

Citizen Participation in Local Administration

A Field Study Exploring the Ways of Developing a Diverse Community
Participation in Local Administration in Northeast Syria



Justice for Life Organization©

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Executive Summary

Civil and political sources in northeastern Syria are circulating news, every now and then, about the Autonomous Administration's intentions to stage elections in SDF control areas. The Administration is taking steps to restructure itself and involve the local community in choosing its representatives and decision-making. Even though no official news or indications confirm that endeavor for elections. It remains a possible step due to mounting local demands to restructure the Administration to meet the local needs.

JFL argues the possibility of holding elections in governorates under the Autonomous Administration control; Deir Ezzor, Al-Hasakah, and Raqqa. JFL has studied the reasons for demanding such restructuring. The field study focused on the Administration's performance, public satisfaction, selection of public officials, relations with local communities across the governorates, and the commitment of the Administration and the SDF to human rights principles and the to enforce accountability.

The field study commented on the local community's stance on the current structure of the Administration and the best ways to restructure it, including: the organization of local elections, election conditions, and the role of civil society organizations, political parties, and international support to northeast Syria in the steps taken or likely to be taken by the Autonomous Administration towards its restructure.

According to a questionnaire implemented in the three governorates, JFL found that the dissatisfaction with the Autonomous Administration has reached 58%. An Autonomous Administration employee associated her dissatisfaction with the Administration's failure to deal with living, security, and political conditions, besides obstructive internal factors within the Autonomous Administration. In comparison, 42% expressed satisfaction with the Administration. According to a media reporter for a TV channel in Al-Hasakah: "There are no militias in northeastern Syria. There is a single force whose leadership is clear and subject to one order. This is a distinction from the rest of the regions." A Female activist from Al-Hasakah confirmed that the Administration ensured representation to all groups. The Administration protects diversity, and it must be given an adequate opportunity.

There is some disparity in the work of the Administration between governorates. Service delivery is not the same quality in all governorates. The participants connected that subject to the disfunction of

the control system and the variance in competencies level from one place to another. Besides, security conditions are worse in some areas than in other regions.

The Autonomous Administration's relationship with the local community is unstable. 54.1% think that the Administration did not seek to enhance citizens' confidence. They defined indications: as the quality of services and the violations committed by the SDF security forces, including arbitrary arrests. Participants in the dialogue session in Deir Ezzor reported that the security forces attacked the medical staff of the Public Hospital of Al-Kasra town (known as Al-Kasra Hospital), west of Deir Ezzor. The forces were not held accountable, which caused anger among local people. According to some people we interviewed, the accountability efforts are hampered by corruption, and the Administration was unsuccessful in preventing it. Additionally, the uncertainty of the region's future, conflict of interests, and the priority of security efforts hinder accountability.

According to the participants in the research paper, many factors are required to improve the Administration's institutes. That includes the development of many sectors, whether by allocating budget or raising funds (ex: services), holding outlaws accountable, improving the economic conditions, employment, equal opportunities, and revising several laws, including the self-defense duty (conscription law).

There is no local participation in nominating the Administration's leadership or its senior officials. Tribal relations and interest networks have a major role in selecting public officials and sustaining public institutions regardless of competence. Some Administration employees confirmed that there are no clear selection criteria or elections. Even if there were elections to choose officials at the commune level, they are pro-forma.

According to the participants in the research paper, working in the administration institutions is not ideal due to exceptional circumstances in northeast Syria. Some participants pointed out that educated people have refused to work with the Administration since it was established. Also, according to the participants, the situation is improving, and the Administration has communicated with the competent candidates from various groups. 35.58% said that partisan, ethnic, and clan quotas have a role in employment, and 37.52% said that corrupted networks in the Administration exploit employment processes.

A participant in the Al-Hasakah sessions mentioned that the Autonomous Administration's judiciary reduced the sentence for an accused of "honor killing" crime because he is related to influential people in the Administration.

During interviews and focused dialogue sessions, common opinions of the institutions indicate that the law-enforcement institutions are flawed and do not enforce the law similarly across regions. The Justice Bureau and Security Forces have many flaws. A lawyer and human rights activist from Raqqa said: "The indicator of the lack of law enforcement is the failure to implement judicial decisions in concluded cases and the seizure of personal property without legal justifications." Everyone interviewed by JFL agreed that the officials in the security sector are not subject to the law and are not held accountable.

A small number of institutes inconsistently publish information about the implementation of their projects. Generally, the Administration's institutions do not share their activities, procedures, or applicable laws with the local community. Among the most important and inaccessible information are budgets allocated to different regions, allocation details of those budgets, budget control mechanisms, the surplus or deficit of annual budgets. All participants in the dialogue sessions in the three governorates agreed that everything related to security or military aspect was completely obscured. But they had different opinions in justifying that.

A member of the Future Syria Party who works for an institution affiliated with the Autonomous Administration confirmed the absence of any communication mechanism of public information between the Administration and the local community.

The employees of local institutes are subject to accountability. However, this accountability is marred by four main flaws. First the Administration's reconciliation with those accused of breaking the law. Second, accountability and prosecution involve certain people. It doesn't extend to those associates or supporters inside or outside the Administration. Third, accountability does not extend to higher administrative levels. Finally, some of those in charge of disciplinary committees and some judges are not qualified for these positions.

According to an employee from the Autonomous Administration in Deir Ezzor, the pace of prosecution of those accused of corruption has increased during the past two years. That is explained by the Administration's response to local and international pressures.

The participants in various governorates agree that respect for human rights in the Autonomous Administration is insufficient. We can mention several levels:

First: education and health, water and electricity services are available to everyone, and there is no distinction between consumers. The problems in these two sectors are related to infrastructure, inefficiency, or the behavior of certain employees.

Second: it is related to public freedoms such as expression, sharing power, and forming parties. The participants acknowledged some margin of freedom, but it is still very limited. Yet political activists, media activists, and civil activists are restricted most of the time. Activists must abide by the security red lines to avoid the risk of arbitrary arrest and torture.

Most of the participants in the field study saw the need to make fundamental changes to the current Administration. Some believe that the current structure is not sustainable, even if it was appropriate.

An employee, who works for an institution affiliated with the Autonomous Administration in Deir Ezzor, said that "the current Administration's structure suits the first stage of forming an Administration. But now the Administration is really seeking restructures".

Civil society organizations and political parties in northeast Syria have a role summarized in three main points: introducing human rights and how to defend them to the local community, establishing connections between local communities and the Autonomous Administration institutes, and "limited" oversight of the institutions' work. The relationship between the Administration from one hand, civil society organizations, and political parties from another hand, ranges from cooperation sometimes to tension in many cases. Organizations and parties fear suspending their work, shutting down their offices, and arresting their staff.

Elections are a tool for change and local demand to achieve local participation in selecting the Administration for north and east Syria. However, according to the participants, the current conditions are not favorable. The participants suggested that some conditions have to be considered before any elections. 74.18% said that the elections should occur without interference from local or regional parties, and organizations and political parties should have absolute freedom to run awareness campaigns. Additionally, 54.75% said there is a need for a law that guarantees equality amongst all northern and eastern Syria residents. 39.61% said that local and international monitoring of elections is essential to conduct those elections.

Some people rely on international support to contribute to preparation for any upcoming elections besides ensuring elections' integrity.

Good governance is a process in which public institutions facilitate public affairs, manage public resources, and ensure the realization of human rights¹. The negative effects of bad government are

¹ About good governance, OHCHR
<https://bit.ly/3kYKSmC>

mainly corruption, lack of property rights, and areas such as the health of the population and people's access to safe drinking² water.

According to JFL findings, it is recommended not to hold elections in the meantime in northern and eastern Syria. Instead, there should be more focus on creating an appropriate environment to hold future elections, specifically improving security conditions, securing technical, financial, and human resources, and making laws to protect the electoral process.

² Principles of Good Governance, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<https://bit.ly/3MOQSHZ>

Methodology

The Spatial and Temporal Framework

The implementation process started with developing research tools, data collection and analysis, finding results, and sharing them in the research paper. That process started in November 2021 and lasted until the end of March 2022. It took place in the towns of Al-Kasra and Hajeen in Deir Ezzor governorate, the cities of Qamishli and Amuda in Al-Hasakah Governorate, and Raqqa city. All are under the control of the Autonomous Administration.

Research Tools

This paper adopts three research tools. JFL conducted a questionnaire that targeted 600 people. JFL also held four focused group discussions and made twelve key interviews in the governorates of Deir Ezzor, Al-Hasakah, and Raqqa.

The research tools focused on the following aspects: local satisfaction with the local authorities' performance, governance in northern and eastern Syria, opportunities available to establish a good governance form in northern and eastern Syria, and each aspect consisted of several branches.

Research Sample

The sample was randomized by assigning respondents to questionnaires randomly. Civil and political activists, representatives of civil society organizations, community influencers, and former local authority employees participated in the dialogue sessions. JFL researchers met with people with social influence, civil and political activism, and knowledge of political, social, and security developments in north and east Syria.

The overall percentage of female respondents to the questionnaire reached 50%. And the percentage of youth, 18 to 29 years old, reached 30%. The total number of participants in dialogue sessions was 98 people.

