BADAEL

Peace Journalism or War Journalism?

Role and impact of alternative media groups on the Syrian conflict

Badael Foundation

Badael means alternatives" in Arabic. The Badael Foundation is a Syrian non-governmental organization (NGO) committed to strengthening civil society groups and NGOs in Syria. The foundation works with groups that are active or want to become active in the promotion and/or implementation of activities to reduce violence, break its cycle, respond to the conflict, and prepare for a future equitable pluralistic Syria.
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Table of content

Preface

The oppressiveness and despotism that Syrian media had to bear for decades became crystal clear with the advent of the Ba'ath party (Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party) into power, particularly under the ruling of Hafez Al Assad and subsequently his successor (and son) Bashar Al Assad. Even prior to the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, Syrian media had largely been unable to echo the people's voice due to severe restrictions on speech. It is under these circusmtances that Syrian journalists are primary targets of state oppression, detention and forced exile. Despite these dangers, the 2011 uprising sparked an outburst of alternative media initiatives that challenged the dominating discourse of the state-run media.

The crackdown on the Syrian people has had devastating conseuqences on their lives. In order to document these daily events, Syrians across the country, and of a range of backgrounds, have established local alternative media groups[1] (AMG), directly challenging the top-down, state-run media outlets that conceal the truth. By challenging the state's monopoly on media, the importance of community engagement and an ownership of free expression has become increasingly clear to Syrian citizen journalists, who have finally been to reclaim their voices and provide an alternative to the discourse imposed by the traditional mainstream media outlets.

Despite the widespread security threats and technical difficulties, the emergence of Syrian media has played a central role in both transmitting facts from the ground to the world, and making the Syrian conflict one of the most highly-covered crises in the world. Some AMGs have performed better than others: many have significantly developed their skills whilst others have repeated flagrant mistakes. This research does not aim to assess the work of AMGs; rather it studies the influence AMGs have had on the ongoing Syrian conflict – which started peacefully. We hope to shed light on the roles that various media groups have played during the past six years, their characteristics, as well as the audience's preferences and expectations. The role of AMGs during the conflict remains ambiguous: some have viewed them as promoting peace through truth, whereas others interpret the emergence of independent Syrian media as a promotion of violence.

Thanks to BADAEL's outstanding network of stakeholders, this research offers an exclusive impact assessment of AMGs and their roles in either ending, or accelerating, the current conflict. The report offers the opportunity to the international community and active Syrian stakeholders to support positive efforts aimed at achieving peace, and to redirect the work of those who are more inclined towards war journalism.

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1 The report refers to these hubs as AMGs or media groups. These terms will be used interchangeably throughout the report. Although, many additional terms will be featured throughout the discussion in accordance with the original text, such as agencies, plaforms and outlets.

Executive Summary

This research analyzes the impact of AMGs[2] on the ongoing Syrian conflict: have AMGs engaged in "peace journalism" by promoting unity among the warring factions, thus lessening the intensity of the conflict? Or alternatively, have AMGs engaged in "war journalism" by promoting divisive discourse, thus fueling the polarization of the conflict? The research also explores the nature of these AMGs, their features and characteristics, and the characteristics of the professional staff administering the respective media platforms. Finally, we hope to provide a comprehensive understanding of accessiblity to the different media platforms, and how these platforms are being utilized by the audience.

The geographical scope of this research covers the northern territories of Syria, which were not under the direct control of the Syrian regime at the time of the survey. The AMGs studied in this research are divided as follows:

1) Zone A: the self-administered zone, (%33) of the groups 2) Zone B: ISIS-held zone, (%8) of the groups 3) Zone C: the opposition-held zone, (%59) of the groups.

The data featured in this research was collected throughout the period extending from the end of 2014 until mid 2016. The employed survey targeted 39 AMGs; 1,837 participants amongst the audience; 12 focus group discussions (FGD); and the inspection and analysis of a sample of publications produced by 16 different AMGs.

Most of the AMGs are still developing: 92% of these groups were established after the Syrian revolution began, and a very small percentage of staff have relevant past experience. Most AMGs are operated by a small team whose members manage multiple tasks on a rotating basis.

The audience tends to follow their local AMG, such as the local coordination committees and the media groups on Facebook, which have better access on the ground compared to traditional Arabic media outlets. In many cases, these emerging AMGs provide better coverage than traditional Arabic media outlets.

In areas governed by armed opposition groups (AOG) and ISIS, Facebook is the most utilized platform; on the otherhand in self-administered zones, television remains the most popular medium. These differences in preference can be attributed to the relative stability in the self-

administered zone, a major factor which could hinder the importance of instant coverage provided by Facebook and the internet in other areas.

Smart-phone applications offer an important source of information, as they encourage horizontal communication, content verification and instant publication, e.g. Facebook newsrooms, WhatsApp, and Telegram.

Most of the coverage provided by AMGs focuses on the direct repercussions of war, military analysis, along with news and updates from the battleground. However, it oftentimes neglects other important side effects of the conflict, such as psychological damage, hindrance of the social fabric, and economic hardship. This type of coverage is primarily and intensively present in the areas controlled by AOGs and ISIS, rather than in the self-administered zone.

Most media groups tend to rely on officials, as opposed to anecdotal experiences, as their primary source of news. However, this tendency differs from one area to another. The audience in the self-administered zone found itself distant from AMGs. However, that was not the case in the opposition-held zones, where the audience favours AMGs. Among those living in the ISIS-held zone, opinion is split: some favour AMGs while others do not.

The coverage of AMGs is seen as biased because they are influenced by donors and their affiliates. As groups refrain from citicizing the official discource of their sphere due to potential backlash, freedom of expression becomes curtailed.

AMGs sometimes function strictly as a medium for news and thus usually avoid discussing the causes, consequences, and solutions of the war, as well as the diverse opinions of the parties involved. Inexperience and low budgets make it difficult for AMGs to provide comprehensive coverage, and thus build their capacity.

Most AMGs tend to promote the victory of factions they support as the only 'acceptable' solution to the conflict, failing to discuss other alternatives such as coo peration between warring factions to end the violence.

AMGs (and state media) tend to portray one side as a victim and others, particularly their enemy, as the executioner. This divisive tactic is fuel when one side reports only the violations committed by the other side.

In conclusion, news coverage by AMGs is characteristic of traditional war journalism, as opposed to the modern principles of peace journalism. Therefore, rather than fostering truthful and peaceful solutions to the conflict, AMGs have played a destructive role that encourages misinformation and division.

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2   It should be noted that in the Arabic version of the report the AMGs are being referred to as 'tools' 'platforms' 'media groups' 'newsrooms' 'coordination committees'.

Introduction

Considering the steadfast upsurge of violence since the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011, along with the lack of efficient and impartial media, activists and citizens had to take the lead in transmitting news from Syria to the world through modest means, such as smartphones and personal laptops.

In April 2011, a video went viral that showed civilians being tortured by government forces in the city of Panias, on the Syrian coast [3]. While the video reverberated across the world, pro-regime outlets rushed to deny the event, pretending that it had been filmed in a different country. However, one of the victims in the video reappeared in a new snippet holding his Syrian ID card, confirming his Syrian identity and experience as a victim of torture and humiliation by the Syrian army. [4]

Similarly in August 2011, pro-regime forces targeted and destroyed the minaret of Uthman ibn Affan mosque in Deir El Zour. A video of the destruction went viral on social media and sparked public rage as it happened during the holy month of Ramadan. Then in October 2011, the Syrian president claimed that a bomb had been detonated inside the minaret.[5] Unfortunately for the regime, a new video surfaced showing a Syrian army tank deliberately targeting the mosque and minaret.[6]

These two incidents should not be treated as exceptions. There are countless stories of Syrian citizens exposing regime lies despite the state's attempts to tighten its grip on the flow of information. As a result, individual efforts to document the events has led to the emergence of local media groups with modest capabilities, offering unrestricted media coverage of the conflict. After six years, these groups are now facilitating a better-informed understanding of the factors behind the conflict and rise of violence. The lack of trustworthy sources of news, in addition to the complexities of Syria, make access to information – and thus, fully understanding context – difficult.

Identifying the factors that have both increased and mitigated violence is essential to conflict resolution and facilitating peace. Understanding these factors could help build an effective strategy that focuses on conflict resolution. Additionally, identifying the causes of the conflict allows the stakeholders to shape their interventions in a way that can minimize unintended consequences and the scale of the conflict.

The importance of this research is due to the focus on the role of local media in the Syrian conflict. This study offers an in-depth analysis of the roles played by AMGs, their features and characteristics, and the public's interaction with AMGs The study attemps to determine whether AMGs have engaged in peace or war journalism; in other words, have AMGs increased or decreased conflict?

The goal of this study is not to criticize the work of AMGs – we recognize the ferocious environment under which they operate. Rather, the goal is to analyze their role in building peace and achieving justice. Thus, it highlights the need to develop the skills of AMGs by offering them additional support. This study also introduces new opportunities of research, such as the effect of other local and international media on the Syrian conflict.

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3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsutp4uYlOM

4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftSUqIdPEPU

5 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZsB9I70A5c

6 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDGmbjeMMDQ

Research scope and methodology

Methodology

This study aims to determine whether local media in northern Syria has engaged in peace journalism or war journalism. To that end, the following research question was raised:

What is the nature of the role played by the emerging local media towards their local audience throughout their coverage of the conflict in northern Syria? Is that role tilting towards peace or war journalism?

To answer the research question, the research work plan was divided into many phases. The first phase extended between end 2014 and mid 2015, whilst all remaining phases were completed by mid 2016.

Phase one:

Pilot survey of the opposition's local media in northern Syria:

A quantitative survey of 39 media groups in northern Syria. The employed survey was descriptive in nature, and not exclusive. It included the groups that the research team have had access to, and those who accepted to participate. The findings of this survey do not cover all details; this study is meant to serve only as a guiding tool. The data collected in this phase helped the research team identify the media groups in the respective research areas, amongst which the groups treated as case studies in the upcoming phases were chosen.

A quantitative survey targeting 1,000 participants amongst the audience in the research areas. This survey aimed to identify the audience's preferred media platforms. Building on the early findings of this survey, 'television' was added as an option amongst the surveyed tools, given its importance for the respondents. The survey showed that AMGs are generally viewed positively.

We worked to ensure the sample's diversity by including audio-visuals, television, printed press, radio and the internet. We also ensured the sample is geographically widespread and representative, covering the northern areas, and taking into consideration local particularities in each geographical zone – namely the strong influence that local factions have.

Phase two:

This phase included the selection of specific civil, political, and military events as case studies, in order to examine how those events were covered by AMGs. Two events in each of the studied areas were selected based on the following criteria:

The research team's prior knowledge of developments in their respective areas and neighbourhoods. This would help them better determine which events are important and which are not.
Ensure a balanced sampling, achieved through the selection of an event that has a military aspect and the selection of another event with a civic aspect. The coverage of military operations often tilts towards war journalism, whilst the coverage of civic events tilts in favour of peace journalism. This balanced selection of events aims to identify how the nature of a specific event would affect the nature of media coverage.
The timing of data collection. Data should be collected shortly after the event in question. The public tends to recall how positive or negative the coverage was when surveys are conducted within a proper timeframe. This applies to both the studied events in opposition zones and self-administrated zones. As for the events in the territories controlled by ISIS, the chosen events took place when the respective audience (currently in safe areas outside the ISIS-controlled zones) was still residing in ISIS-held zones (late 2014/early 2015).

Phase 3:

In this phase, the research team studied how the audience tends to follow the news, as well as accessibility issues the audience could face.

837 people participated in the survey, and were asked about AMGs coverage of multiple civil, political, and military events. Some of the survey questions included: 1) what is the likelihood that the audience has access to different media platforms?; 2) How were events covered by AMGs?; and finally, 3) what are the audience's preferences for media presentation (e.g. audio-visual vs. printed press)?

The audience's ability to access media platforms was also studied. In volatile zones such as Syria, access depends on basics such as the availability of electricity, internet access, and communications devices.

The survey helped to identify FGD participants. AMGs in opposition-held and self-administrated zones, which suspended activities during the subsequent research phase, were excluded from the samples. In ISIS-held zones, AMGs were included.

Finally, a few TV channels highly popular with the audience were also studied.

Phase 4:

In this phase 12 FGDs were organised, with five to 10 participants in each group. These groups were formed based on the results of the survey, with the goal of gathering in-depth and relevant information from the sample in question. The FGDs collected the relevant information in a written group exercise, followed by a discussion of the AMGs role.

Phase 5:

In this phase, content analysis was performed. As mentioned earlier, the coverage of both military and civic events were analyzed, and the coverage of four to eight outlets in each case was featured. The performance of 16 different media was evaluated: five in the self-administered zone, three in the ISIS-held zone, and eight in the opposition-held zone. The coverage of the events allowed BADAEL to form a well-grounded sample, which contributed to the in-depth analysis featured throughout this report. Surveying a larger sample was a major challenge due to the lack of media monitoring and content analysis software.

Research Scope

The scope of this research was defined as per the following:

1- This research is a pilot study of the emerging AMGs in northern Syria. The gap in knowledge, exasperated by the deteriorating security situation, created the urgent need for additional research, studies, and statistics about AMGs in the uprising.
2- This study targets the AMGs in northern Syria, which emerged with the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011. The study focuses on the media outlets that use Arabic as a first language, in addition to few others that use Kurdish. The focus on the Arabic language was mainly driven by the available resources amongst our team of researchers.
3- The targeted audience of this study is composed entirely of people who reside in Syria. A majority of participants were located in opposition-held and self-administered zones. Due to the risks of conducting research in areas that ISIS is active, the sample of the ISIS-held zone was composed of Syrians who had previously lived in communities under ISIS' control between 2013- 2015. This precautionary decision to not include people currently residing in ISIS-held zones was to reduce risks for all staff, participants, and other civilians. Only Syrian adults were surveyed, and efforts were made to form a balanced and diverse research sample.
4- The exploratory survey data of AMGs along with the audience's opinion were collected between the end of 2014 and mid 2015[7]. The remaining data was collected in mid 2016. By that time, although some AMGs had either suspended their activities or were dissolved entirely, others continued to emerge. All these developments were taken into consideration throughout the data cleaning and analysis processes. For instance, the questions which we addressed to the former residents in ISIS-held areas were amended to cover the events which took place during their presence there, in addition to the media coverage which was provided at the time. However, the questions addressed to the residents in the opposition-held areas and the self-administrated zones evolved around the events which took place during the spring of 2016.
5- Due to the lack of statistical records of media traffic within the areas targeted by this study, the research made use of already available numbers from three different sources, and analysed them by drawing comparisons. The AMGs were asked first about their estimation of traffic percentages, although they do not have the resources to efficiently track network traffic. In any case, they almost always tend to exaggerate numbers. The research team had to track the "views" count and impressions on different platforms, such as YouTube and SoundCloud, or the recorded traffic on newswires, subscriptions, and other online publications. The way these platforms were monitored made it possible to anticipate how printings and online platforms would be monitored. In contrast to online media, the adopted method could not be applied to Radios and TVs. This was a reason why the research team had to survey the audience's preferences.

