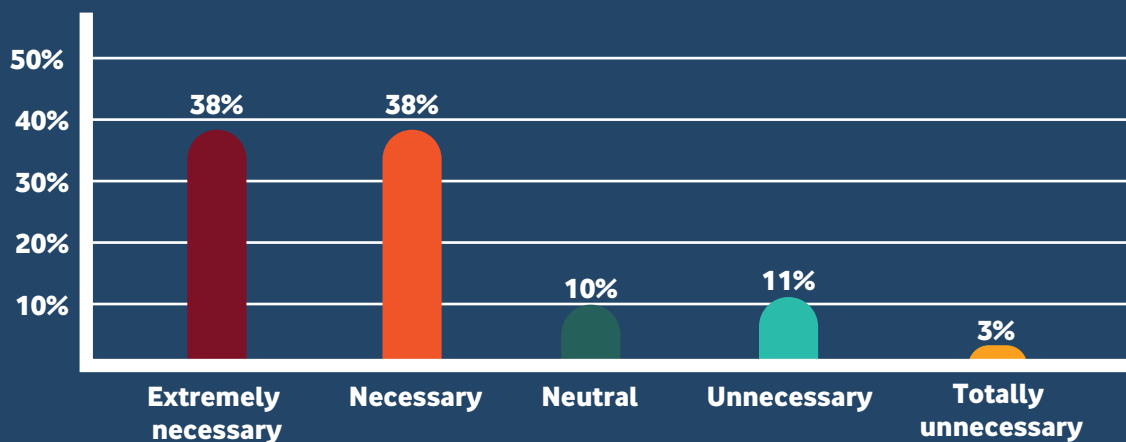
On the other hand, the majority of the study participants and the experts believe that holding the presidential elections and the winning of Al-Assad will negatively affect the economic and field conditions inside Syria and will result in many problems, as more than two-thirds of the participants in addition to the experts said that this would lead to more economic deterioration and depreciation of the Syrian pound, which will increase the difficulty of the living conditions of the Syrians and limit their ability to secure their daily living requirements. Also, about two-thirds of the participants believe that Al-Assad's winning of the elections will lead to an escalation in military operations in an attempt by him and his supporters to control more lands which are now beyond his control, which will increase the intensity of the conflict in Syria, and among the problems that may also occur as a result of the deteriorating economic conditions and the increase in the intensity of the conflict, is that many Syrians will be forced to leave their areas and the occurrence of more waves of displacement and asylum.

In your opinion, which of the following problems may happen if Al-Assad won the elections?



According to experts' opinion, avoiding the aforementioned problems requires that the international community pose pressure on the Syrian regime and its supporters to postpone the date of the presidential elections, while work is done to create appropriate conditions for holding free and fair elections in which all Syrians participate, regardless of their areas of residence. The experts had different answers when they were asked whether they believe that the participation of the Syrian Democratic Forces in the current elections and the presence of candidates on behalf of it can contribute to achieving political stability in the country, as two of them confirmed this by saying that Syrian Democratic Forces control nearly a quarter of the Syrian territory and therefore, their participation will definitely contribute to achieving political stability and will give the elections a kind of legitimacy and credibility. Another expert expressed his doubt regarding that opinion, saying that the Syrian Democratic Forces do not have public acceptance in the areas they control, and one expert also said that political stability cannot be achieved with the participation of the Syrian Democratic Forces due to the rejection of the countries supporting them, the foremost of which is The United States, of the elections. As for the study participants, the largest percentage of them said that they believe that it is necessary for The Syrian Democratic Forces to participate and to have representatives for it in the elections.

Do you think it is necessary to hold elections in the areas controlled by SDF?



Presidential Elections Between reality and the Syrians opinions

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