Research Team

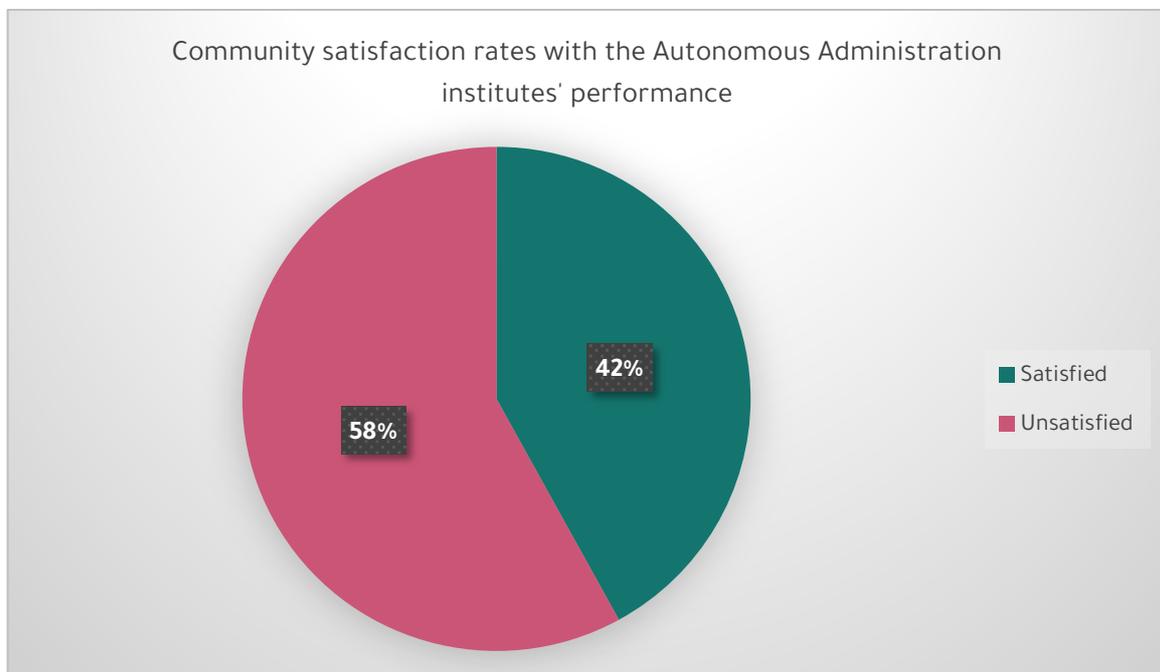
The questionnaire and key interviews were carried out by six researchers in Deir Ezzor, Al-Hasakah, and Raqqa. The JFL's field team and skilled local facilitators conducted the central dialogue sessions in the

three governorates. With the help of experienced facilitators from the region. Shortly before implementation took place, JFL conducted training on administering surveys, key interviews, and orientation sessions for facilitators.

First Aspect: The Autonomous Administration Institutes

First: Satisfaction of the Local Community with the Work of the Local Authority Institutions

The satisfaction and dissatisfaction rates with the Autonomous Administration institutes' performance are comparable in the local community. The questionnaire results indicated a dissatisfaction of approximately 58% ranging between total and relative dissatisfaction with the Autonomous Administration. The results show that women are more satisfied, as the percentage of satisfied women reached 26%. Satisfaction rates increase in the Al-Hasakah and Qamishli areas. In contrast, the satisfaction rate drops in Raqqa, witnessing a small percentage, and Deir Ezzor.



The following reasons can explain the dissatisfaction in the three provinces:

- 1- The severe shortage of some services such as water and electricity provision: It is incredibly difficult for some villages to get water at a high price, even though the region lies at the Euphrates River. Even some villages get electricity for one hour daily.
- 2- Insecurity³: including the widespread use of weapons, robberies, armed robberies, assassinations, and arbitrary arrests⁴.
- 3- Severe shortage of academic staff⁵ and education facilities: Existing academic staff are not qualified. The three governorates, especially Deir Ezzor and Raqqa, suffer a significant school dropout rate.
- 4- Shortage of medical staff and the lack of adequate medical infrastructure to cover local needs: For example, many villages in the governorates of Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, and Al-Hasakah do not have a single health center. That problem has emerged more severely during the pandemic.⁶
- 5- Not all families get enough bread⁷ daily, and its low quality: There is no clear and sustainable plan to ensure bread supply to residents and displaced families.
- 6- Insufficient fuel and gas supplies negatively impacted civilians, especially during the Winter season.
- 7- Agriculture is affected by the rise in fuel prices and failure to secure necessary seeds and fertilizers, which have become expensive in the black market.
- 8- Obstacles set sometimes by the Administration to register parties and civil society organizations⁸.

³ Deir Ezzor: Insecurity Grips Deir Ezzor: Locals Concerned Following a Series of Disturbing Murders.

Joint report, JFL and STJ - April 2021.

<https://bit.ly/3Gy78Nd>

⁴ Deir Ezzor: Dozens Arbitrarily Arrested during SDF's "Deterrence of Terrorism" Campaign.

Joint report, JFL and STJ - October 2020.

<https://bit.ly/3yrFYGn>

⁵ Education From a Means of Conflict to a Vehicle of Peace and Communal Living. JFL - July 2020.

<https://bit.ly/3FE6v51>

⁶ Thousands of New Cases and Hundreds of Deaths Due to the Widespread of COVID-19 in Northeastern Syria.

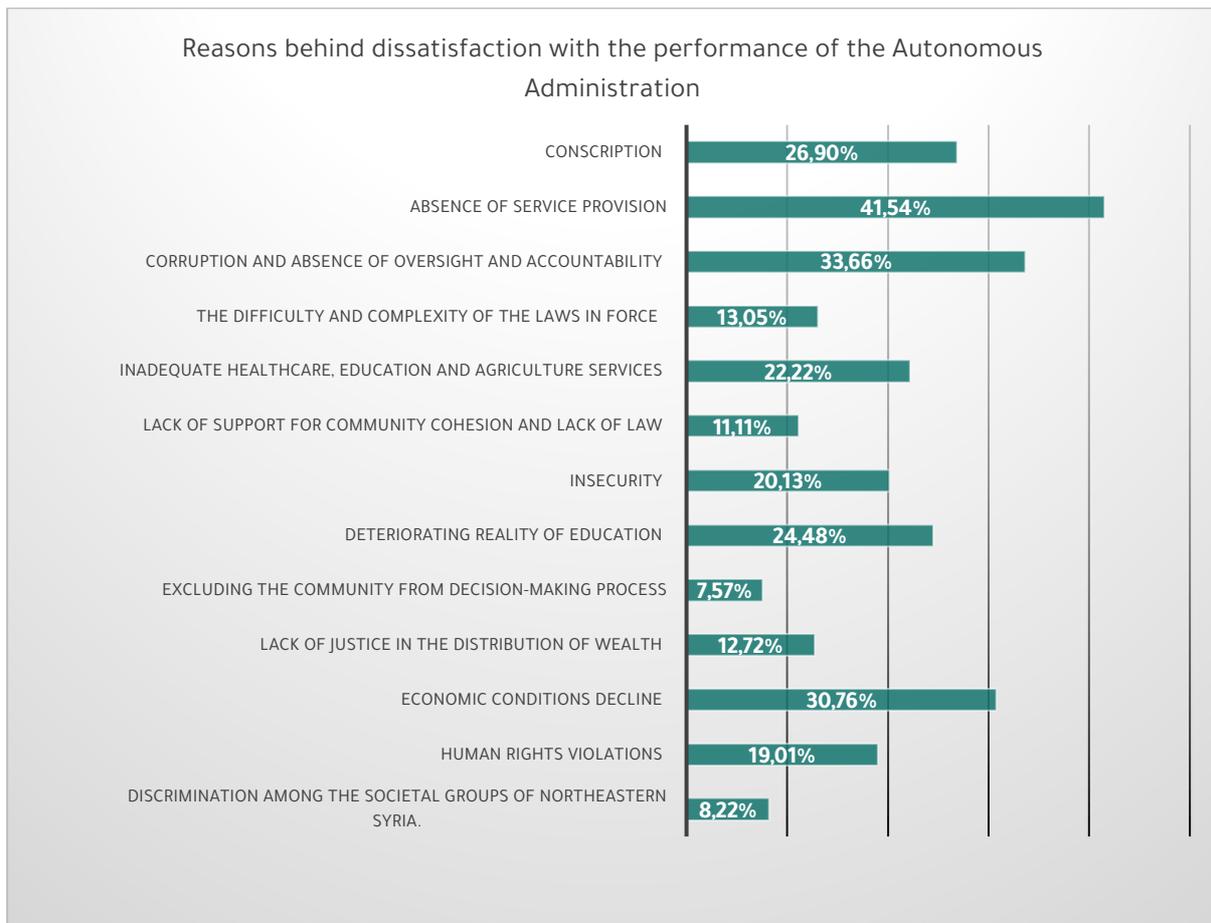
JFL - October 2021.

<https://bit.ly/3srp6vH>

⁷ The Economic Committee of the Deir Ezzor Civil Council indicated, in a letter, a significant deficit in flour delivered to bakeries despite attempts to deal with that deficit. The letter was sent to the Co-Presidency of the Council No. 1437 on November 15th, 2021.

⁸ "Government effectiveness and efficiency exist where processes and institutions make the best use of resources to produce results that meet the needs of society. Effectiveness and efficiency require the enhancement of quality and standardization of public service delivery, the professionalization of the bureaucracy, focusing government efforts on vital functions, and the elimination of redundancies or overlaps in functions and operations". What is good governance?, UNODC.

<https://bit.ly/3MOQSH7>



A social representative from the village of Gharanij, east of Deir Ezzor, said: "The most important drawback of the administration was the quotas system and not paying attention to educated people." A civil activist from Raqqa said: "I am not satisfied with the violations against civilians, as I was one of the victims after my detention in the Administration's prisons."

A female employee, who works for an institute affiliated with the Autonomous Administration, attributed dissatisfaction to the Administration's failure to deal with the current living, security, and political conditions and internal obstacles that burden the Administration from functioning.

A lawyer and a human rights activist from Raqqa said during an interview, explaining his dissatisfaction: "There is a shortage of skilled people, and this is due to the widespread emigration from the region during the years of war. Existing skilled people are reluctant to work with the Administration to avoid engaging in corruption and nepotism that permeates all the Administration's institutes. In addition, the ambiguity of the region's future and the possible return of the Syrian government."

The respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with the services, including the provision of water, electricity, flour, fuel, and road repair. This dissatisfaction is common in the three governorates and was expressed by 41.54%. While 30.76% confirmed that their dissatisfaction is due to deterioration of living conditions. Education has a place in evaluating the Administration's work. 24.58% said that the

lack of educational infrastructure and academic staff deprived thousands of children and youth of their right to education. The security instability in some areas of northeastern Syria caused the dissatisfaction of 20.13%.

The percentage of satisfaction can be explained by the fact that the satisfied participants compare the current situation in northeastern Syria with the rest of the Syrian regions. Some mentioned the improvement in water service provision in Raqqa and a better space for expression than in the Syrian government areas. Another reason is the availability of some health centers and improving the security conditions in Al-Hasakah Governorate.