The geographical scope of the research

The geographical scope of this research covered three main areas. Some AMGs do not cover all of

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7 The time gap is the direct result of the lack of funds as well as logistical and administrative barriers.

the events that take place over a set of territory, due to the security and administrative challenges that differ from one area to another. Moreover, the production – in addition to the news itself - could differ between each zone. The language used has also played a role in identifying the audience of non-Arabic media outlets. The borders between the three areas are blurry and never set, hence a lack of precision over these geographical boundaries.

Zone A: self-administrated zone

The self-administered zone is perhaps the most stable, since it is rarely targeted by regime or coalition airstrikes. Moreover, the infrastructure, governance, and provision of basic services all continue to operate as normal. Many AMGs emerged locally, even prior to the uprising: for example, some AMGs emerged to document the regime's discrimination against the Kurdish community, which began long before 2011. The ways these outlets function has ranged from covert to overt activities.

Residents of this zone used to follow professional Kurdish media outlets based in Iraq and Turkey that report on areas inhabited by the Kurds. The media work in this zone is highly political, as the several warring factions have long been organized along different ideological affiliations. Most of the Kurdish political parties have their own media outlets; however, a handful of other independent outlets have also emerged. The relatively stable security situation in this zone, in addition to the progressive administratation of the governing parties, has led to a nascent media experience. However, this did not free the media in the zone from self-censorship (it is also the case in the regime-held areas). Despite the challenges, the media in this area enjoys greater freedom, which is reflected by the large number of operational outlets compared to other areas. Moreover, the groups in the self-administered zone are unique in their ability to produce multilingual content in Kurdish, Syriac, and Arabic.

Zone B: ISIS-held zone

The ISIS-held zone is the most violent and dangerous. The cities and villages in this zone suffer from a complete denial of media activities. Journalism in this zone is extremely difficult and full of risks, some of which are life-threatening. When the first phase of our research began, some of these areas were not under the complete control of ISIS, allowing BADAEL and other media outlets to operate in the zone. But the security situation has drastically deteriorated in the second phase and as a result, most media

outlets have suspended their operations in the area and have moved elsewhere, due to what is essentially a media blackout imposed by ISIS. In addition to ISIS on the ground, the people of this area cope with ongoing aerial bombardment by the US-led coalition as well as the Syrian regime and its allies. The scarcity of basic services such as water and electricity, as well as internet, schools, and hospitals, has led to mass exoduses and thus a signifiant decline in population.

ISIS has imposed tight controls over media in this area, and media work is restricted to ISIS-owned outlets. For example, ISIS has imposed restrictions on the use of telecommunication tools such as the internet, satellite dishes and printings. The restrictions are so tight, and the consequences so extreme, that some locals in ISIS-held areas have stopped using their mobile phones altogether, because text messages and all forms of communication are routinely monitored. To enforce these restrictions, ISIS has pursued and assasinated media workers critical of the group, even targeting those who live outside of Syria.

Zone C: Opposition-held zone

Authority over the opposition-held zone is highly contested and suffers from infighting on multiple fronts between the regime, AOGs, the Kurds, and ISIS. This zone has been targeted by a wide variety of weapons, which has led to insurmountable damage in the infrastructure and a suspension of the provision of basic services such as electricity – either partially or completely. The regime has also stopped the flow of food into areas outside of its control, systematically starving local populations as a form of punishment.

Media activists in the opposition-held zone are oftentimes monitored and targeted by some of the AOGs. The lack of a substantial regulatory framework governing media in this zone makes journalism a dangerous activity here.

Despite the risks, journalism in this zone has become very important, as the public relies on AMGs for news and updates from the ground. Not only do AMGs cover the ongoing conflict, but importantly other aspects of public life such as road closures, service blockages, search and rescue operations, and the identification of the wounded and other victims of violence. The classical sender-receiver dynamic between media outlets and audience is lacking due to the urgent need of instant coverage, considering the administrative and security disorder. The relationship between media activists and the general audience in this zone does not follow the traditional sender-receiver pattern, but a two-way communication where AMGs and the audience interact closely.

Technical notions

As the goal of this research is to analyze the different roles that the media could play, the ideas of "peace" and "war" journalism will be defined as follows:

1-Peace Journalism: When editors and reporters deliberately tailor their coverage to push the public to consider nonviolent solutions to conflicts[8]. This type of journalism, although politicised, promotes peace as both the ultimate goal and as an ethical commitment. Peace journalism is characterised by its modernity; however, it encourages scepticism about its practicality in conflict reporting more than it draws protagonists. Due to ethical and pragmatic concerns, as well as the difficulty in remaining neutral and objective, peace journalism is often criticised because it is unrealistically idealistic and ironically, viewed negatively for being impartial.

2- War Journalism: The type of media coverage that favours one party over others in a specific conflict with the one goal of guaranteeing their side's victory, at any cost. In this scenario, traditional media is the conflict catalyst, as its coverage revolves around widening the division between parties, and polarizing the conflict between black and white. This type of journalism tends to portray events according to an agenda, rather than offering a comprehensive and honest interpretation of context. War journalism is based on the following: if it bleeds, it leads. Blood, death, and destruction are the topics favored by war journalists.

The following criteria have been used to determine whether AMGs engage in peace or war journalism. These criterion are also applied to AMG's content analysis.

Peace Journalism	War Journalism
Proactive (predicts events and prepares its coverage accordingly)	Response-oriented (awaits wars and acts accordingly)
Uncovers hidden effects (such as trauma)	Reports on visible effects
Tilts in favour of the public	Elitist (relies on officials as a source of news)
Highlights the common ground between rivals	Focuses on schisms and differences
Highlights the causes and repercussions of conflict	Focuses on the instant coverage of event
Avoids the good or evil binary	Uses contradictory dyads, victims against executioners; Good and evil
Sees the conflict as multi-sided	Sees the conflict as two-sided
Impartial	Biased
Does not promote the victory of a specific party as a condition to conflict resolution	Promotes the victory of one party as the only solution to the conflict
Coverage continues even when the war reaches an end	Stops its coverage when a peace agreement is reached
Avoids the classification of one party as a victim	Portrays one side as victims
Avoids emotions and villification	Vilifies some parties and plays on emotions

Table number 1

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8   Lynch, Jake, and Annabel McGoldrick, Peace Journalism. Stroud: Hawthorn Press, 2005.

Overview of Syrian media: from Assad's rise to the Syrian revolution

This chapter offers a brief overview of Syria's media landscape under the rule of Hafez al Assad and his successor Bashar, in addition to how the media was transformed into a propaganda outlet for the regime. This chapter also discusses the emergence of AMGs.

Syrian media under Hafez Al Assad

Since its ascension to power in March 1963 following a coup d'état, the ruling Baath party has sought to crackdown on liberties in general and media in specific, in order to remain the dominant power in society. These practices were further intensified when Hafez Al Assad became president on March 1971 ,12. Al Assad replaced the constitution, and reversed all newspaper licences in the country, allowing only those published by the Baath party (all of which were subject to his authority). Al Assad also imposed tough censorship measures on all types of publishers and translation centres, including the publishers of foreign novels and magazines. Journalism in Syria was transformed into a regime propaganda tool and an ideological apparatus, where journalists were subjected to Al Assad and the ruling Baath party's criteria, and the media was used merely to conceal the "leader's" activities. In essense, Assad's Baath Party was reinforced across the country as the state party.

Throughout the mid‑20th century, the only available Arabic newspapers were Al Baath (est. 1947); Al Thawra ("the Revolution," est. 1963); and Techrin ("October," est. 1975). These newspapers relied on the national news agency, Syrian Arab News Network (SANA, est. 1965) as their source of news. News, including apolitical entertainment stories, were replicated by bureaucratic editors. The quality and editing of newspapers was so poor, and the publication so unprofessional, that it was common to find the same exact typos and grammatical mistakes in different newspapers, which demonstrates how minimal efforts were to edit and proofread the text. In her book titled, "Ambiguities of Domination," Lisa Wedeen described Syrian newspapers as "sous-plats," rather than professional media outlets whose job is to document ongoing events[9].

There were two official TV channels operating in Syria: Channel One, established in 1960, and Channel Two, established in 1986. These two channels were used to promote the regime's propaganda; however in some provinces, like Tartous on the coast, there was access to foreign TV stations, particularly from Lebanon. From the provinces of Daraa and Soweida in the south, Jordanian TV was accessible. After failing to prohibit the use of satellite dishes and monopolizing access to information, the regime finally launched Syria's first satellite TV station in 1996.

Although subject to the same regime censorship, radio stations such as "Al Quds," which was established in 1986, enjoyed marginally greater flexibility. Damascus (est. 1946) and Al Shaab ("the People," est. 1978) were other important radio stations.Similar to television, residents along the Syrian coast had some access to foreign radio stations.

The regime has a long track record of smearing dissidents and journalists in order to silence its critics. When even the most minor infractions could mean years in jail, few dared to challenge the Baath party's discource in Syria under Assad, let alone opnely criticize it. Over the years the regime blackmailed journalists by detaining their family members, torturing them, restricting their movement and access to labour, as well as denying them their civil rights. This dangerous environment did not completely stop the work of journalists, some of whom resorted to anonymity to publish their work – in Syria or abroad. That said, journalists who were forced abroad faced a whole other set of challenges that affected their ability to tackle contemporary topics.

It should be noted that during this phase, the Kurdish opposition was secretly publishing periodicals in their communities. This was made possible due to two reasons: 1) wide support networks across Syria, Turkey, and Iraq; and 2) the inability of Syrian intelligence agents to monitor content published in Kurdish.

Syrian media under the rule of Bashar Al Assad

Bashar succeeded his father Hafez in 2000. His succession to power required a constitutional amendment to lower the minimum age of the

9 Wedeen, L. (1999) Ambiguities of Domination, London: University of Chicago Press. P.37.

president as he was well under the required age. In the early years of his reign he introduced himself as a young reformist leader. This was reflected in limited freedoms of the press, as Syrians got to witness the role media played in criticizing the government's performance. Similar actions were totally forbidden under the ruling of Bashar's predecessor and father. In the same time period, the first satirical and caricature journal was published, issued by a painter named Ali Farzat. The journal Al Doumeri became very popular because it portrayed the truth. However, critiques of the Assad family or their cronies remained forbidden.

The incremental and temporary opening of politics, or as we called it, the "Damascus Spring," soon vanished. In 2001 a new 'media and printings' law was ratified and was tied to penal law for the roughness of the articles applied to violators. The penalising measures included imprisonment, licence reversal, and penalties, etc[10]. Shortly afterwards, in 2003, the 'Al Doumari' journal was no longer being distributed[11]. Detainment had once again become a method to intimidate journalists and opposition members. For example, during the 2004 Kurdish uprising in Qameshli, the regime was closely monitoring various sorts of information and news stories, in effect tightening the existing restrictions on journalists.

Although the regime has allowed a limited number of radio stations and commercial publications to operate in Syria, such as the Sham FM and Arabesk radio stations, coverage was restricted to entertainment and cultural stories. Given the lack of competition in Syria, these stations were able to sustain their profits. Other licenses were granted only to the regime's partners like the "United Group for Publicity and Advertisement," "Wasila Ealaniya," "Baladna," and "Layalina" newspapers, all of which were owned by Majed Suleiman, the son of the well-known intelligence officer, Bahjat Suleiman.

Private internet services were not available in Syria until the new millennium. Prior to that, access to the internet was provided by governmental service providers. Moreover, governmental surveillance resulted in a tough censorship of political websites and social media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube. Low quality of the service prevented Syrians from widespread

and easy access to the internet. Despite these barriers, the internet did expose Syrians to Arabic and other foreign newspapers, the distribution of which was previously banned. Another tool that helped facilitate access to the internet were web proxies; by providing anonymity, web proxies allowed Syrians in opposition circles to communicate with one another, and to access highly-sought weblogs such as "Al Jamal," "Kolona Chorakaa," and "D-Press."

The information and data available to Syrian media and its audience remained low in quantity and lacked validation – both direct consequences of restrictions imposed by the Assad regime. Only a few Syrian researchers had the permission to conduct field research, collect data, and publish their findings independent of the Central Agency for Statistics.

The available data on Syrian media can be divided into two categories: 1) reports published by foreign agencies, which are more accurate than government reports but tend to be outdated, or alternatively 2) research conducted by government-affiliated research centres, whose work, methodology, and analysis is closely monitored, thus becoming instruments of the regime's political agenda. It is very difficult to access these reports because they are only available in print and located at government centers, meaning official visit-requests are required.

The 2010 U.S. Freedom House report described Syria as a country that denies all forms of liberty to its citizens.[12] Reporters Without Borders, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) headquartered in France, ranked Syria 178/177 in the 2016 World Press Freedom Index.[13] Before the 2011 revolution, social media platforms were highly censored in Syria. Many observers interpret the post-revolution reversal of social media censorship as a government tactic to monitor internet users and entrench the regime's position in modern media.[14]

Alternative Syrian media at the start of the uprising

Given the outburst of the Syrian revolution, a surge in violence, and the regime's monopoly over media, there was an immediate need to document the events that were unfolding across

10 The direct link to the decision on the website of the Syrian parliament:
http://parliamant.gov.sy/laws/Decree/2011/civil_02.htm

11 Zaman Al Wasel, Interview with Ali Farzat, 2007/09/25
https://www.zamanalwasl.net/readNews.php?id=1452

12 See:
www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2010/syria

13 See: https://rsf.org/en/syria

14 Kirkland, A. (10' (2014 countries where Facebook has been banned', retrieved from index on censorship, Available at: https://www.indexoncensorship.org/-10/02/2014 countriesfacebook-banned/

the country. It was inevitable that AMGs would emerge in order to counter the regime's narrative that the popular protest movement and state-sanctioned violence were nonexistent.