An employee, who works for an institution affiliated with the Administration and a member of the Future Syria Party in Deir Ezzor, confirmed that the Administration was able to restore many of the services that had stopped due to the conflict. A female civil activist from Deir Ezzor said, "The reasons for default have nothing to do with the Administration."

A media reporter for a TV channel in al-Hasakah said: " There are no militias in northeastern Syria. There is a single force whose leadership is clear and subject to one order. This is a distinction from the rest of the regions." An activist from Al-Hasakah confirmed that the Administration ensured representation to all groups, and the Administration protects diversity. It must be given an adequate opportunity.

Result (1)

The way people determine their satisfaction or dissatisfaction is still connected to the provision of services, security status, education, improving economic conditions by creating job opportunities, supporting farmers and livestock⁹. Raising wages and raising the margin of human rights and public freedoms. We noticed positive opinions about the security conditions in Al-Hasakah, in contrast to Deir Ezzor and Raqqa.

Result (2)

Freedoms are not one of the main reasons for determining satisfaction with the Administration. That is because civilians have suffered a great deal from successors of different forces in the region that did not provide services that meet people's needs.

⁹ The Executive Council of the Autonomous Administration issued Resolution No. 41 on February 24th, 2022, that canceled customs duties on fodder materials imported into the Autonomous Administration's areas designated for livestock. It allowed all traders to import fodder materials.

Conclusion

The Administration must improve the local community's satisfaction by steadily improving services and security conditions and covering various regions¹⁰. Participants focused on service provisions more than rights and liberties for reasons related to the conditions in the regions. Yet, that would not grant immunity for the Administration to continue its policy of suppressing liberties. In fact, the violations committed by security forces leave cumulative negative impacts that may make satisfaction levels decline further in the future.

Second: The Work of the Local Authority Institutions in North and East Syria

The disparity¹¹ in the local authority's work is among the governorates and within each governorate. It is noted that the services in Al-Hasakah and Raqqa are relatively better than Deir Ezzor. In the Deir Ezzor governorate, fewer services are provided to areas near the Badia desert than in the villages away from it due to armed attacks in Badia desert areas. Also, there are clear demands for representing various regions in each governorate. This representation is effective, enabling representatives from different regions to convey their regional needs.

Some participants attributed the service provision disparity to low numbers of experienced staff and conflict of interest that some Administration's staff provide services to their region at the expense of other regions. 49.30% confirmed the absence of a control mechanism which led to disparities in the authority's progress across regions. And 34.19% attributed the discrepancy to the improvement and decline of the security conditions across different regions. 36.5% mentioned the ability of social influencers to pull services into their regions at the expense of other regions.

An employee from the Administration and a female activist from Deir Ezzor acknowledged the existence of disparity. They explained it to massive destruction in Raqqa and Deir Ezzor than in Al-Hasakah. Yet, Raqqa and Deir Ezzor governorates did not allocate enough budget to improve service conditions.

¹⁰ "Equity and inclusiveness exist where everyone has opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being. This means that all members of society, especially the most vulnerable, are taken into consideration in policymaking, and no one feels alienated, disenfranchised or left behind", What is good governance? UNODC.
<https://bit.ly/3MOQSH7>

¹¹ "Transparency exists where the process of decision-making by those in power can be scrutinized by concerned members of society" What is good governance? UNODC.
<https://bit.ly/3MOQSH7>

The most mentioned example of disparity is fuel. The fuel prices differ from one region to another, confirmed by a social representative from Gharanij village in Deir Ezzor. A public employee in Raqqa stated that allocated fuel for Raqqa is approximately equal to what the city of Tabqa gets. According to the employee, Raqqa's population is about 700 thousand people compared to Tabqa's is about 450 thousand people.

A lawyer and a human rights activist from Raqqa added judiciary¹² and the rule of law¹³ to the disparities in the Administration's actions, as they exist in some areas and are almost absent in others.

The security and freedoms conditions constituted some difference in the participants' opinions from one region to another. It was obvious among those from stable security regions versus those from security-chaos regions. A TV journalist said that the Administration works in the same way in various regions, "the laws of the administration and its security, services, and economic institutions are one and work in a coordinated manner." A civil activist in al-Hasakah said: "The disparity of the administration's progress is not a systematic policy, but rather is due to reasons related to each region separately."

Result

There is a disparity in the progress of public institutions from one region to another. There is no agreement on the reason, but what stands out is the weakness of competence, relationships, personal interests, the dominance of money, some clans, and influential people in power. In addition, there is no sufficient allocation of resources commensurate with the size of every region's needs.

Conclusion

The Administration is required work to improve its official's efficiency across the regions. The Administration must allocate sufficient resources for each region in proportion to needs and population size and monitor the disbursement of that support. The judiciary must have the authority to hold accountable those who violate the law. The Administration will thus overcome the obstacles to providing a non-discriminatory service.

¹² The Trial of the Islamic State's Members.. Fundamental Proceedings for Justice, JFL - June 2022

<https://bit.ly/2R9qzr8>

¹³ The United Nations defines the rule of law as "a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards. It requires, as well, measures to ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision-making", What is good governance? UNODC.

<https://bit.ly/3MOQSHZ>

Third: The Relationship between the Local Authority and the Local Community in Northeastern Syria

The continuation of violations, especially arbitrary arrests, and the dissatisfaction shown in this paper based on the deterioration of the security and services and failure to develop it indicates 54.1% of the participants that there are no endeavors to enhance citizens' confidence in the Autonomous Administration. According to the results, decisions are taken unilaterally¹⁴. The Administration allies with stakeholders and influencers at the expense of the public interest. In addition to the stagnation in the service sector and failure to develop it to suit different regional needs despite high demands. Participants in a dialogue session in Deir Ezzor said that security forces attacked the medical staff in the General Hospital in Al-Kasra, west of Deir Ezzor. The security forces were not held accountable, which angered the local people.

A media person from a TV channel in Al-Hasakah said: "The administration's effort to gain the local community's confidence is clear." A civil activist from al-Hasakah confirmed that opinion by saying: "The administration has organized elections to choose the commune members." According to some people interviewed by JFL researchers, these efforts are hampered by corruption that the Administration has been unable to combat, the uncertainty of the region's future, and the priority of security efforts.

45.89% confirmed that the Administration is working according to its capacity to enhance the local community's confidence. Some said that the Administration includes the various groups in northeastern Syria in its institutions and does not discriminate among those groups. The Administration responds to the demands for improving services, even if this effort has been slow.

A civil activist from Deir Ezzor said, "The Administration has launched a project to restructure its institutions. " The activist recognized that as progress, even if it has not been achieved so far. An employee from the authority's institutions from Raqqa said: "My colleagues and I seek to respond to societal needs. Now the provision of bread has improved. Fuel and gas cylinders were allocated to each family."

Result

The majority believes that the Autonomous Administration is not serious about improving trust with the local community through continuing violations, disparities in services provision, and regional

¹⁴ Consensus orientation: Public hearings, referendums, forums for debate, citizens' legal right to petition leaders about policy and consultation mechanisms are examples of means to work towards achieving consensus or at least compromise. What is good governance? UNODC.

<https://bit.ly/3MOQSHZ>

security problems. Those convinced with the Administration's efforts to meet increasing demands acknowledged that the Administration does not meet all the demands due to limited capacity, security, and economic conditions.

Conclusion

It is clear that the administration lacks a clear action plan to improve services and respect human rights, especially during SDF security operations, hold violators accountable, and include political, social and civil forces in decision-making.

Fourth: Developing the Work of Local Authority Institutions

According to the participants, the Administration is currently required to develop many sectors, whether in terms of allocating budgets for them or raising the budgets that have been allocated, such as services, and holding outlaws accountable.

Additionally, improving service facilities leading to raising the level of services is a common demand in various north and east Syria regions. 54.40% called it a priority, along with the need to improve the economic conditions and focus on creating job opportunities by infusion of more funding into local projects and ensuring equal opportunities among applicants to work opportunities. That reached 46.10% of demand. The conscription¹⁵ imposed by the Administration poses a challenge to age groups targeted for recruitment. Many of whom are considered the sole breadwinner of their families. In case they do not provide what justifies their inability to join the service, they will not be able to move or reach their workplace due to the spread of military checkpoints that execute conscription regulations.

Despite announcing a wide campaign to stop child recruitment¹⁶, including the formation of the Child Protection Officer in Armed Conflict¹⁷, especially to return recruits under the age of eighteen. The local community still requires the Administration to take more steps. It is reported that the recruitment of those under the legal age is ongoing, even though it is at a slower pace than before.

¹⁵ The Defense Office of the Executive Council of the Autonomous Administration issued Circular No. 5 on March 26th, 2022. The Self-Defense Duty campaign begins, targeting people born between 1998 and March 31st, 2000.

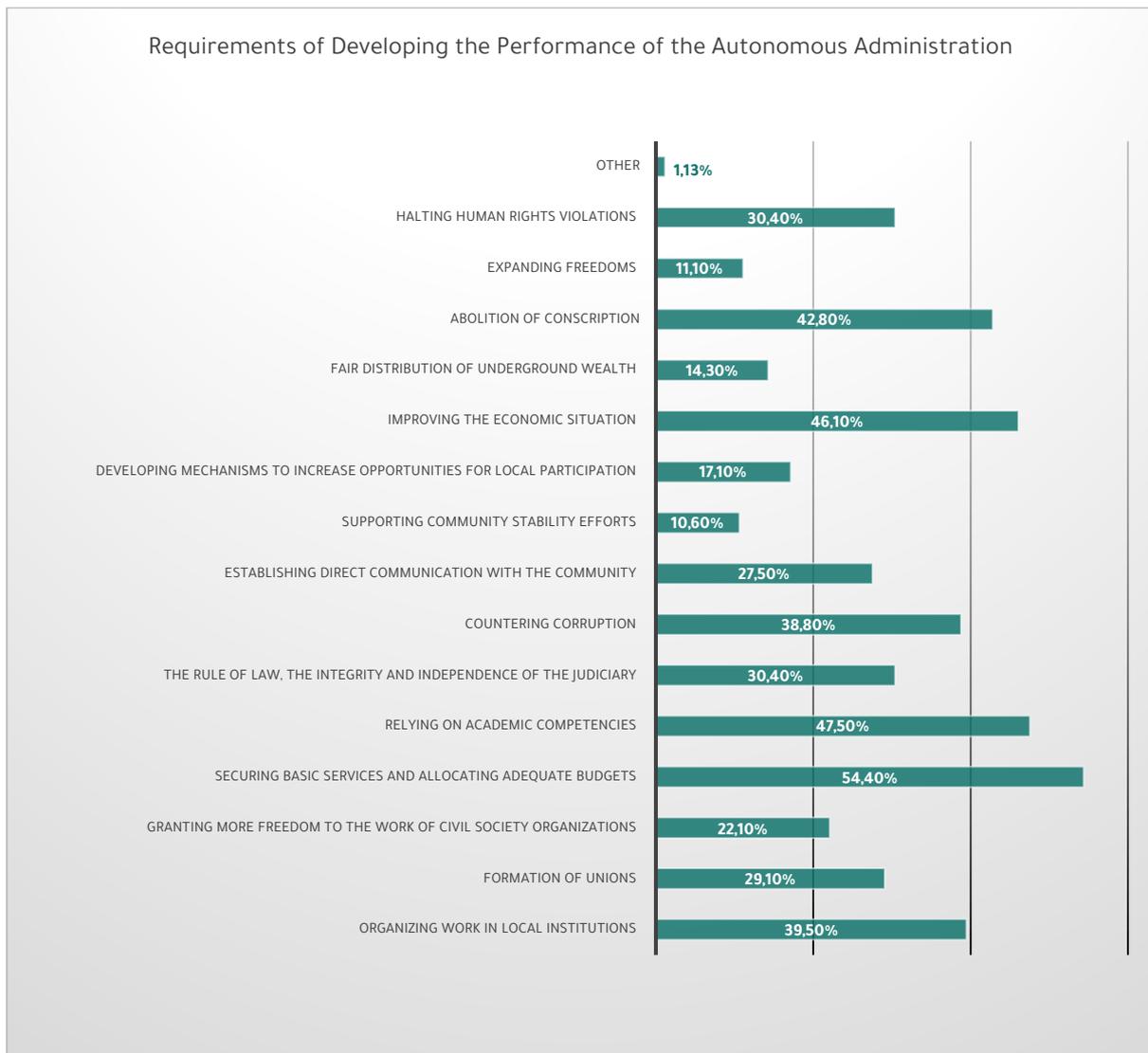
¹⁶ Northeastern Syria: Northeast Syria: Why does the Autonomous Administration fail to prevent child recruitment?

STJ - January 2022

<https://bit.ly/3FyocD5>

¹⁷ The office was formed in 2020 by a decision from the Executive Council of the Autonomous Administration, based on a plan signed between the Syrian Democratic Forces and the United Nations.

<https://bit.ly/3M8xBUw>



One of the most prominent problems in the Administration's institute's work is the lack of qualified people. Communicating with existing skilled people and developing a program to qualify staff and include the Administration's institutes. That demand was urgent for more than 47% of the respondents.

A social representative from Gharanij village said: "They need to hold accountable those found guilty of corruption through judiciary while ensuring the independence of the judiciary." He believes that "the development of the Administration begins from the fight against corruption that has burdened its efforts".

An employee in the administrative institutions in Deir Ezzor said: "The shortcoming caused by the lack of academic merit must be ended, and those skills must be allowed to contribute to the development of service conditions." A civil activist confirmed that by saying that quotas in jobs and responsibilities are almost ravaging the Administration's experience.

There are demands to form a new social contract, remove restrictions on political participation¹⁸, develop laws to improve the lives of the local population and protect and prevent the security services from interfering in the service and judicial institutions. According to an Administration employee in Raqqa, some institutions are almost a figurehead.

Result

Improving the Administration's work depends on two basic requirements. The first is to develop services, and the second is to create job opportunities. Those two demands require: launching a campaign to combat corruption in decision-making, relying on qualified people, and moving away from quotas in employment, segregation of powers, and judiciary's integrity and independence.

Conclusion

All demands focus on reforms, of which the Administration is a leading part. We did not notice any demand to abolish the administration model. Rather, opinions were unanimously agreed on reforms within the Autonomous Administration. The Administration must reform by focusing on: ensuring the judiciary's integrity, launching a campaign to combat corruption, imposing the rule of law, avoiding autocracy and one-party leadership, and accepting the role of political parties, civil society organizations, and the media.

¹⁸ "Participation refers to the opportunity for active involvement by all sectors of society in the decision-making process regarding all issues of interest. Participation is fostered by enabling environments where pertinent information is appropriately disseminated in a timely fashion so that all concerned people can voice their opinion in an unconstrained manner", What is good governance? UNODC. <https://bit.ly/3MOQSHZ>

Second Aspect: Governance in Northeastern Syria

First: Choosing the Members of the Local Authority in Northeast Syria

Clan relations, interest networks, and loyalty to those in power and the parties forming the Administration constitute a major factor in recruiting workers to the local authorities and ensuring their continuity at all administrative levels regardless of qualification. The Autonomous Administration workers affirmed no clear criteria for recruitment and no elections are in place. Even choosing officials at the common level, yet it is a formality. In addition, the Administration relies on unclear criteria for recruitment, such as hiring someone from the "martyrs' families." That does not mean that qualified people do not exist. Generally speaking, the Administration does not pay much attention to qualifications in recruitment.

A TV reporter in Al-Hasakah said, "The Administration relied on elections for some lower administrative positions. The Administration is now preparing to go to elections to respond to the growing demands for the necessity of local participation."

Some participants indicated that when the administrative institutes began to function, many people refused to work with the Administration. And the exceptional circumstance in the north and east Syria does not make working in the administration institutions ideal. The situation is improving and developing, and the Administration is attracting qualified people from various groups. 35.58% said that quotas based on ethnicity, clan, and party have a role in the employment, and 37.52% said that corruption networks within the Administration exploit employment processes.

Result (1)

The Administration does not rely on qualifications in selecting its employees. Quotas based on clan relationships and interests are the main factor to hire employees.

Result (2)

The elections that were recently organized to choose the communes in the neighborhoods of Al-Hasakah governorate were not accepted, as most of the participants described it as a sham election.

Result (3)

The reluctance of qualified people to work with the Administration is changing recently. Obviously, the Administration's desire, or part of it, is to cooperate with local expertise.

Conclusion (1)

Recruitment based on relations, partisan, and regional interests reflects the Administration's desire to fortify itself with its loyalists and exclude those with experience and different orientations.

Conclusion (2)

So far, there are no indications that the Administration is preparing for a better election than the one that recently took place.

Conclusion (3)

There are contradictions in dealing with local demands by those in charge of the Administration's institutions. Some actually seek to meet those demands, while others adhere to their single-minded approach.

Second: Imposing the Rule of Law in the Autonomous Administration Areas of Control

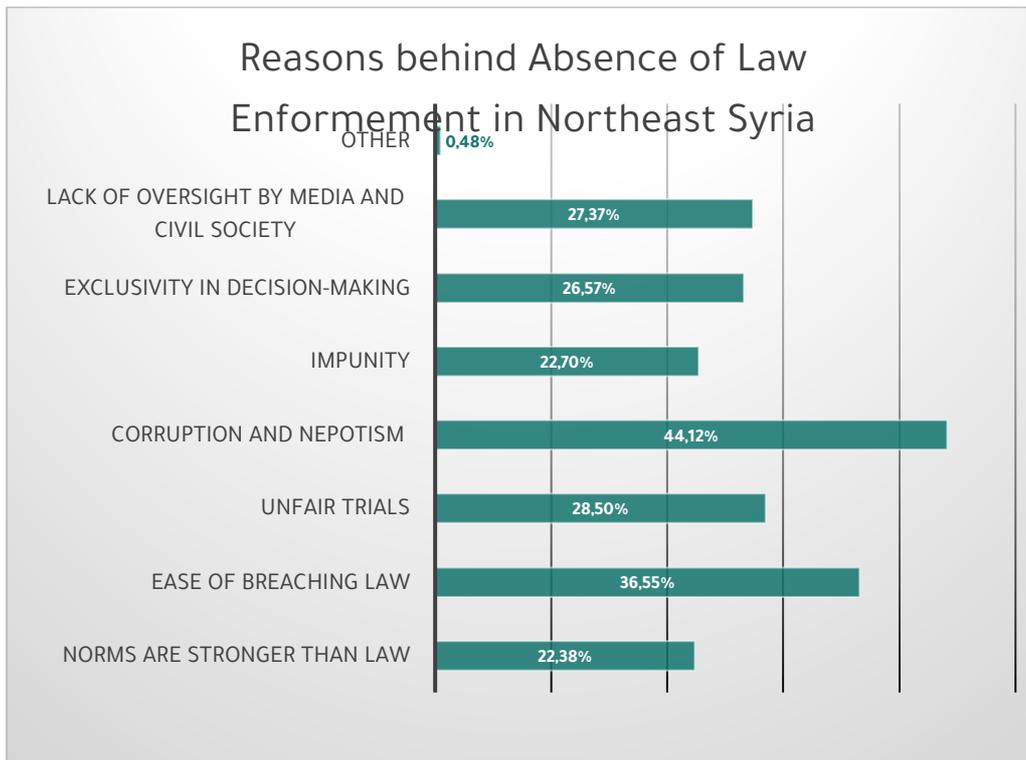
The dominant opinion in the interviews and focused dialogue sessions emphasized that the institutions formed by the Autonomous Administration to impose the rule of law do not perform their duties as they are supposed to. And the law enforcement varies from one region to another. There are many flaws in the work of the Social Justice Bureau and the Internal Security Forces.