Without much technical experience or sophisticated gadgets, media activists simply used their mobile phones to document and publish bits and pieces of the protests. An international interest in Syria coincided with the climax of some social media platforms, like Twitter; as a result, raw video footage from across Syria was quickly going viral.

A shortage of funding and high levels of risk limited the number of journalists willing to report from Syria. As citizen journalists filled this gap, Syrian AMGs were put in the spotlight, particularly during the first few years of the revolution. Facebook and YouTube were amongst the most highly used social media tools. These platforms strengthened freedom of speech in Syria by helping citizens communicate with one another and staying informed; and by providing instant access, instant coverage, and sharing options, social media allowed Syrians to elude the regime's restrictions on information and freedom of the press.

As the security situation deteriorated, AMGs emerged and began their coverage of events within specific geographical areas. Additionally, many analytical websites, blogs, newspapers, and journals were launched – both domestically and abroad – with a focus on the Syrian uprising.

Syria is one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a journalist. Journalists are systematically targeted by various factions, and are constantly at risk. Almost 50% of journalists kidnapped around the world in 2015, were kidnapped in Syria. In the same year, Syria was second only to neighboring Iraq for the greatest number of journalists killed.

15   Reporters without Borders, Round up of journalists worldwide, 28 December 2015
https://goo.gl/zBrPBu

Chapter 1: Survey of local media in northern Syria

The geographical distribution of AMGs under scrutiny:

The research investigated the work of 39 associations and coalitions in northern Syria. (%59) of these associations were based in the opposition-held zones, (%33) in the self-administered zone, and (%8) in ISIS-held zones. The high number of AMGs operating in opposition-held zones reflects the high demand for journalism in these areas. On the other hand, the low percentage of AMGs in the ISIS-held zone reflects the extreme dangers journalists face there.
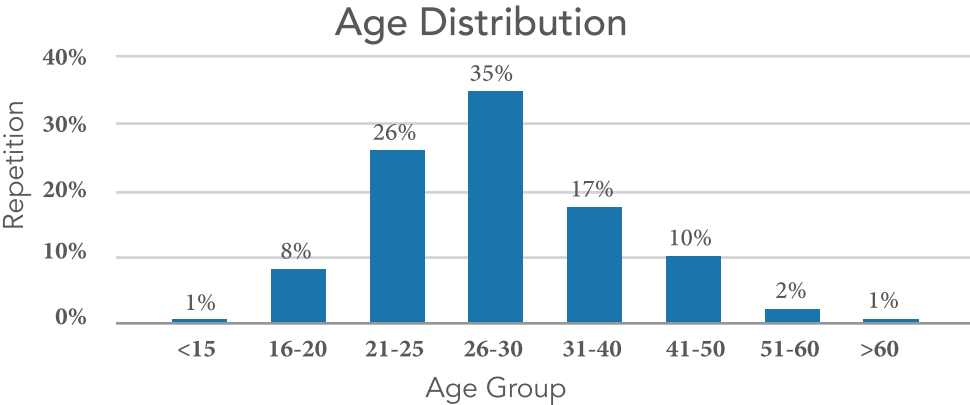
Geographical Distribution

Self-administered zone	33%
ISIS-held zone	8%
opposition-held zone	59%
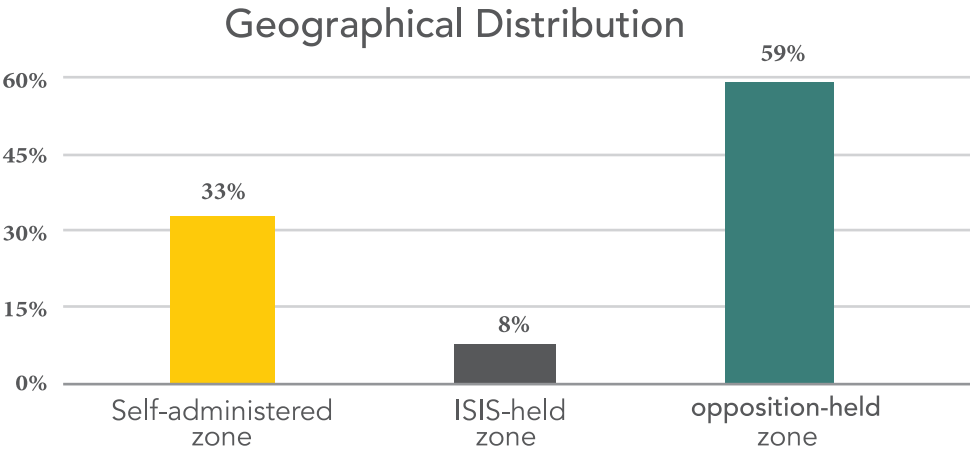
Age distribution across AMGs

The age group (30-26) constitutes the largest percentage of journalists in AMGs, a clear indication that youth are more active in this field. This finding is in tune with previous research carried out by BADAEL; for example, the research project, "Activism in Difficult Times" identified youth activists as the largest component of Syrian civil society groups. The kind of skills common among youth[16], in addition to the youth's inclination to developing new skills, make them assets to AMGs.

Age Distribution

| Age Group	<15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	>60
Repetition	1%	8%	26%	35%	17%	10%	2%	1%

16 Khalaf, R. Ramadan, O. Stolleis, F. (2014) 'Activism in Difficult Times', Available at: http://badael.org/wp-content/uploads/01/2015/Activism-in-Difficult-Times.-Civil-Society-Groups-in-Syria2014-2011-.pdf

Distribution of AMGs activists by gender:

The difference in the count of women and men in this sample was striking. The number of active women within AMGs surpassed that of men in three groups, and was equal to that of men in one of the group. However, the professional cadre amongst one of the group was totally formed of women. As for the remaining groups, there were more men than women, if the latter were present at all. That reflects the limited engagement of women in local AMGs. Security risks, as well as conservative social structures, have significantly effected how women participate in AMGs. The latter could be applied to the opposition-helds-held and ISIS-held zones, whilst the interaction between sexes does not face objections in the self-administrated zone. Consequentially, the percentages on women engagement differ from one zone to another, as the most stable and secure self-administrated zone had the highest percentage of women engagement compared to the less stable and secure areas. In this zone, relative stability and a lack of religious extremism have contributed positively to women's engagement.

Referring to the 'Activism in Difficult Times' report which studies the organisational structures of the Syrian civil groups and their characteristics, one could notice the difference in the percentages of active women within civil society groups compared to those in the media field. The report states that (%69) of the civil society groups have
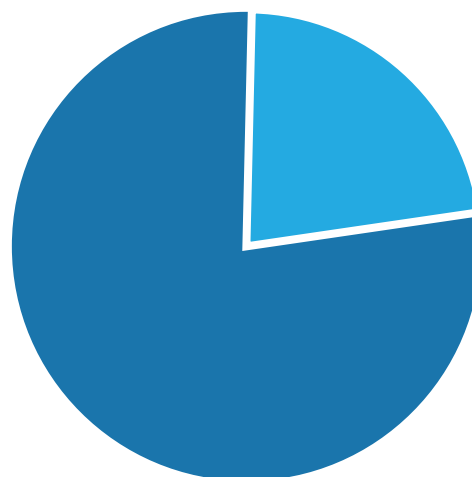
|	
● Number of Males	**0.7715**
● Number of Females	**0.2285**

women amongst their members, and this is quite higher than those working in AMGs. This result could be related to the influence that ISIS has in Deir El Zour and Raqqa, two areas which were under the direct control of the FSA at the time when the first report was completed. Also the escalation of the conflict could have a major effect leading to this difference and the lack of women's participation on the fighting fronts and conflict zones.

Distribution of AMGs according to their date of establishment

There is also a difference between groups based on their date of establishment. (%92) of the groups were formed after the start of the Syrian revolution, encouraged by the need to document events on the ground, and to broadcast news to both local and international

audiences. The gradual decline of the regime's presence in different areas had paved the way for AMGs to emerge. Between early 2011 and mid 2012, approximately three new AMGs were established every six months, reaching even higher percentages through 2014.

Distribution of AMGs based on the date of establishment
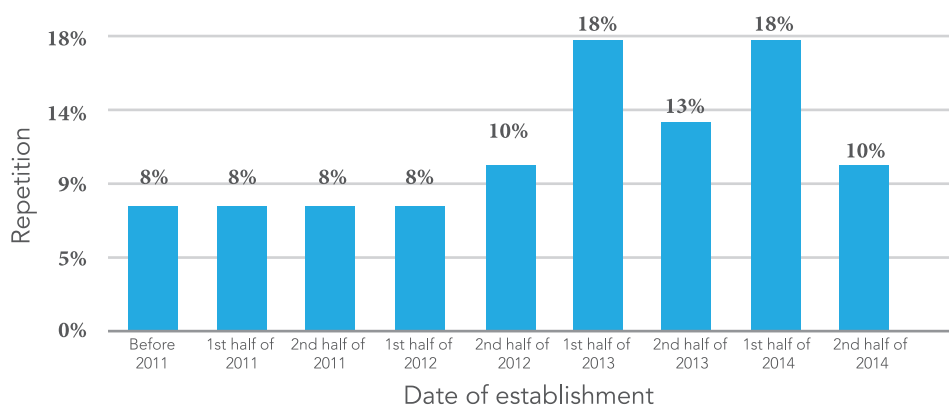
The Educational Level of AMGs workers

An impressive (%64) of AMG staff had completed their graduate studies, which is not typically characteristic of the Syrian population. This particularly high percentage could be related to the technical expertise and knowledge of the AMG community, which has helped them succeed in this field. On the other hand, the percentage of those who have completed secondary studies had reached (%26); many were unable to pursue graduate studies because they were active in the revolution and/or wanted by the security forces.

Educational Level
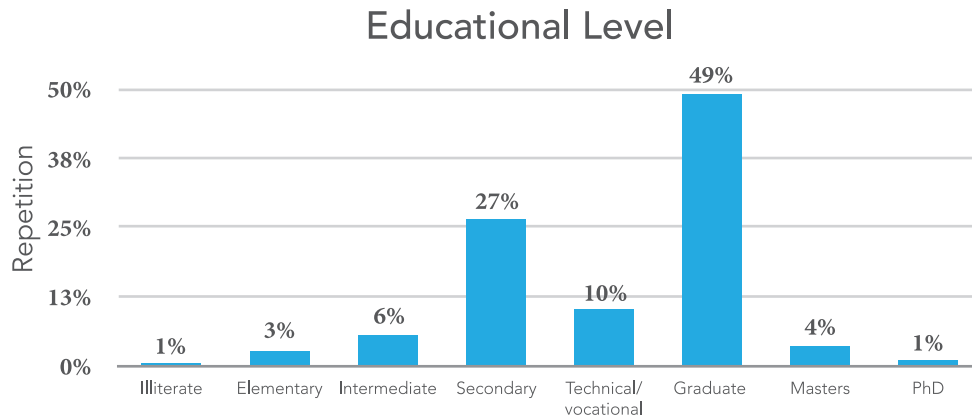
The size of AMGs

Most AMGs are small in size; (%54) of AMGs have less than 10 members, whereas only (%28) of the groups have more than 20 members. Importantly, the size of some AMGs could be exaggerated, since larger AMGs are perceived as more successful and professional. Smaller AMGs face different challenges, such as vague job descriptions, obscure roles and responsibilities, and the inability to form administrative staff in charge of the managerial and financial matters, as well as the group's public relations. Professional staffs in these groups maintain successful operations by rotating staff through different positions. In many cases, staff rotation has caused disorganization, and has undermined AMGs in their ability to ensure comprehensive coverage of ongoing events.
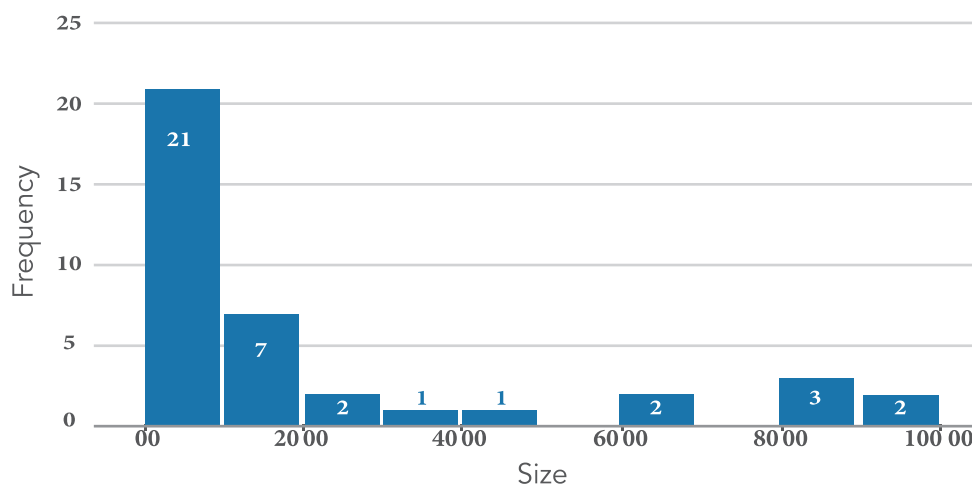
The classification of AMGs based on their experience

Less than (20%) of AMGs considered themselves as a professional group, reflecting the group's lack of confidence in their own expertise. The youth of AMG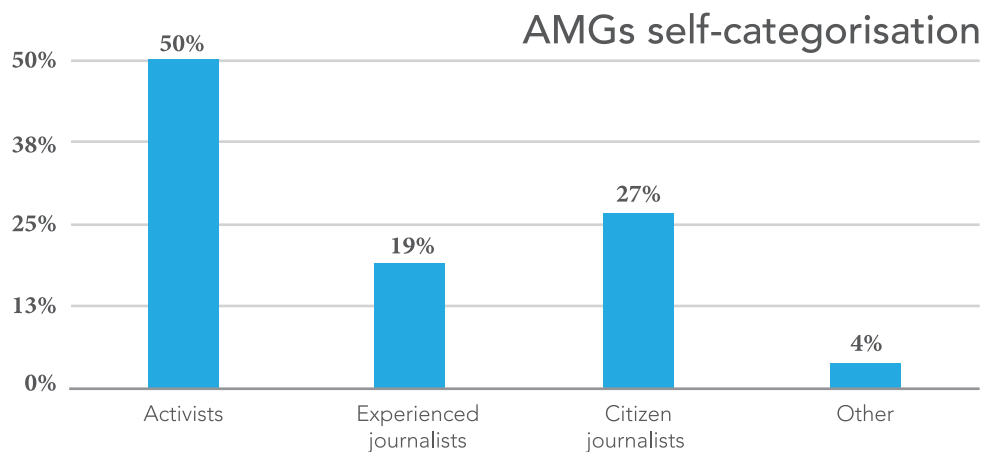 staff, small group sizes, and a reliance on amateurs all contribute to low levels of confidence. The percentage of journalists prior to the revolution reached only (9%). Many have pursued this field because of their desire to document the peaceful uprising, and to expose violations committed by the regime. The absence of international news agencies encouraged Syrian activists to do the job, despite their lack of experience. As the Syrian crisis became the focus of the world, some activists were offered jobs with prominent members of the mainstream international media, opportunities which were not available before the revolution. This phenomenon was exasercbated by the rapid decline of the regime's influence, particularly in matters related to security.

AMGs self-categorisation

Category	Percentage
Activists	50%
Experienced journalists	19%
Citizen journalists	27%
Other	4%

The challenges

The lack of financial support is the biggest challenge which the AMGs face, followed by the security consideration, the lack of expertise, lack of technical equipment and professional cadre. Various factions not only detain, arrest, intimidate, and kidnap journalists on a regular basis, but sometimes destroy AMG facilities altogether.
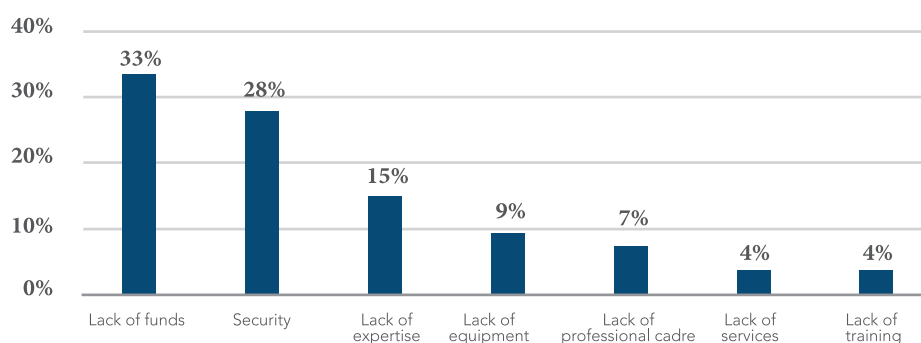Also, some of the AMGs' members were targets of assassination attempts. Robberies and physical violations come as the last categories of threats.

What is striking in this research is that almost 25% of the groups denied the existence of security challenges. Most of these were based in the self-administrated zone which is considered amongst the most stable compared to other areas. Moreover, two of the groups in the opposition-held area mentioned that they never faced any security challenges despite of the complex situation. The answers provided by these groups could be drawn from their interpretation of 'security challenges' as those which could be imposed by local factions and not the threats posed by aerial bombing amongst many others. Reporters without Borders classify Syria amongst the most dangerous country when it comes to press safety. According to the 2015 "Syrian Centre for Press Freedom" annual report, 265 journalists and citizen journalists were killed between March 2011 - end of 2014. The deadliest year for journalists in Syria was 2013, when a total of 103 were killed. In 2014, 53 journalists were killed -- although a significant decrease in number, there was absolutely no decrease in the levels of danger and violence. There were a total of 129 violations against journalists in 2014; 49 cases were committed by the Assad regime, and 29 by ISIS. Killing attempts constituted 50% of these violations, the most of which occurred in Aleppo (41) and Hasaka [17].

17 http://www.syja.org/images/PDF/Y_EN_PDF.pdf

Challenges

Category	Percentage
Lack of funds	33%
Security	28%
Lack of expertise	15%
Lack of equipment	9%
Lack of professional cadre	7%
Lack of services	4%
Lack of training	4%

Security Challenges

Category	Percentage
Detainment	25%
Intimidation	19%
Nothing noted	17%
Kidnapping	10%
Destruction of premises	8%
Assassination	6%
Detention attempt	4%
Theft	4%
Physical harm	4%
Closing FB page	4%
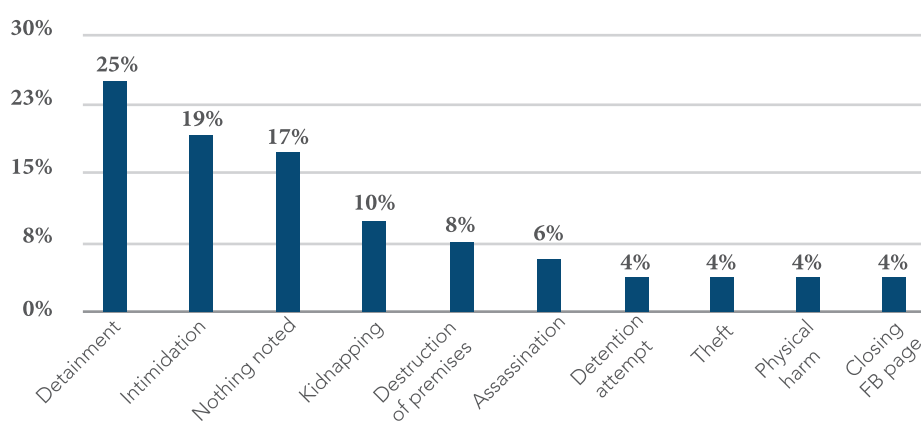
Priority of coverage

Covering 'civil and local society affairs' has largely been the highest priority for AMGs. 14 out of 39 AMGs considered civil society affairs as their top priority, whilst 20 other groups gave civil society affairs a moderate-to-high level of interest. Humanitarian affairs was the next highest priority – 12 AMGs identified this type of news as a top priority, compared to the 23 AMGs that gave 'humanitarian affairs' moderate-to-high attention. Only a few AMGs focused on rights, documentation of violations, or politics. 28 groups said that their focus on military affairs is minimal.[18]

Style of coverage

21 out of the 39 AMGs declared that they tend to focus on breaking news, whilst only 15 groups focus on similar news on a moderate-high scale. 18 groups rely on photographs as a tool for sharing news, compared to 16 groups that favored photographs on a moderate-high scale. However, photographs are less popular as a source of news from a technical and editorial point of views compared to their artistic, expressive and emotional effects. Photographs can be easily edited and therefore, videos provide a more accurate representation of reality. Most AMGs focused on violations' monitoring, investigative journalism, articles, featured analysis, as well as filmed reports – more so than radio programs and news stories.

[18] No available figure to illustrate the information here. The results have been concluded from the sample's answers to several questions, where some choices in the answers were excluded due to different reasons.

Distribution based on the type of news

Type	Value
Short stories	3.1026
Photographs	2.9487
Documenting violations and monitoring the status of liberties	2.5
Reports and investigative reports	2.2703
Articles and analysis	2.2368
Filmed reports	2
Stories	1.4474
Radio programs	0.7632
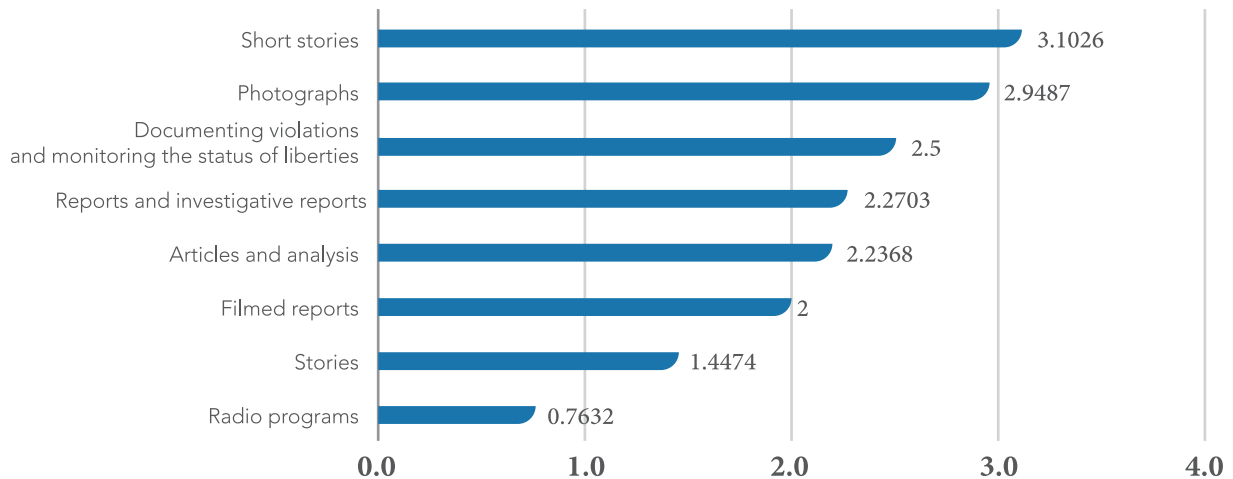
Interaction of AMGs with the audience:

The internet is the most popular tool of communication, the fastest, and the most widespread. 23 out of 39 AMGs said the comments of their followers on social media demonstrate high levels of interaction. 22 AMGs continuously receive messages and emails from the audience, accept all comments, and take in all suggestions, in order to improve their performance. 10 AMGs stated that they also receive direct feedback at individual meetings with followers, and not necessarily through the internet. Finally, AMG interactions with the audience were maintained through interactive entertainment programs, phone calls from the audience, and polls.[19]

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[19] No available figure to illustrate the information here. The results have been concluded from the sample's answers to several questions, where some choices in the answers were excluded due to different reasons.

Chapter 2:
The audience's preferences and trends

This chapter focuses on the audience, their perception of the roles of AMGs, and their reliance on AMGs as a credible news source. The research identifies the audience's favourite type of media as well as favourite type of news. It also analyzes how these tools are being used to serve the audience's needs, as well as the adaptation and reliance of the latter on the use of similar tools to access news' updates.

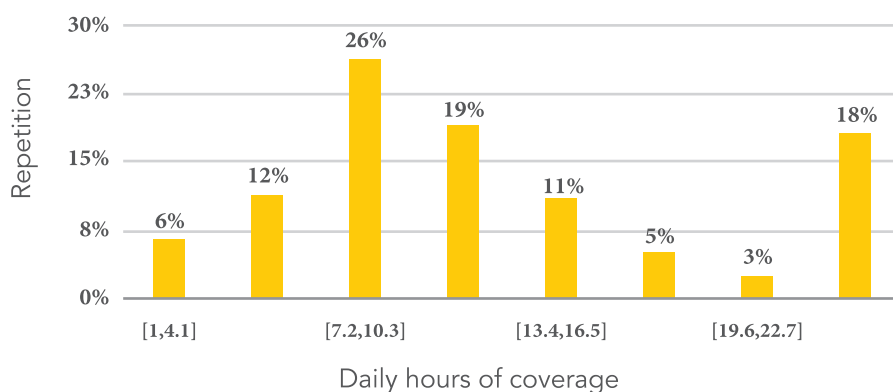### 1- The availability and accessibility of media tools

The wanton destruction of infrastructure has had direct effects on the daily lives of Syrians, including their ability to access news. Similar to the assessments discussed earlier, there are trends and characteristics unique to each geographic area in question. These differences could be tied to various developments such as the effects of fluctuating oil prices, the decreasing value of the Syrian pound, and the prevalence of checkpoints and road closures in specific areas. Increasing transportation costs have forced many families to either move to less expensive areas, find new employment, or withdraw their children from school.

Therefore, it is essential to understand accessibility to media platforms in the areas in question, due to uncertainty in the availability of services. Power shortages in Syria prior to 2011 were rare; today, on the other hand, perhaps the most asked question amongst Syrians is: how many hours per day is electricity available in area "X?"

Predictably, the answer to this question differed in each zone. The averages were 12 hours in self-administered zones; six hours in opposition-held zones; and in ISIS-held zones, accurate estimations were nearly impossible, due to the displacement of the sample participants to safer areas. Longer hours of electricity availability in the self-administered zone compared to the other zones is due to relatively stronger infrastructure. Additionally, stability in the self-administered zone has simplified, and reduced the costs of, access to generators, which are used widely during power shortages.