Participants in a dialogue session in Al-Hasakah governorate stated that the penalty imposed on polygamy, for example, is not applied to all regions. One of the participants in the Al-Hasakah sessions said that the Autonomous Administration's judiciary had reduced the sentence for an accused of committing an "honor killing" due to the accused's relationship with influential people in the Administration. 60.86% of respondents to the questionnaire said that there is no law enforcement in their areas. A lawyer and human rights activist from Raqqa said: "What indicates the lack of enforcement of the law is the failure to implement the concluded judicial rulings in some cases, in addition to the seizure.¹⁹ of property without legal justifications". 28.50% of respondents said that unfair trials are one of the most prominent indicators of non-application of the law. All those interviewed by JFL agreed that officers in the security sector and senior leaders at the political and military levels are not subject to the law enforcement or accountability. A TV reporter in Al-Hasakah spoke about two factors that generally affect law enforcement in northeastern Syria: "First: corruption

¹⁹ Law No. 7: Property Seizure Legitimization. JFL - October 2020

<https://bit.ly/3wLXEZf>

protected by networks within the Administration and figures close to it. Second is the clan custom that imposes itself on the modernity of the Administration's experience, which forces its institutes to overlook those customs." A group of the total respondents expressed their belief that the law is generally not implemented in northeastern Syria. 44.12% explained that by the existence of corruption networks in the administrative institutions. And 22.38% said that customs are stronger than the law in some areas.



Two civil activists from Al-Hasakah said that one of the shortcomings is the institution's slow response to enforcing the law. Respondents to the questionnaire, who said that the law is being enforced, even if there are some gaps, but it is important not to neglect the security institute and the judiciary's presence and prosecute those accused of committing crimes. Also, the activists referred to the positive role of media and civil society organizations to strengthen the rule of law.

Result (1)

The Social Justice Bureau and the Internal Security Forces do not perform their duty to implement the law with the required competence, as differences are observed from one region to another.

Result (2)

The presence of these institutions has two sides: First is positive, represented in one leadership of those institutes. The second is negative, expressed in the security forces' control over the justice sector in particular.

Result (3)

The top leadership in Administration is immune from accountability.

Result (4)

The novelty of the Administration's experience makes it unable to enforce the law.

Conclusion (1)

The Administration is required to ensure the rule of law with all the integrity and efficiency it requires, and to engage the media and civil society organizations in oversight and to give them full freedom to operate.

Conclusion (2)

Reviewing the law enforcement process and the reason for the inability or "unwillingness" to implement them in many regions.

Third: Access to Public Information in Northeast Syria

The Administration's institutions do not share their activities and procedures with the local community²⁰. Some exceptions include a limited number of institutions publishing pictures and summaries of service activities with no further details. It is not possible to learn about budgets allocated to each region or the aspects of their allocation, annual budgets and mechanisms to audit them, or the surplus or deficit of the annual budget. The participants of the dialogue sessions in the three governorates unanimously agreed that everything related to security and the military aspect is completely obscured. However, the participants differed in explaining that.

In Al-Hasakah, the participants said that some municipalities announced, on an irregular basis, the budget allocated to services.

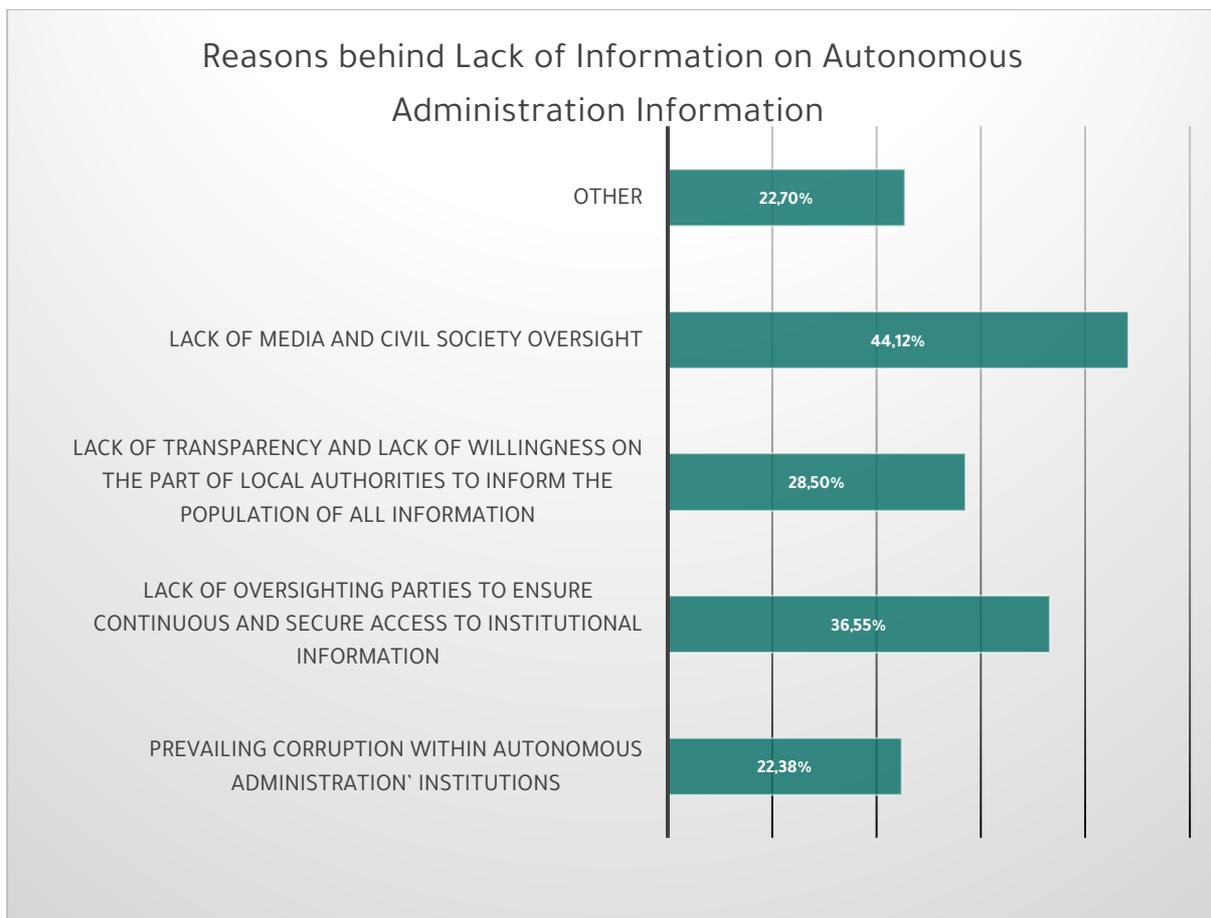
58.77% of those surveyed by the JFL said that the Administration does not facilitate access to information about its institutions. That does not mean that the local community does not know any information about the institutions. More precisely, the lack of sufficient information and the difficulty accessing what is required.

²⁰ "Transparency exists where the process of decision-making by those in power can be scrutinized by concerned members of society. Transparency rests on a partnership: officials must make information available, and there must be people and groups with reasons and opportunities to put information to use." What is good governance? UNODC.
<https://bit.ly/3MOQSHZ>

An employee of an administrative institute and a member of the Future Syria Party confirmed the absence of a communication mechanism between the Administration and the local community to provide public information. In contrast, two civil activists and two employees from the authority's institutes in Raqqa said that access is relative. The Administration seeks to improve this access through communes and popular meetings implemented by those in charge of these institutions, which is supported by 27.43% of respondents.

75.34% of the unsatisfied respondents with public information provided by the administration institutes believe that the reason is the absence of transparency and the desire to inform the local population of all information. And 48.76% say that it is not in the interest of corruption networks to disclose all information regardless of the institute's nature, whether service or security. The respondents add the absence of regulatory bodies and the oversight role of the media²¹ and civil society organizations.

From the point of view of 56.25% of those satisfied with the information provided by the authority, information related to security should be preserved.



²¹ The Media Department of the Executive Council of the Autonomous Administration issued Resolution No. 5 on February 5th, 2022, to shut down the Rudaw News Network.

Result (1)

There is insufficient public information available in northeastern Syria.

There are sporadic attempts to provide some information, yet it is not a regular commitment.

Result (2)

No information is available about the security or military institutes.

Conclusion

There is an absence of channels that share institutional information with the local community on a regular basis, including budgets, implemented projects, and projects that will be implemented. Two reasons could be behind this; the first reason is there is an interest in keeping information hidden, and the other one the absence of regulators.

Fourth: Accountability in Northeast Syria

Those who work in the local authority institutions are subject to accountability. Yet, that accountability suffers four main issues: First, the Administration's reconciliation for those accused of breaking the law and corruption. The reconciliation mechanism is to release them for a financial penalty that is sometimes high. Second, that mechanism does not extend to those associated with the accused or their supporters from inside or outside the Administration. Third, accountability is limited to some administrative levels and does not exceed it to higher levels. Fourth, some of those in charge of control committees and some judges are not qualified.

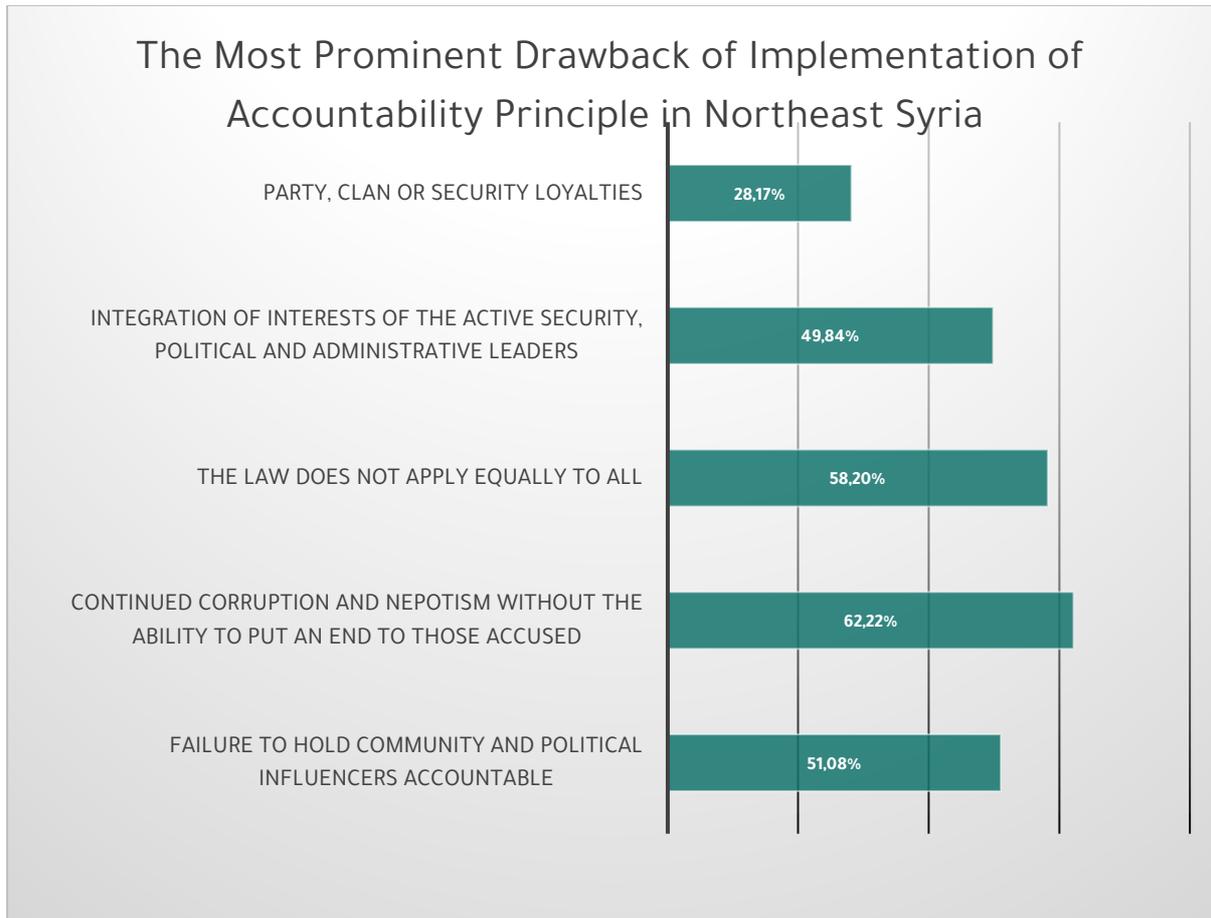
Forms of accountability include suspension from work, dismissal, exemption from duties, and expulsion. That happened to heads of committees affiliated with the Administration in Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, and Al-Hasakah. According to an employee in the Administration in Deir Ezzor, the pace of prosecution of those accused of corruption has increased during the past two years. This is explained by the Administration's response to local and international pressures. It was noted in the interviews that the most vocal supporters of the Administration called for the strengthening of accountability²².

Despite the emphasis on the existence of accountability, even relatively, 51.08% stated that those with social and political influence are above accountability. 58.20% believe that the law is not applied equally

²² "Accountability is based on the principle that every person or group is responsible for their actions, especially when their acts affect the public interest", What is good governance? UNODC.

<https://bit.ly/3MOQSHZ>

to everyone. 49.84% stated that networks of interests protect corruption, prevent law enforcement, and obstruct accountability.



Result (1)

The Autonomous Administration is working to enforce accountability. The increase is noted, holding officials accused of corruption and violating laws accountable.

Result (2)

The flaws in the accountability process limit its impact and facilitate impunity.

Conclusion

The Administration was unable to enforce accountability to all violators due to internal reasons such as conflict of influential members, or external reasons such as clan influence, security conditions, and the power of capital owners. That makes the application of accountability relative.

Fifth: The Administration's Commitment to Human Rights Principles

Participants in the various governorates agree that respect for human rights in the Autonomous Administration is partial. we can talk about several levels:

First: Education and healthcare. Water and electricity services are available to all, without discrimination among beneficiaries. The problems in these two sectors are related to infrastructure, inefficiency, or conflict of interest that some Administration's staff provide services to their region.

Second: public freedoms such as expression, participation in power, and formation of parties: the participants acknowledged some margin of the aforementioned, but it is very limited. The general case is restrictions on political, media²³, and civil activists and drawing security red lines that put those who cross the line at risk of being arrested.

Among respondents, 58.84% consider that the respect for human rights in the Administration's institutes is limited. Some mentioned discrimination on racial and religious grounds. Others referred to the violation of basic rights such as the right to live, movement²⁴, expression, and safety. At the same time, 43.15% think that what the Administration provides can be built on and is distinct from the rest of the Syrian regions. They compared the violations committed in the Administration's areas and the rest of the Syrian regions, acknowledging that the violations have decreased significantly. The participants referred to institutions defending the rights of vulnerable groups, such as the Women's House.

The participants were divided between those who justified the Administration restrictions in some areas for security reasons and those who did not. A civil activist from Deir Ezzor said: "The current security conditions are pushing the Administration to take what it deems appropriate to maintain security. That causes some violations, but that does not constitute a systematic policy."

A human rights activist from Raqqa confirmed: "The lack of respect for the law, the discrimination by the judiciary, and autocracy are significant indicators of failure to respect human rights by authority's staff."

Result (1)

The commitment of the Administration's staff to human rights is partial. The security and military services are above the law. Their violations are left unaccountable. Additionally, those services do not follow legal procedures regarding arrests, enforced disappearances, and child recruitment.

²³ SDF Continues Stifling Acts on Civil Society and Arresting Civil Activists. JFL - March 2020

<https://bit.ly/3M3mADA>

²⁴ The Expat card in northern and eastern Syria: wide controversy and consensus to take measures to preserve the rights of civilians. JFL - February 2022

<https://bit.ly/3Fz8QxW>

Result (2)

The freedom of expression and political and civil action is limited in various regions. At the same time, it is noted that the dereliction in the right to education, health, shelter, water, and other services is not systematic.

Conclusion (1)

An improvement in freedoms and expression in the Autonomous Administration areas during 2020 and 2021 appears to result from popular movements and civil forces. The gains that have been achieved so far to improve freedoms can be built upon to expand the scope of freedoms, which contributes to increasing stability and improving diverse and effective participation in decisions. The Administration must take the initiative in legislating and enforcing laws protecting human rights.

Conclusion (2)

It is important to consider unstable security conditions when talking about freedoms. Some limits must be recognized to protect areas from armed operations. However, the security conditions must not excuse widespread violations and lawlessness. That can be controlled through clear regulation and enforcement, holding violators accountable, and local community involvement in forming a security approach that depends on the community's contribution to maintaining security in the various regions.

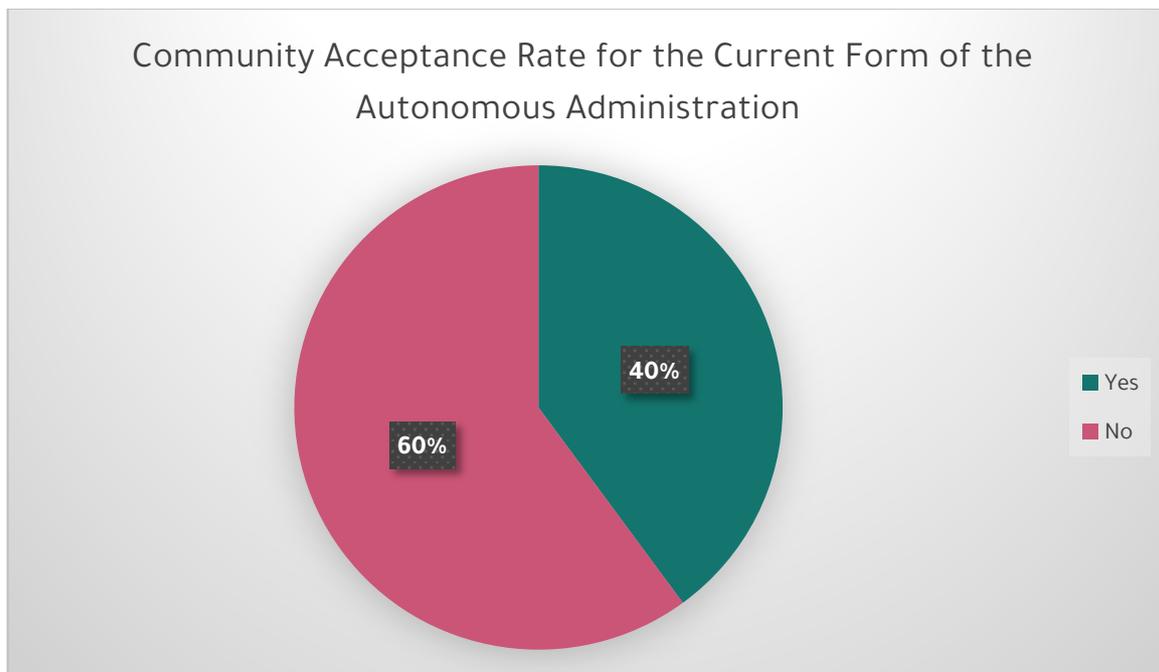
Conclusion (3)

Technical and international support is required to deal with the current situation regarding respect for human rights and maintaining security. A lack of local experience is noted in dealing with those situations.

The Third aspect: Available Opportunities to Build a Good Governance Form in Northeast Syria

First: The Autonomous Administration in its Current Form

There are some positive opinions about the Administration and its current form²⁵ compared to the past. This positivity is based on the decline of repression and the fight against sleeper-armed cells, the existence of some expression and objection margin, even if it was limited. This opinion is supported by 39.93% of the total participants in the questionnaire. 40.32% said that the Administration provided security, which must be preserved in its current form. 37.50% indicated that the current form of the Administration preserved diversity, and 27.41% said that the current form of the Administration facilitated the provision of services to various regions.