Availability of electricity in the self-administrated area

Repetition

Daily hours of coverage
6% · 12% · 26% · 19% · 11% · 5% · 3% · 18%

[1,4.1]   [7.2,10.3]   [13.4,16.5]   [19.6,22.7]

Daily hours of coverage

Availability of electricity in ISIS-heald area

Repetition

90% —
68%
45%
23%
0%

7%   7%   0%   2%   85%

[2,7.1] [7.1,12.22] [12.2,17.3] [17.3,22.4] [22.4,24]

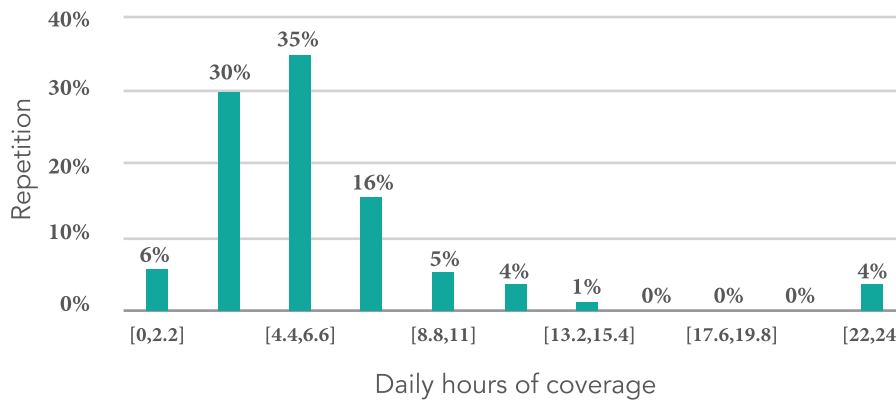Daily hours of coverage
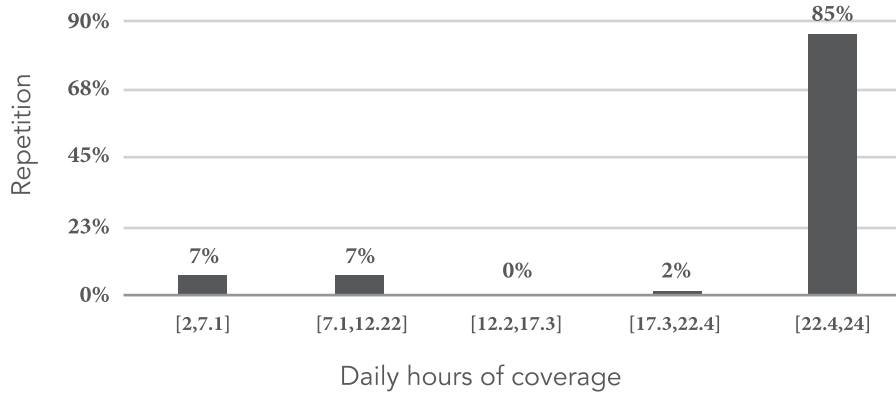
Availability of electricity in opposition-held

Repetition

40%
30%
20%
10%
0%

6%   30%   35%   16%   5%   4%   1%   0%   0%   0%   4%

[0,2.2]   [4.4,6.6]   [8.8,11]   [13.2,15.4]   [17.6,19.8]   [22,24]
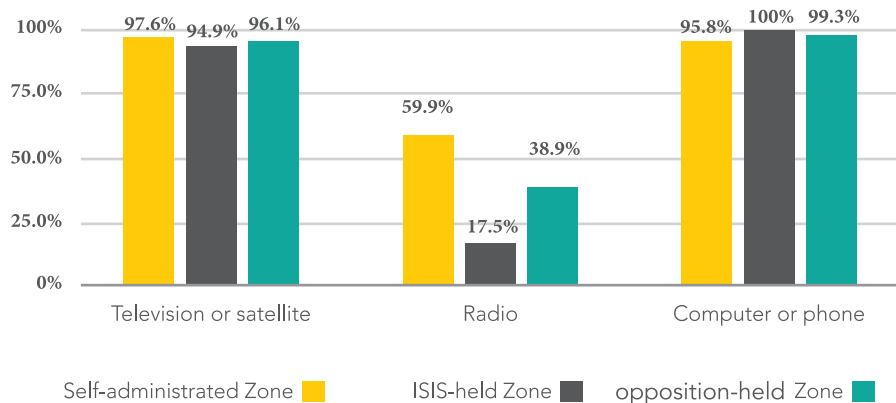
Daily hours of coverage

Power shortages significantly reduce television traffic, whereas users of laptops and smartphones are less likely to get disconnected due to the convenience of batteries, satellite internet, and wireless mobile telecommunications technology, such as "3G." In addition, although smart-phones are used to access radio services, there is a serious shortage of traditional radio equipment.

(%95) of survey participants have access to a TV – either at home or at work. (%96) of participants have a laptop and/or smartphone with internet access. The availability of radios differed in each area surveyed, and the use of radio is not common, especially when compared to other tools. (%94) have access to internet, a sign of average-to-good infrastructure and equipment. The limited use of radios is linked to the limited number of receivers in comparison to other devices.

Availability of tools

100%
75.0%
50.0%
25.0%
0%

Television or satellite: 97.6%   94.9%   96.1%
Radio: 59.9%   17.5%   38.9%
Computer or phone: 95.8%   100%   99.3%

Self-administrated Zone   ISIS-held Zone   opposition-held Zone

Availability of internet

Zone	No	Yes
opposition-held Zone	2%	98%
ISIS-held Zone	3%	97%
Self-administrated Zone	6%	94%

■ No ■ Yes
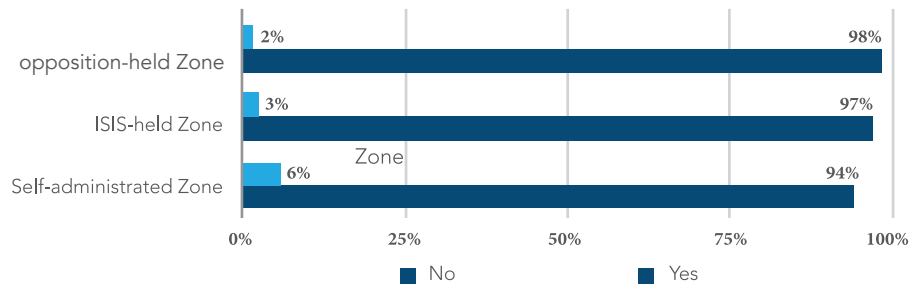
TV's are the most widely-available media tool in the self-administered zone; on the other hand in both opposition-held zones and ISIS-held zones, internet is the most widely-available media tool. The widespread use of TVs in the self-administered zone is closely related to the ava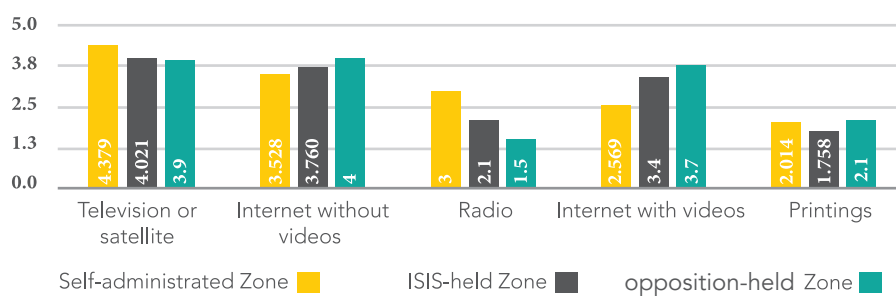ilability of electricity. In the opposition-held zone, where electricity is relatively scarce and frequently cut, residents go to internet cafes in order to charge their smartphones and laptops. Radio was the next most widely-used tool in the self-administered zone, and in both opposition-held zones and ISIS-held zones, internet is the next most widely-used tool. Finally, print is used least across northern Syria.

Most available tools

Tool	Self-administrated Zone	ISIS-held Zone	opposition-held Zone
Television or satellite	4.379	4.021	3.9
Internet without videos	3.528	3.760	4
Radio	3	2.1	1.5
Internet with videos	2.569	3.4	3.7
Printings	2.014	1.758	2.1

■ Self-administrated Zone ■ ISIS-held Zone ■ opposition-held Zone

These results contradict the idea that radio and print could be the main platforms of emerging media during and after conflict. The circulation of printed newspapers and other journals is negatively effected by the deteriorating state of the country's infrastructure and lack of equipment. In any case, the authorities of each area consistently monitor publishing houses and print media. Consequently, the circulation of print inside Syria faces many challenges, namely threats made against both distributors and readers. The decline in the use of radio is not related to costs or the lack of production and transmission, but rather to a lack of interest by the audience.
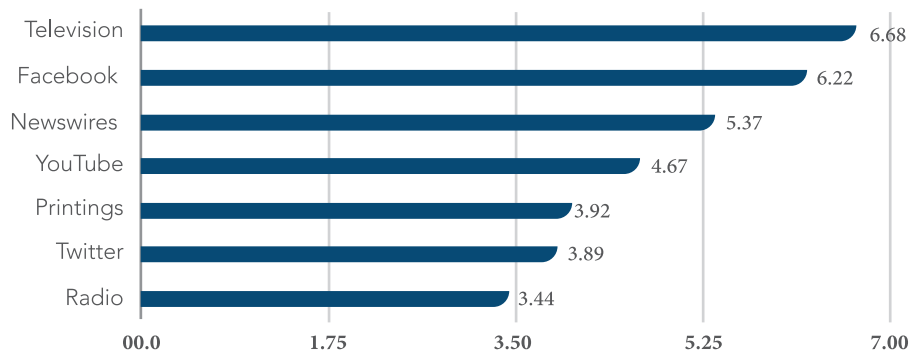
2- Audience preferences

Media trends

TV is the audience's favourite tool, followed by Facebook, newswires and YouTube, and then lastly, printed journals. Twitter and blogs were less favourable, whilst radio is the least favourable tool among the sample. The opposition was unable to utilize TV on a more frequent and widespread basis due to a lack of funding, as well as the need for professional and well-trained staff. As cited earlier, although radio is being increasingly used by AMGs for various reasons, the audience's use of radio remains limited. Finally, the use of Twitter by the audience and AMGs is low, since Syrians tend to favour Facebook.

Availability of internet

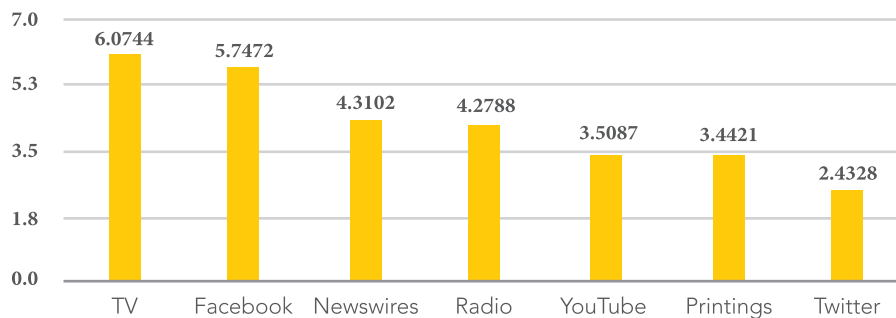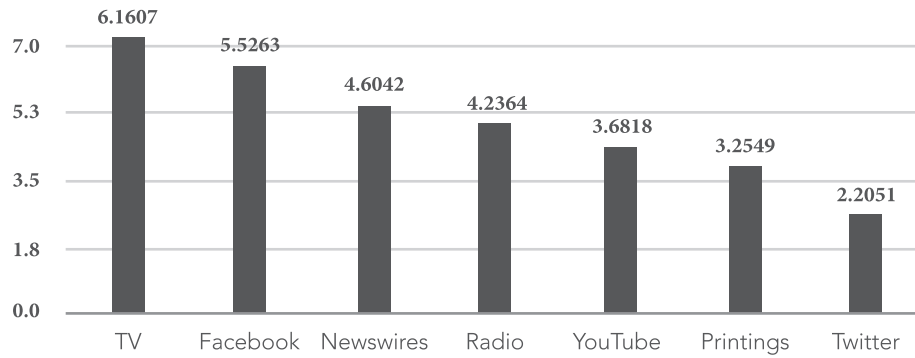| Tool	Value
Television	6.68
Facebook	6.22
Newswires	5.37
YouTube	4.67
Printings	3.92
Twitter	3.89
Radio	3.44

The most preferable tool
to keep up with the news

Audiences in Syria tend to follow their local news. As disussed earlier, in the self-administered zone, TV is the favourite media medium whereas in opposition-held and ISIS-held zones, Facebook is the favourite. Greater stability and negative perceptions of unofficial Facebook mediavourite media tool in the self-administered zones. In any case, the simple fact that a higher number of mainstream TV stations operate in the self-administered zone compared to the other two zones is perhaps why TV is the favourite there. The third favourite media tools are radio newswires in the self-administered zone, and YouTube in the opposition-held and ISIS-held zones. (%60) of the sample in the self-administered zone confirmed the availability of radio device - and specialised experienced station – transmissions. Twitter and printings are the least favourite tools in in the ISIS-held and opposition-helds-held zones.
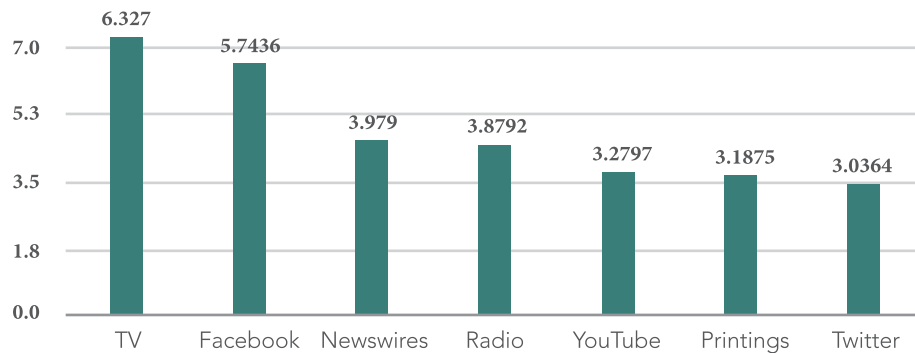
Preferred tools in the self-administrated area

Tool	Value
TV	6.0744
Facebook	5.7472
Newswires	4.3102
Radio	4.2788
YouTube	3.5087
Printings	3.4421
Twitter	2.4328

Preferred tools in ISIS-held area

Bar chart values:
- TV: 6.1607
- Facebook: 5.5263
- Newswires: 4.6042
- Radio: 4.2364
- YouTube: 3.6818
- Printings: 3.2549
- Twitter: 2.2051

Y-axis: 7.0, 5.3, 3.5, 1.8, 0.0

Preferred tools in opposition-held area

Bar chart values:
- TV: 6.327
- Facebook: 5.7436
- Newswires: 3.979
- Radio: 3.8792
- YouTube: 3.2797
- Printings: 3.1875
- Twitter: 3.0364

Y-axis: 7.0, 5.3, 3.5, 1.8, 0.0

There are many reasons why AMGs rely on Facebook in the early stages of development: low costs, global reach, secure communications, instant coverage, the ability to engage with the audience, edit existing posts, and send private messages. It is these variety of functions and features on Facebook that were more appealing to audiences than traditional media like TV.

TV on the other hand is costly, and requires a large initial investment and technical expertise, luxuries that are largely not available to revolutionary and emerging media groups. This is the underlying reason why mainstream media is generally weak in the geographical areas of this research.