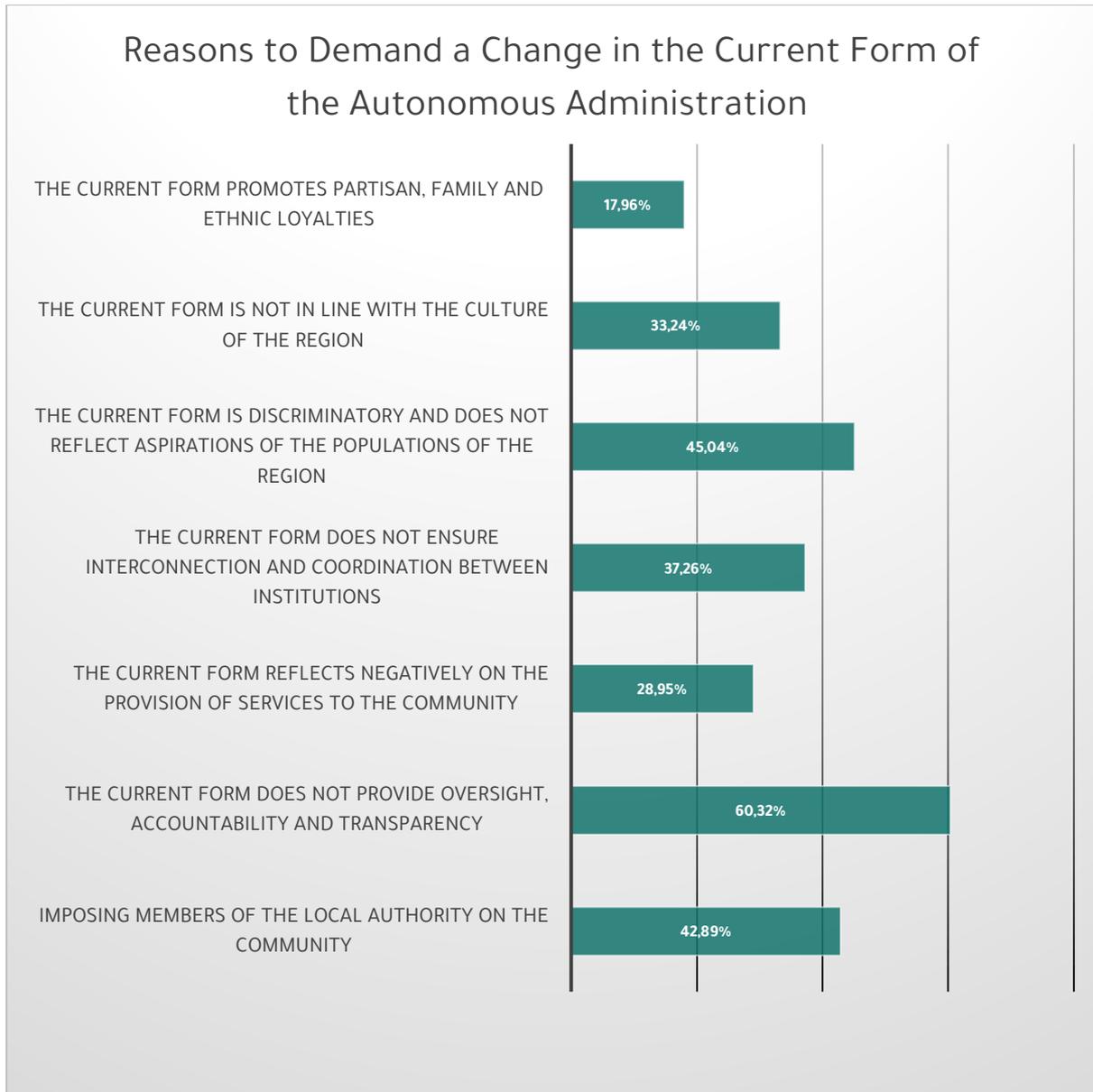


Two activists and a media person on a TV channel from Al-Hasakah said that the current form of the Administration has evolved since it was formed and has achieved equal representation for all various groups in northeastern Syria. And the current form is suitable to meet the aspirations of residents in the region.

²⁵ Deficient Participation. JFL - February 2020

<https://bit.ly/3M02fzd>

On the other hand, more than 60% of the participants said that the current form needs to be modified. Some believe that the current form is not sustainable even if it is currently appropriate.



A social representative in Deir Ezzor said: "The current Administration's form has not been successful in finding radical solutions to intractable security and service problems despite the long time of years passed since the formation of the Administration". That was confirmed by an employee of an institution affiliated with the Administration in Deir Ezzor, who added: "The current form suits the early stage of the Administration formation. Indeed, the Administration is now seeking restructuring". A public institution official in Raqqa said: "The current form needs to be improved because many problems have suspended the Administration's progress, the most important of which is corruption". 60.32% said that the current form of Administration does not provide monitoring and accountability. And 42.89% said that officials are imposed on northeastern Syria without any free selection process.

Besides, 17.96% confirmed that the current form reinforces clan, regional, and ethnic loyalties at the expense of equality and justice principles.

Result (1)

The current form of the Administration improved service delivery, combat armed groups, and created a single command for the security and military forces, all of which have fallen under the command of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

Result (2)

The current form of the Administration is incapable of dealing with intractable challenges, such as the continuation of insecurity, rampant corruption, and the growing demands for the popular choice of forming the Administration.

Conclusion (1)

Changing the form of Administration or allegedly restructuring it, has become an urgent matter. Furthermore, the founding parties of the Administration should be part of this change without monopolizing power.

Conclusion (2)

Practically, the Administration has not kept its promises to restructure. And there is no indication of new steps toward that.

Conclusion (3)

The dismissal of major civilian and military leaders followed by appointments did not have popular acceptance because the dismissals were unclear. The method of appointment and criteria have not changed, as they are based mostly on party affiliation and clan loyalties.

Second: The Role of Civil Society Organizations and Political Parties in Developing and Restructuring the Administration

Civil society organizations and political parties play a role in political and human rights awareness in northeastern Syria. The Syrian Democratic Forces' control of the region allowed organizations and parties to organize their activities. Their role can be summarized in three main points: Introducing the local community to human rights and ways to defend them, establishing communication between local

societies and the Autonomous Administration institutes, and taking limited- control measures over those institutions.

This role's problem is with the drawn limits by security services of the controlling powers.

This limitation was confirmed by 80.83% of participants. 51.26% said that civil society organizations and political parties could not move freely as required, greatly limiting their role. And 48.73% said that the space for participation and freedom of expression promoted by the Administration is a formality.

A civil activist from Raqqa said: "Organizations and parties are supposed to play a mediating role between the administration and the local community, but there is no suitable environment to work freely, which is the administration's responsibility."

A public official in Raqqa said: "The problem of organizations is that they stereotype themselves with relief work instead of presenting themselves to the community to enable the organizations to gain community trust."

On the one hand, the relationship between the Administration on one side and the civil society organizations and political parties on the other side are unstable due to the Administration's denial or non-renewal of licenses, strict control over the organization's work, and interference in their affairs.

19.16% of the participants said that organizations and parties have a role in developing the work of local institutions, capacity building of local staff, enhancing community participation in decision-making, and supporting human rights principles.

A media activist from Al-Hasakah said: "The organizations are a major support to stability and meet the local needs." An activist from Al-Hasakah said: "The presence of organizations and parties, even with restrictions, is important to preserve the freedoms and control over public institutions."

Result (1)

Civil society organizations and political parties work to promote a culture of human rights and respond to local needs, especially relief and medical care.

Result (2)

The Autonomous Administration does not allow civil society organizations and parties to practice censorship or full freedom of expression.

Result (3)

The limited role of organizations is the responsibility of:

- 1- The Autonomous Administration by drawing lines against the organizations, such as criticizing the public staff or the “advisors” as the Administration calls them, criticizing the work of the higher administrative, military, and security ranks.
- 2- Organizations limited their role to relief and aid provision. They did not engage, to some extent, in peace-building activities, human rights, and combating extremism.

Result (4)

The relationship between the Administration, civil society organizations, and political parties varies from cooperation to tension in many cases. Organizations and parties are afraid of suspending their work, shutting down their offices, and arresting their staff.

Conclusion

Civil society organizations and political parties have a role in facilitating the process of community participation and contributing to creating a stable community environment through mediation, education, and capacity building. This is conditioned upon what is provided of a safe work environment by the Administration. Also, this is conditioned upon the behavior of the Administration towards the civil society organizations and political parties such as closing them or arresting their members.

Third: The Possibility of Holding Elections in Northeast Syria

The election is a requirement to achieve change by choosing a representative administration capable of meeting the local community's aspirations in improving services, stopping violations, strengthening the judiciary's role and the rule of law, and establishing mechanisms for control and accountability. And because election achieves all the above, the three governorates considered it the main tool for change, with a percentage reaching 71.49%. Several obstacles against achieving the elections made 28.50% consider current conditions unfavorable: the current security conditions that may prevent massive participation in the elections. Second, lack of sufficient space for civil society organizations and parties to contribute to making the elections a changing tool and not entrenching the status quo. Third is questioning the will for change within the Autonomous Administration, and therefore the elections may be a sham. Fourth is the predominance of custom over the law. In other words, the elections will not bring about a fundamental change.

A civil activist in al-Hasakah said: "The elections are necessary, but they have to be fair. The recent elections of commune members did not leave a positive impact". Three officials in the authority in Deir Ezzor and Raqqa agreed that the current security and social conditions do not guarantee fair elections that achieve community participation.

A lawyer and human rights activist from Raqqa expressed fear that a part of the Administration does not want those elections to succeed. Therefore, this time is not appropriate.

Result

Elections as one of the tools for change is a local demand to achieve local participation in choosing the Administration responsible for northeast Syria.