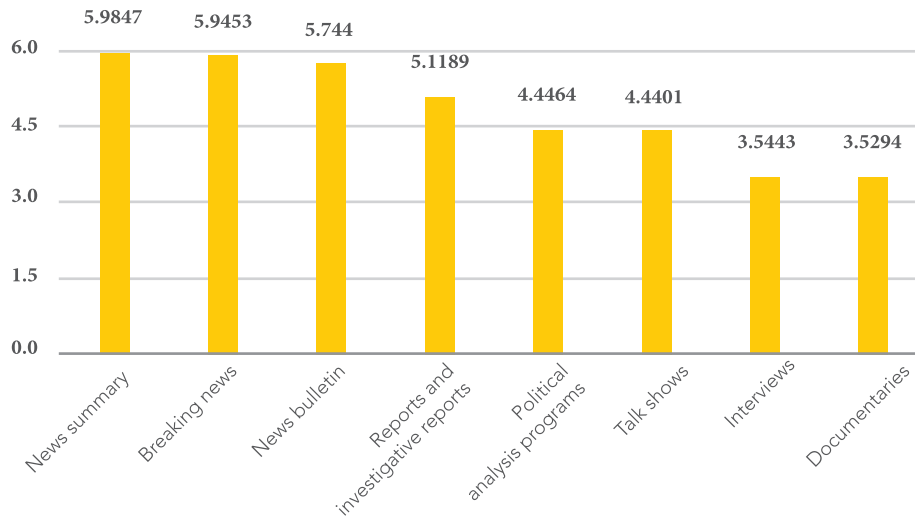### The quality of news content

War reporters tend to focus their coverage on daily violence. therefore other aspects of life and the community are oftentimes not reported. However, when questioned about the quality/type of news which they prefer, it was clear the audience has a desire to watch positive news that demonstrates the continuity of life. Photos that illustrate optimism got the highest score; these photos offer a positive contrast to the daily reminders of violence and war. News related to services, such as healthcare, humanitarian aid and public services, received the second highest scores, followed by political updates at third. These preferences could give peace journalists an idea of the issues to cover in their reporting.
Despite the average audience's interest in

conflict-related news, they gave low scores violence, torture and scenes of destruction. The general interest in conflict-related news reflects the need to be updated on the security situation.

The figures show that the audience prefers flash news and news summaries as they provide quick updates that are not overwhelming. Detailed news bulletins came in second place, followed by news reports. Talk shows, political analysis shows, interviews, and documentaries were ranked fourth in all three zones.

Preferred TV shows in the self-administrated area

Category	Value
News summary	5.9847
Breaking news	5.9453
News bulletin	5.744
Reports and investigative reports	5.1189
Political analysis programs	4.4464
Talk shows	4.4401
Interviews	3.5443
Documentaries	3.5294

Preferred TV shows in ISIS-held area

Category	Value
News summary	6.5818
Breaking news	6.2545
News bulletin	5.7037
Reports and investigative reports	4.7736
Political analysis programs	4.0208
Talk shows	3.6889
Interviews	3.5208
Documentaries	3.225
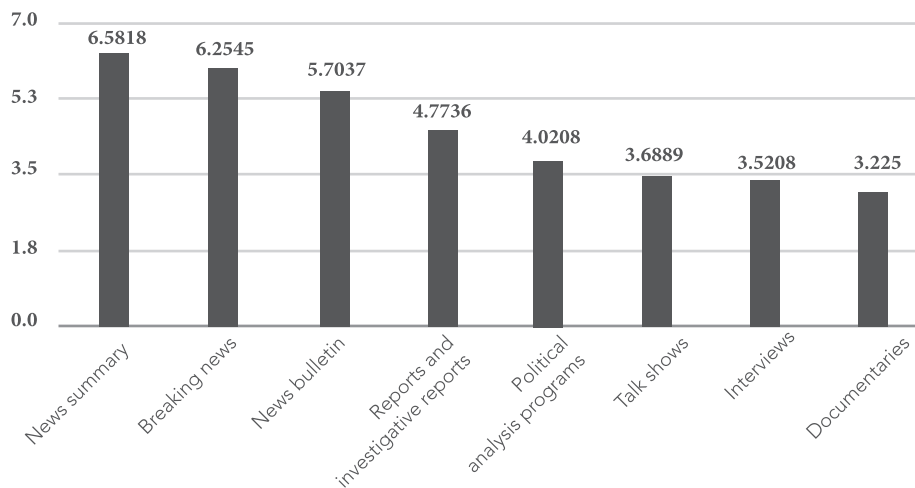
Preferred TV shows in opposition-held area

Category	Value
News summary	6.5818
Breaking news	6.2388
News bulletin	6.0446
Reports and investigative reports	4.8041
Political analysis programs	4.2083
Talk shows	3.7311
Interviews	3.1667
Documentaries	2.7569
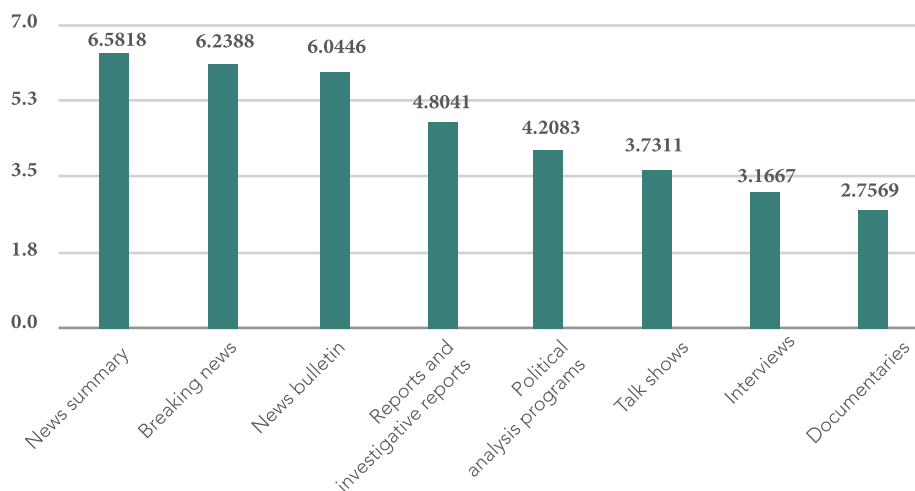
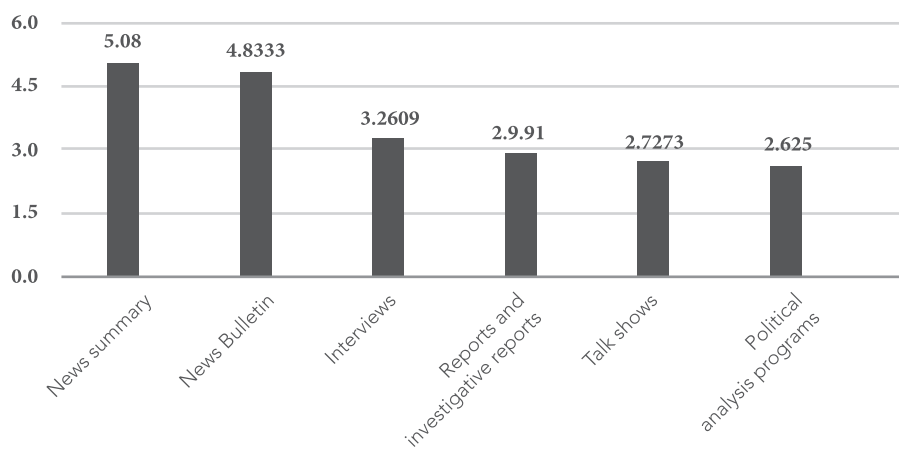The same preferences can be applied to radio: news summaries are rated highest, then news bulletins, news reports, political analysis, and finally, talk shows/interviews are the least preferred. As for printings and newswires the audience in the three areas preferred breaking news over photos which came in the last place.
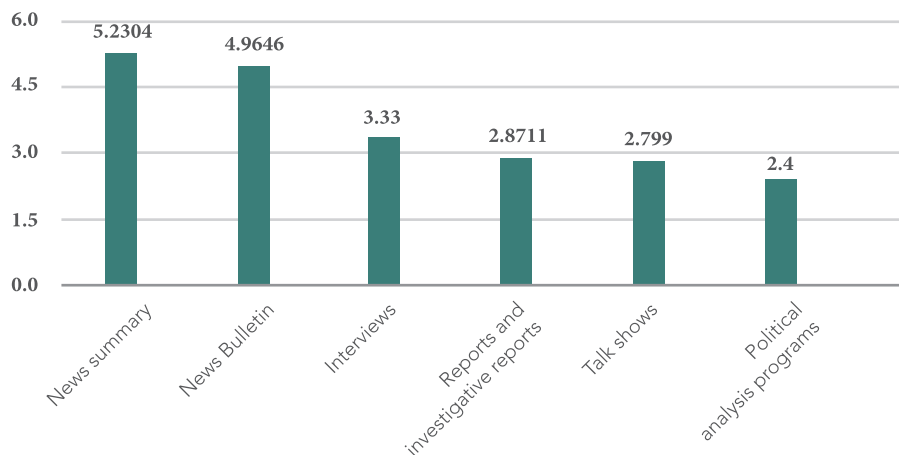
Preferred radio shows the self-adimitstrated area

Category	Value
News summary	4.9317
News Bulletin	4.3559
Interviews	3.4517
Reports and investigative reports	3.4545
Talk shows	2.996
Political analysis programs	2.8996
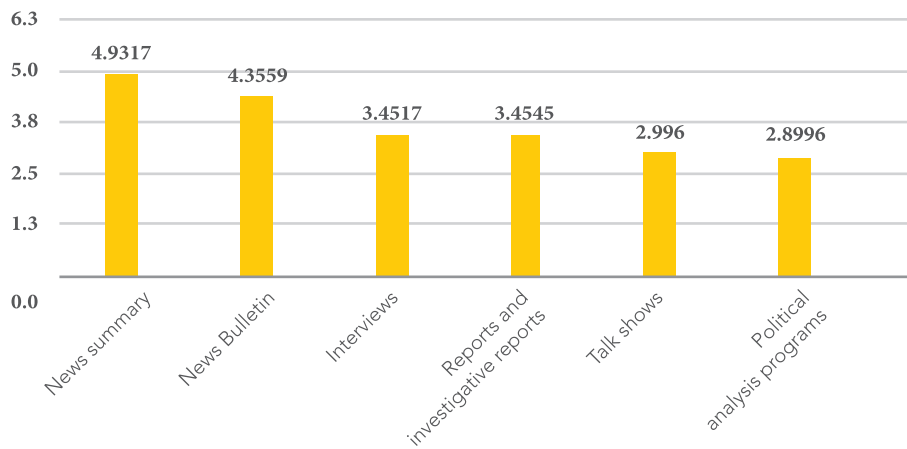
Preferred radio shows in ISIS-held area

Category	Value
News summary	5.08
News Bulletin	4.8333
Interviews	3.2609
Reports and investigative reports	2.9.91
Talk shows	2.7273
Political analysis programs	2.625

Preferred radio shows in opposition-held area

Category	Value
News summary	5.2304
News Bulletin	4.9646
Interviews	3.33
Reports and investigative reports	2.8711
Talk shows	2.799
Political analysis programs	2.4

Preferred printings
and newswires in the self-adimitstrated area

Category	Value
Short News	5.5119
Reports and Investigations	4.468
Detailed news	4.2968
Documents and leaks	4.2131
Interviews	4.101
Statements or press releases	4.0487
Still Pictures	3.1806
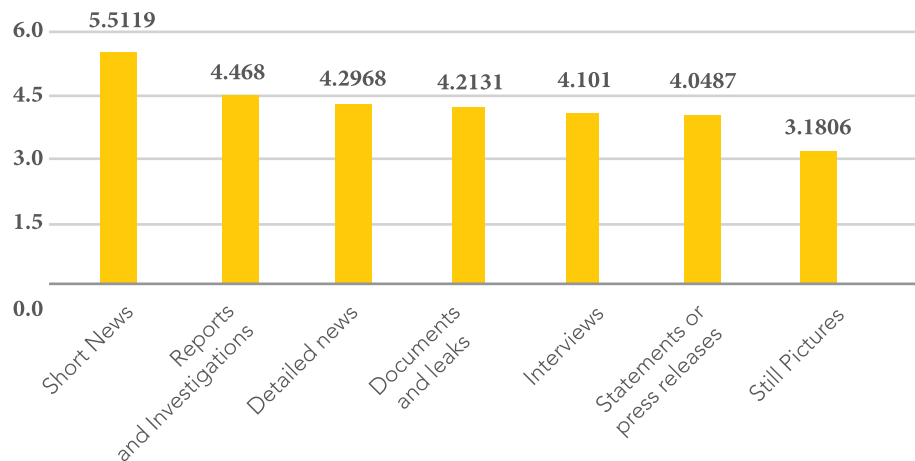
Preferred printings
and newswires in ISIS-held area

Category	Value
Short News	6.1579
Reports and Investigations	4.6087
Detailed news	4.32
Documents and leaks	4.1042
Interviews	3.8085
Statements or press releases	3.449
Still Pictures	3.3182
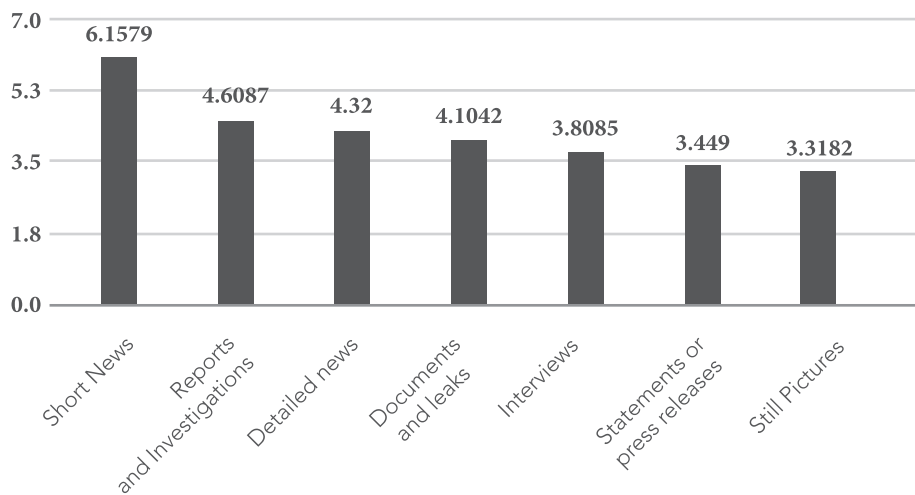
Preferred printings
and newswires in opposition-held area

| Category	Value
Short News	5.8284
Reports and Investigations	4.824
Detailed news	4.1905
Documents and leaks	4.0857
Interviews	3.9333
Statements or press releases	3.3478
Still Pictures	3.0506
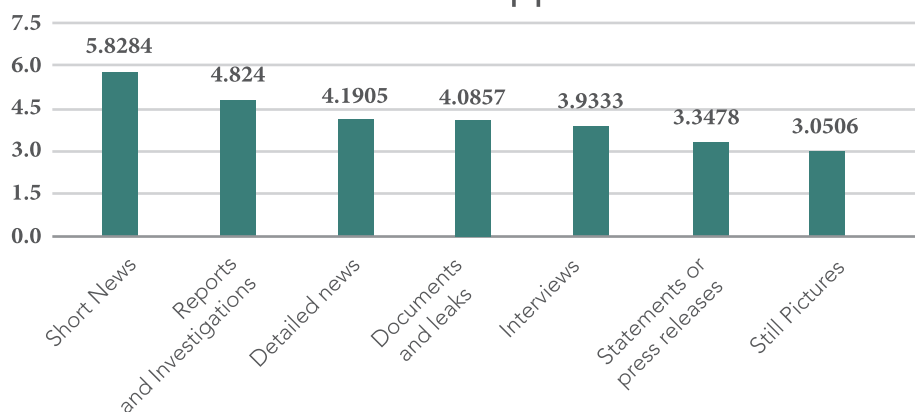
In terms of audio-visual media (though the internet came in first place): recordings of the ongoing events in the battlefield came were ranked first; news reports second; statements and press releases third; news bulletins fourth; interviews fifth; talk shows sixth; political analysis seventh; and finally, documentaries eigth and last. These results indicate the audience prefers raw news over analysis and dialogue on the various shows.

The electricity shortage and lack of internet access also limits the audience's options, and interest, in those programs. These accessibility issues are another reason why the audience prefers news updates over talk shows and political analysis, since the infrastructure for such shows is unavailable.
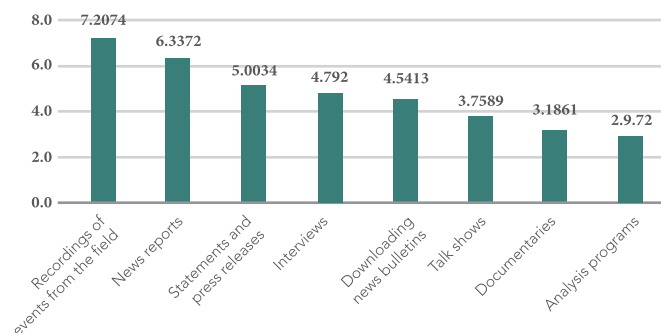
Preferred audiovisual material in the self-adimitstrated area
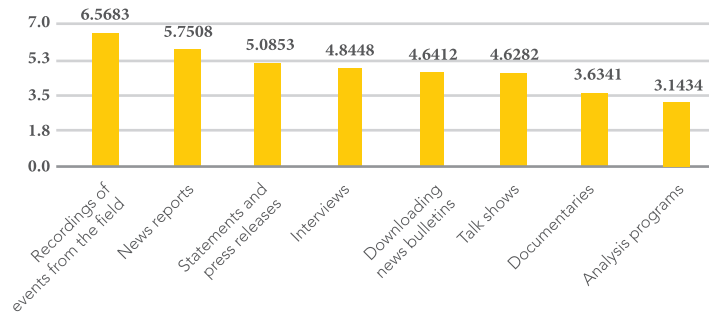
Preferred audiovisual material in ISIS-held area
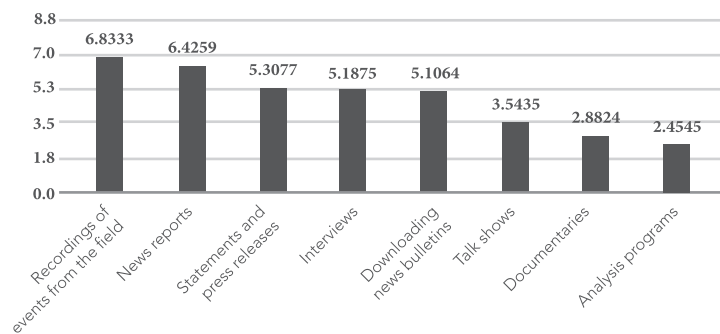
## Preferred audiovisual material in opposition-held area

News sources

The audience gets its news updates from the following sources, in order: personal connections, public updates, posters, and published statements. People also receive news updates from verbal communication in common public places; these percentages differ slightly from one area to another.
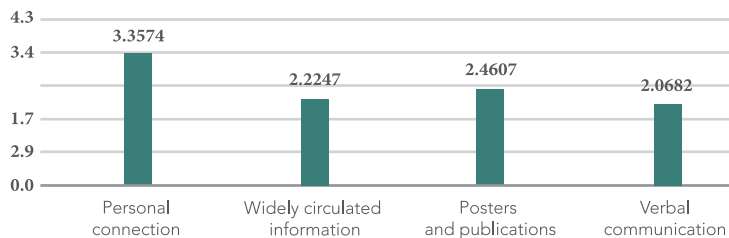
Source of news in the self-administrated area
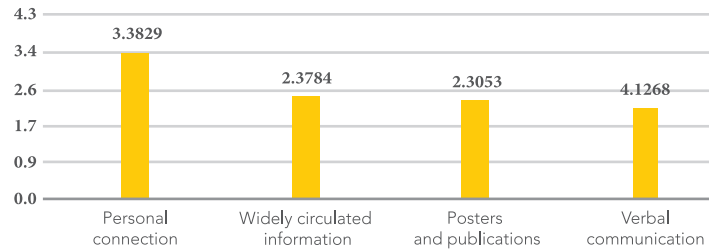
Source of news in the ISIS-held area
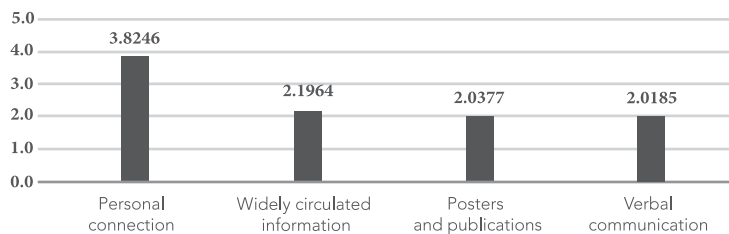
Source of news in the opposition-held area

What is telling in this research is the emergence of new sources of information which rely on smartphone applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram, in addition to hand-held non-wired communication devices used within urban areas by the different factions. Most activists and journalists perceive these applications as tools for data collection rather than news platforms; however, the reference made by individuals from outside the media field to these applications as their preferred source of news indicate how user friendly these applications are, and how blurry the boundaries have become between news broadcast, data collection and the audience's feedback. This new emerging dynamic between tools and the respective audience are a clear reflection of the chaotic and complex reality in which media groups operate.

The availability of these platforms and applications to the public is not consistent. At a time when some media platforms use these applications as their official platforms, receiving news updates from smartphone applications and the internet is a luxury not all Syrians have. Mostly, those with continuous access are activists (and

sometimes their relatives) on the ground who come from a variety of fields such as relief, military, politics, and media. The followers of these platforms praise their credibility for being on the ground and close to the audience, which allows greater engagement with producers of news. This close engagement from start to finish allows the audience to independently form their opinion, partly based on their assessment of the data collection process, whereas mainstream media tends to offer biased news and a tailored point-of-view.

The interweaving of data collection, data publishing, and feedback collection across these platforms transforms the relation between sender and receiver, as any individual could be engaged in news production through testimonies and evidence-based stories, and even the assessment and verification of news shared by other sources. The process is available to the general audience who have the chance to follow the discussion in the same way they receive updates sent from a specific media platform.
These applications rightly open the door to many questions regarding how the different

platforms benefit from these applications and tools, and the implications they might have on mainstream media – in addition to many other questions that need to be answered when discussing Syria.

It has been confirmed that news-production dynamics are undergoing quick and steadfast development in areas of research, thanks to the employment of new communication technologies, and the urgent need for breaking news services in light of the escalating dangers on the ground. That means that the role of emerging media platforms in these areas are continuously undergoing changes. It is almost impossible to predict how communication technologies, and the situation on the ground, will develop in the future. Despite the challenges, it is fair to say that these emerging organisations are eager to improve and willing to adapt in terms of administration and technical know-how. The benefits from using the latest technologies compensate for the lack of resources and experience.

2- In-depth analysis of the audience's preferences and trends

Many FGDs were organised and gathered a sample amongst the audience whom participated in the survey. The FGDs aimed to provide an in-depth knowledge of news circulation in the targeted areas and how the audience benefits from the news, gathered from different sources. The question throughout the groups' discussions focused on two specific notorious events in each area: one with a strictly civic aspect, and another with a military aspect. A thorough discussion regarding AMGs' coverage of these events took place. At the beginning, participants were asked about their sources of information and how they would verify their information. Lastly, participants were asked about the sources which they relied on to form a better understanding of an event's details and causes.

Afterwards, participants were asked to assess the work of the media outlets

that provided the most comprehensive coverage on various levels, such as sources of information which the breaking news referred to (What? Where? When?), the group that provided the most detailed coverage (What? Where? When?), as well as the group that provided the audience with a comprehensive analysis (What? Where? When?). Participants were then asked to rank the groups based on their ability to provide instant coverage, accuracy, verification, analysis, balance, and neutrality. Moreover, the groups were ranked based on the extent to which they avoid manipulation by the news in shaping and influencing public opinion. Towards the end, participants were asked to give a general assessment of AMGs in their respective areas; not only a mere assessment of how the above events were covered, but rather, an assessment of performance, neutrality, and integrity.

Self-administered zones

The events that were studied in this area were selected based on discussions the team had with participants. These events were divided as follows:
- *Civic event:* the education directorate's decision to move the official exam centre from Qameshli to Hasaka.
- *Political event:* The announcement of a federal state in the self-administered zone.

The priorities of news' sources and usage of information

The answers provided by the sample on the sources of information which they used in relation to the first event were divided as follows:

Most participants informed the research team that they learned the news through word of mouth, either from friends, relatives, or the students themselves. They did not consult local media platforms, but instead, verified the news and details through local contacts. The internet in this case served as a secondary, rather than primary, source of information. The same applies to Facebook and TV as a tool to understand the causes and repercussions.

As for the three levels of news sharing, Arta FM came first in the assessment which was carried by the audience, followed by Yekiti Media, Boueir Press, and Ronahy Channel.

Moreover, the sample's answers to the second event classified TV stations a primary source of information and news validation; these were Rodaw, Ronahy, and Kurdistan 24. To learn more about the details of the event, respondents had referred to their friends, acquaintances, and political activists of local political parties. However, in the second place, they referred to local radio, TV stations, and the internet. It should be noted that the internet in this area came in third place. The ranking of the internet is mainly due to the access the audience has to official platforms when compared to the TV and radio. The availability of local TV stations, interaction with activists, and relatively free movement, have all contributed to the audience's preference of mainstream media over the internet.

Rodaw and Ronahy came in first place

based on the audience's assessment, whilst Arta FM was ranked as less favourable.

Assessment of performance

Answers regarding media outlets which offered the best news coverage of events, based on swift services, accuracy, details provided, and balanced coverage, were divided as follows:

For the civic event: the audience believed that Arta FM was the best media outlet on all levels (see above) amongst the outlets in Al Jazeera's zone. It was followed by Yekiti Media and Boueir Press.
For the political event: the audience considered Ronahi TV as the most reliable, followed by Rodaw and Radio Arta FM. For the outlet with the most balanced coverage: Arta FM was ranked first, followed by Rodaw and Ronahi.

Description of media coverage

On the level of media coverage provided of by the five news outlets in Al Jazeera's zone, the audience has placed Boueir Press, Yekiti Media, Char Journal, and Arta FM amongst the most accurate and balanced in their coverage. In contrast, they described Ronahi as misleading, emotional, exaggerative, and using an intimidating tone. As for the political event, the audience's opinion was relatively similar to the impression provided above. They found that Yekiti Media, Boueir Press and Arta FM are amongst the most accurate and balanced whilst the others were misleading, exaggerative and using an intimidating tone.

General assessment of the media outlets' performance

This question was answered by a very small number of journalists ((%50) of the sample in Al Jazeera's zone). The results were divided as follows:

6 out of 11 considered the outlets' coverage as professional
7 out of 13 considered the news provided by these outlets as accurate
On the other hand, most respondents found that the outlets rarely admit their mistakes or work to correct them.
When evaluating impartiality, most respondents found that these outlets are politicised and tilt in favour of specific movements. They also found

that the outlets are subject to pressures from, and close monitoring by, different parties.
Most respondents believe that these outlets clearly try to shape public opinion.

ISIS-held zones

The two events which were selected by audience in this sample were:

Civic event: The forced repentance amongst teachers to announce their loyalty to ISIS, follow its orders and to fight its enemies.
Military event: ISIS control of Al Tabaka military airport

The priorities of news' sources and usage of information

The answers about the civic event are similar to the news about moving the official exams' centre in Al Jazeera, as most respondents have heard news about forced repentance from teachers. They essentially relied on acquaintances and friends to verify the news. The internet and mainstream media came in second place. It was obvious that similar civic news is less attractive for media outlets compared to the news from the battleground or political updates.

As for the three levels of news sharing: Orient Channel had the best rating on the first and third levels, whilst Al Jazeera had the best rating on the second level.

The answers provided as per the military event: TV stations were largely the initial source of news. However, the audience relied on friends, personal connections and the internet in order to validate the news.
Al Jazeera TV landed in first place, followed by Al Arabiya, and Orient.

Assessment of performance

The respondents' assessment of coverage provided by media outlets regarding the aforementioned events were very similar in the two cases. Most respondents found that the performance of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya are amongst the best on all levels such as swift news services, accuracy, details provided and balanced coverage. The same applies to Orient Channel, according to the respondents.

Description of media coverage

The audience in this sample had different views about the coverage provided by the well-known Facebook page "Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently." Whilst some of the respondents found it emotional and passive, others described their coverage as accurate. The same applies to Al Jisr channel, whilst the coverage of 'Adasat chab deiry' (Arabic for, "A guy from Deir El Zour") was considered as superficial.
The assessment of the audience did not differ between both events as the outlets have had the same rating.

General assessment of the media outlets' performance

The respondents' opinions of the professional performance of media outlets have varied amongst the sample. (%42) of respondents said that the outlets' professionalism is good, whilst (%39) found the outlets' professionalism as below average.

(%65) of the respondents confirmed the accuracy of the broadcasted news.
However, the answers related to the outlets' admission of mistakes and their efforts to revalidate the news were ambiguous.
As for impartiality and politicisation: most respondents (%79) found that most outlets are biased and are subject to pressure.
As for their tendency to shape public opinion: (%63) of respondents said that outlets often try to shape public opinion. (%34) found this tendency as a general rule, whilst the same percentage of respondents believed that this tendency fluctuates based on the i**s-held zone**

The sample in this area chose the following events:

Civic event: The protest against the Nusra Front in Maaret El Naaman.
Military event: The bombing of Al Quds hospital in the Sukkari neighbourhood of Aleppo.