Conclusion (1)

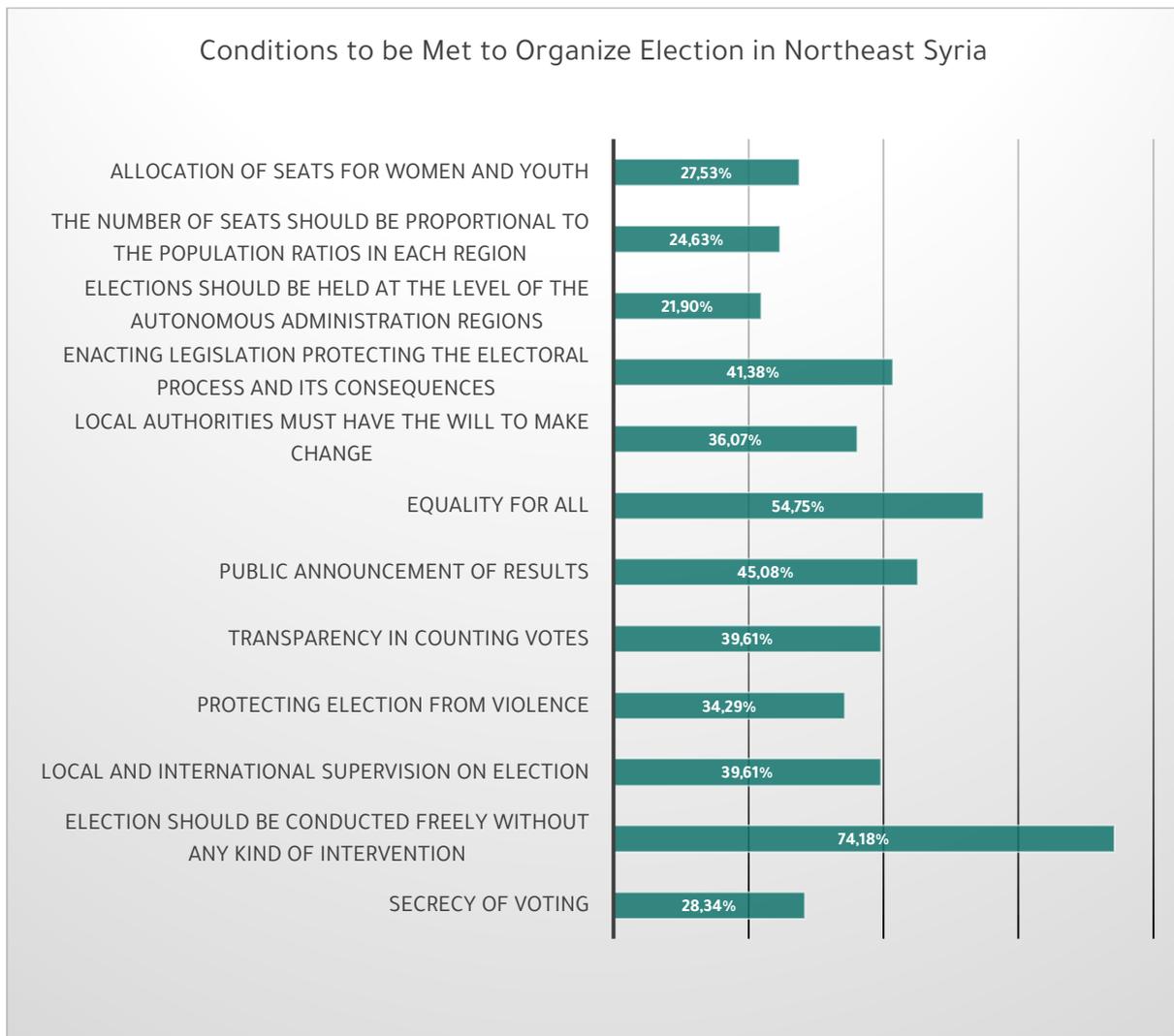
Current conditions are not appropriate for holding fair elections. It is important not to hold elections because they will not lead to a change in form or performance.

Conclusion (2)

In the light of international and local desire to make change, the current opportunity now is suitable for preparing for fair elections by providing security conditions and technical and human financial resources and enacting laws that protect the electoral process.

Fourth: Conditions for Holding Elections in Northeast Syria

The participants suggested several conditions as requirements before any fair elections. 74.18% said that the elections should occur without any interference from local or regional bodies. Voters, organizations, and political parties should have absolute freedom to organize awareness and advertising campaigns. 54.75% mentioned the need for a law stipulating equality among northern and eastern Syria residents. 39.61% said that local and international monitoring of elections is a basis for conducting the elections. About marginalized groups, 27.53% said that any election law should leave seats for women and youth.



A civil activist from Raqqa said that "it is better to hold elections at smaller administrative levels. Then expand towards provinces to ensure representation and integrity". An activist from Al-Hasakah said: "A neutral and independent election committee must be formed, and that civil society and parties should be allowed to monitor the elections."

Conclusion (1)

No elections will have a positive resonance within the local community if they are not held according to conditions that ensure integrity, international and regional non-interference, non-interference of the security services in the electoral process, or determining election results and facilitating participation in the various regions of north and east Syria.

Conclusion (2)

Any electoral process that does not lead to change entrenches the status quo or produces a similar reality means continuing the situation, including negative attitudes toward the Administration's

performance, security instability, the spread of corruption, and losing community trust in elections as a means of change.

Fifth: International Support and Governance in Northeast Syria

The international support provided to northern and eastern Syria gives resources for staff capacity building and institutional work. This support contributes to increasing political awareness and rebuilding infrastructure. The international support secures funds and technical support for the Administration. The support has a major role in improving security conditions through training security members from controlling powers and enabling the security forces to participate in security operations. 76% of participants count on this support to improve the Administration in form and performance.

In the future, this support could provide the infrastructure required to conduct elections, train teams to monitor elections, and urge those objecting to elections, from the Administration or those who are close to it, to accept fair elections.

An employee in the Administration from Deir Ezzor said: "The results of international support have begun to appear by rehabilitating workers in the administration's institutions in various fields."

On the other hand, some fears of the international coalition's strategy in northeastern Syria and the refusal of the Administration and its local allies, or at least part of them, to change made 23.99% not rely much on international support. Out of which 67.78% see corruption as a scourge that hinders any support that helps in change. Corruption prevents any efforts to build a new and credible form of government. 60.40% saw the political and security conditions as an obstacle to continuing long-term support. In comparison, 39.91% said that international subsidies need redistribution and oversight.

A lawyer and human rights activist from Raqqa said: "The international coalition lacks a clear strategy in Syria. Therefore, any support provided by the coalition, or any other party cannot be relied upon."

A civil activist from Al-Hasakah criticized the support provided to northern and eastern Syria, especially the International Coalition. The support focuses more on security aspects and is therefore not concerned with developing the Administration.

Result (1)

International support improves services and security, providing job opportunities and staff capacity building.

Result (2)

There is reliance on supporting international bodies to prepare for any upcoming elections and guarantee elections' integrity.

Result (3)

Fear of the international coalition's ambiguous strategy in Syria, thus the possibility of discontinuation of this support.

Result (4)

Denouncing more attention to security aspects than services and political aspects.

Conclusion (1)

The support provided by international bodies can bring about change on different levels: increasing the Administration's efficiency, enhancing transparency and accountability, pressure to improve the freedoms, and preparing for fair elections.

Conclusion (2)

It is essential to clarify the International Coalition's strategy in Syria and to involve local communities through local and international civil society organizations in directing the support allocated to North and East Syria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research paper, and the conclusions contained therein, the JFL recommends the following:

The Autonomous Administration

- 1- Not holding elections in the meantime in northern and eastern Syria. And create a suitable environment to hold them in the future, especially providing necessary security conditions, technical, financial, and human resources, and making laws to protect the electoral process in collaboration with local actors such as civil society, local community, and political parties.
- 2- Improving services and the security conditions to include the various regions. The Administration has to increase the efficiency of its staff. Additionally, the Administration must allocate sufficient resources to each region in proportion to needs and the number of residents. The Administration has to monitor the disbursement of resources. And all administrative institutes across the regions communicate information about those institutions through well-known channels, including budgets, projects implementation, and future implementations.
- 3- The judiciary must have the power to hold lawbreakers accountable to end violations such as arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances. The judiciary must make laws to protect human rights.
- 4- Review the mechanisms of law enforcement and reasons for unequal enforcement of laws across different regions. That requires the participation of media and civil society organizations in oversight.
- 5- Allow registration of political parties and civil society organizations according to clear laws and not use that to obstruct political and civil activity in northeastern Syria.

- 6- The Administration should work to include partisan, civil forces, and social actors in designing a security approach and a plan for providing services and setting a vision for implementation.

The US-led Global Coalition against Daesh

- 1- Clarifying the coalition's strategy in Syria. That helps the Autonomous Administration, civil society organizations, and various local groups in developing long-term strategies that contribute to local stability.
- 2- Continuing to provide technical support to increase the efficiency of the Administration's staff. All forms of support must be conditional on a strict transparency and accountability system.
- 3- Continuing to partner with civil society organizations to meet the local community's needs and create suitable conditions for holding future elections.
- 4- Put pressure on the Autonomous Administration to increase freedoms margin, stop violations, and strengthen relations with civil and political groups and local community representatives.

About Justice for Life

Justice for Life organization JFL is a Syrian, independent, non-profit, non-governmental that is based in Berlin, Germany under the registration number 211/2019. It works on promoting human rights, advocacy, and peacebuilding in Syria.

It was established in 2015 by a number of human rights defenders and actors from Deir Ezzor province. This was a fruit of their individual and team defend for human rights in their communities and documenting the human rights violations that are committed by different parties and powers who have been in the province since 2011, to make it as a platform and space for those who defend human rights and victims in order to advocate and defend their cases in accordance with a legal and professional course. So these violations and acts do not go by no just accountability. It also aims at promoting the human rights in Syrian society and state on the political, behavioral, and cultural levels in order to ensure access for the victims and their relatives to their rights. In this endeavor, JFL expanded its work in 2016 to be an active and effective part in the national and international alliances and platforms concerned in human rights and documenting violations in Syria and preparing the profiles of violations and crimes that took place against the Syrians since 2011 according to mechanism and methodologies compatible with international legal standards.

Vision

Syria is a justice and rule of law state where human rights are inviolable an enshrined.

Mission

Collaboratively strive to consolidate human rights, dialogue, and freedoms in Syria through documentation, advocacy, access, and capacity-building efforts for communities and organizations.

Values

Equality

We believe that all people are born equal in rights and duties. We cannot discriminate against human beings according to racial, sectarian, sexual, color, or other considerations. The building of society and the state based on true citizenship will not be completed by discrimination or establishment of considerations that obstruct citizens from accessing their rights or capabilities.

The Rule of Law

We believe that the law governs the relations between people and relations between the people and the state. No individual or institution, public or private, can override or violate the law under any circumstances. The responsibility to protect the law is a collective.

Justice

Countries and societies cannot live without a path that guarantees justice for their children and groups. Justice has different aspects and forms. Justice is not only the one in front of courts. It also distributes resources, cultural justice, social justice, and political justice.

Participatory

We believe that limited individual efforts are not enough to bring about changes at the level of society and the state. Therefore, we appreciate the necessity of efforts and joint work in public affairs to make changes in our societies at all levels.