The priorities of news' sources and usage of information
The respondents' answers regarding the first event were divided as follows:
Social media platforms and local AMGs were amongst the first sources of news for

the audience. These platforms were also amongst the most favourable news validation check desks, as acquaintances and friends came in the second place. These findings align with the subsequent content analysis, as most mainstream outlets have avoided the events in their coverage (they briefly mentioned the protests without discussing protester demands or their objections against the Front). The audiences' reliance on local pages in this case makes sense.

As for the three levels of news sharing:

The answers of respondents regarding the military event: 'Aleppo Today' was the major source of news, as it was the first outlet to provide comprehensive coverage. The audience then relied on local AMGs in verifying the news, followed by acquaintances and friends. "Aleppo Today" got the best rating, followed by Orient and Al Jazeera.

Assessment of performance

The assessment of performance differed between the two events. While "Aleppo Today" was the first to broadcast news about the civic event, the audience ranked Orient Channel as the most accurate, balanced, and detailed.
As for the military event: "Aleppo Today" got the highest rating on all levels, despite being ranked second (after Al Jazeera) in balance of coverage.

Description of media coverage

Most respondents in this sample said that most outlets in the opposition-held zones have provided balanced and accurate coverage of the civic event, despite it being ignored by many media outlets. However, the percentage of respondents is relatively low.

As for the military event: the audience rated media outlets as accurate, particularly 'Aleppo Today."

General assessment of the media outlets' performance

(%77) of the sample described the media outlets as professional.
(%76) of the sample note that the information provided by these outlets are mostly accurate and trustworthy.
(%85) of the sample found that these outlets rarely correct their mistakes.
(%84) of the sample believe that the outlets are subject to pressure and surveillance.
(%67) of the sample found that these outlets tend to shape public opinion. (%23) link this tendency to the discussed topic.
(%78) of respondents found that these outlets are politicised and tilt towards one party or another (Possible answers: Obviously, Relatively, or Slightly)

Common trends between the three zones based on the assessment of performance, orientation and influence

To a certain extent, the audience found these outlets to be professional, despite inaccurate reporting and a tendency to ignore - rather than fix - mistakes.Most participants believe outlets are subject to surveillance and pressure by different parties. As a result, their impartiality and freedom are hindered.
Most participants agree that these outlets tend to influence public opinion.

Chapter 3: Peace journalism or War journalism?

Chapter 3 assesses the role of AMGs from two perspectives: peace journalism and war journalism. The assessment is based on research conducted by BADAEL and according to the criteria featured below. The data analysis of this research was completed by comparing FGD conclusions and the content analysis performed by the research team. The analysis referred to the results of the survey which the research team conducted in the early phases of its work.

Media is often seen as a participant in war rather than a witness. McGoldrick (20-19 :2000) described peace journalism as a "new form' of the media profession which looks "at how journalists could be part of the solution [for war and conflict] rather than being part of the problem." [20] Lynch (2002a: 22) argued that journalists are "participant-observers' because the people involved in stories adjust their behaviours according to their calculations of how the coverage will affect the course of events (Lynch 64 :1998). "News is the sum of all decisions made by editors, producers and reporters," which can impact the behaviour of all actors in a given conflict, particularly because for so long media has been utilized as an architect of public opinion [21] (Lynch 2003).

Peace Journalism is rapidly picking up momentum in the media landscape, particularly during times of crisis. It focuses on the choices which editors and reporters make to facilitate peace. This can be executed by choosing how to frame stories, the selection of language and the overall portrayals of all involved parties. Ideally, journalists and editors should constructively contribute to an open debate and an atmosphere that is receptive to peace-making initiatives.

This idea was initially developed by John Galtung in the seventies. Galtung proposed that peace journalism is "a normative mode of responsible and contentious media coverage of conflict that aims at contributing to peace making, peacekeeping, and at changing the attitudes of media owners, advertisers, professionals and audiences towards war and peace" [22] (Shinar, 2007, p. 2). Galtung distinguished between two notions of reporting conflict – "peace/conflict journalism" and "war/violence journalism." He believed that war journalism is both propaganda-oriented and elite-oriented, since it has one focus – victory. On the other hand, peace journalism entails finding a truthful and peaceful solution to a problem by creating opportunities for society. It seeks to bring justice to civilian casualities by telling their stories and voicing their concerns. Peace journalism uncovers the truth from all sides of the conflict without vilifying or praising any of the involved parties.

The pursuit of peace journalism can be achieved through six steps as conceptualized by Galtung. First, journalists should be keen to provide "background and context of conflict formation," presenting an impartial narrative of the respective causes and repercussions; second, they ought to provide an equal opportunity for all voices in the conflict; third; reveal all fabrications and unfounded claims by all parties; fourth, report "post-war' developments and peace events as frequently as they cover conflict; fifth, foster authentic and thoughtful perspectives to support the success of the peace process or initiatives, and shed enough light on possible resistance and potential dismissals; sixth, recommend innovative ideas for conflict resolution [23] (Shinar, 2007, p. 2).

Lynch (2007), McGoldrick (2006), Hackett (2006) and Kempf (2005) are academic researchers who have established four promises of peace journalism to report conflict in a fair and nonviolent way.

Professional   Importance   –   According   to

20 McGoldrick, A. (2000). 'Peace Journalism: An Introduction,' in Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Ed.). The Media in Conflicts - Accomplices or Mediators? Bonn: FES. Pp. -1924.

21 Lynch, J. (2003). 'Journalists Need to Think: A Reply to David Loyn'. Open Democracy. Accessed on December 2016 ,9. https://www.opendemocracy.net/media-journalismwar/article_1037.jsp

22 Shinar, D. (2007). Epilogue: Peace Journalism – The State of the Art. Conflict & Communication Online. Vol. 6, No. 1. Accessed on December 2016 ,13. http://www.cco.regeneronline.de/1_2007/pdf/shinar_2007.pdf

23 Shinar, D. (2007). Epilogue: Peace Journalism – The State of the Art. Conflict & Communication Online. Vol. 6, No. 1. Accessed on December 2016 ,13. http://www.cco.regeneronline.de/1_2007/pdf/shinar_2007.pdf

Wolfsfeld, the only reason why journalists and the media constantly cover war is because it attracts higher viewership. This type of coverage is "more compatible with media norms, discourse and economic structures," whilst discussions of peace often happen behind closed doors and are considered "time consuming," "dull" and "tedious." (2004) However, if media focuses on peace, the possibilities of creating a cultural shift towards accepting peace journalism will be viable. [24]

Strengthening Values - Human, moral and ethical values in the media are at the core of peace journalism. Journalists should strive to emphasize these values in their style of reporting, as this can aid in shifting attitudes of media owners, eliminate bias towards violence and focus on peacemaking throughout the media's coverage of conflicts.

Contribution to the Public Sphere – Improvement of the media landscape can be achieved through peace journalism as it highlights important social issues and most importantly, publishing news articles for the nation's overall good, as opposed to individual interests.

Broadening Horizons – Peace journalism has enabled academic and professional media centres to expand the scope of their research, and promote objectivity and conflict studies.

According to Luostarinen (283 :2002), it "is not even necessary to give such type of journalism a name, which is peace journalism." Many of the principles of peace journalism are the very essence of excellence in journalism and are deeply embedded in media work, such as: promoting transparency through the provision of background information, voicing the views of all rivals, exposing lies and cover-up attempts by culprits on all sides, and to report atrocities against, and the suffering of, all civilians. [25] It seems that peace journalism oftentimes contributes to the debate on quality of journalism which is embedded in media work and research [26] (Hanitzsch, 2007). Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that peace journalism and journalists are not the problem, but rather their acceptance by society and its respective culture is.

It is often noted that journalists are the 'offspring' of their societies and their cultures, so why should one expect journalists to be better humans than their readers, viewers and listeners?' [27] (Hanitzsch, 2004).

The idea of socially responsible peace journalism has, nevertheless, raised significant criticism in recent years. According to Grundmann (2000, p. 94), its normative proposals raise the misleading impression that the implementation of peace would primarily be the task of the media—and not the duty of policy making. Furthermore, Grundmann has well-founded doubts on the practicability of Galtung's idealized conception of making news for peace. [28] The concept of peace journalism is also discussed controversially among practitioners. The German WDR editor [29] Sonia Mikich (2000, p. 98) pointed out that war reporting basically follows the same (ethical) principles as journalism in general. Mikich does not believe that war reporting should be made a "special category." [30] (Hanitzsch, 2004, p.485) Some critics also identify peace journalism as a mechanism of activism that is not in line with other normative journalistic ideals, including factuality and impartiality.

Before delving into the analysis, it is essential to present a brief explanation of the research criteria in the following table. These criteria are used in this chapter in order to clarify the media's effect on conflicts, and its role in the Syrian context.

24 Wolfsfeld, G. (2004). Media and the Path to Peace. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

25 Kempf, W. & Luostarinen, H. (Eds.). (2002). Journalism and the New World Order: Studying War and the Media II. Accessed on December 2016 ,10. https://goo.gl/HFd3Qs

26 Hanitzsch, T. (2007). Situating Peace Journalism in Journalism Studies: A Critical Appraisal. Conflict & Communication Online. Vol. 6, No. 2. Accessed on December 2016 ,10. http://www.cco.regener-online.de/2_2007/pdf/hanitzsch.pd

27 Hanitzsch, T. (2004). The Peace Journalism Problem: Failure of News People – or Failure of Analysis. In T. Hanitzsch et al (eds.) Public Communication and conflict Resolution in Asian Settings. Jakarta: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

28 Grundmann, J. (2000). 'Friedensjournalismus und Kriegsjournalismus nach Johan Galtung'. In: ami, -89)30), pp. 94.

29 Mikich, S. (2000). 'Über die Diskussion post festum,' in Friedrich-Ebert- Stiftung (ed.) Medien im Konflikt -Mittäter oder Mediatoren? The Media in Conflicts - Accomplices or Mediators? Bonn: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. pp. 98.

30 Hanitzsch, T. (2004). The Peace Journalism Problem: Failure of News People – or Failure of Analysis. In T. Hanitzsch et al (eds.) Public Communication and conflict Resolution in Asian Settings. Jakarta: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. pp. 485.

- The first criterion: Proactive or response-oriented: Do media agencies wait for the fighting to begin to start their coverage? Or do they predict events and start their coverage with the outburst of disputes, with no exclusive focus on violence?

- The second criterion: The coverage tackles the visible or hidden effects: Does the coverage focus on material destruction, casualties and the news on advancement and setbacks in the battlefield? Or does it cover the long-term repercussions, such as social rifts, trauma, impediment of the quality of education, along with economic decline across various sectors such as industry, commerce, services, and the subsequent inflation?

- The third criterion: Tilts towards the public or is elite-oriented: Does the media focus on the repercussions that war has on the public? Such as displacement, casualties and scarcity of basic services? Or does it focus on leaders, decision makers and their news? Does media rely on officials as a source of news? Or does it rely on testimonies and stories from the public?

- The fourth criterion: Focuses on commonalities or schisms: Does the media focus on schisms between warring factions, or does it highlight similarities between rivals, and the common grounds which would pave the way for agreements and acceptable solutions?

- The fifth criterion: Discusses causes and consequences or focuses on instant reporting of events: Does the media coverage focus on instant reporting of events? Or does it rather explain the causes and historical background of the conflict and its repercussions? Is the coverage limited to the conflict's zone or does it investigate the broader context which surpasses the geographical borders of the conflict?

- The sixth criterion: The coverage revolves around the binary of good and evil or a more complicated set of dyads: Does the media portray one of the warring factions as always good whilst others are portrayed as evils? Or does it rather feature a more nuanced story which shows the wrongdoings committed by all involved parties?

- The seventh criterion: It covers the events by focusing on a two-sided polarisation or a many-sided one: Are there only two involved parties in the conflict? Or are there many groups with different goals and interests on both sides of the conflict?

- The eighth criterion: Biased or impartial in its coverage: Does the coverage praise one sole party, whilst it subjectively portrays others? Or does it rather covers all facts apart from its proximity from the involved parties, as it shows the wrongdoings and deeds of all groups?
The ninth criterion: Sees victory as the only solution or seeks diverse solutions to the conflict: Does it restrict the conflict's resolution to the victory of one of the parties? Or does it seek solutions which are the result of compromises made by all parties?

- The tenth criterion: The coverage either stops or extends after a peace agreement is reached: Does the agency end its coverage once the conflict is over? Or does it follow up on the repercussions and to which extent will the agreement achieve peace?

- Eleventh criterion: Treats one of the parties as a victim: Does it use terms such as innocents? Hostages? Disenfranchised? By portraying one of the parties as subordinate? Or does it use terms which would give the subjugated party an opportunity to become more active, or empowered.

- Twelfth criterion: Vilifies one of the parties: It portrays one of the parties as absolute evil or does it rather report their deeds?

The research had faced many challenges when the team tried to apply these criteria to the Syrian case which is much more complex in nature, and where the boundaries between the dyad benchmarks are blurred. In conventional wars, the journalist could distinguish the civic and military events in their coverage, which does often follow the policy and priorities set by the agency. Syria is different because there are no boundaries between military developments on one hand, and the provision of basic services on the other. That also applies to the distinction made between victims, be those military or civilians. The military operations and bombings often target civilians; as such it is almost impossible to distinguish in news reporting between military operations and the documentation of casualties. Even public services are being used as a weapon against urban areas, as their availability or scarcity is tied to military advancements and setbacks of all military factions. Armed forces often hire minors amongst their ranks, in violation of Syrian laws and international conventions. Those minors should be considered hostages rather than fighters.

As such, we excluded three criteria throughout the discussion in this chapter. These are:

The first criterion about proactive media and response-oriented media: This criterion could hardly be applied to the Syrian crisis, as most media outlets emerged in the aftermath of the uprising and the brutal response from the regime's side. The latter have banned media

outlets from documenting the ongoing events. Many reputable international organisations fell short from keeping up with the steadfast events and developments; they even fell short from effectively responding to the crisis, as the United Nations suspended their count of casualties since 2014.[31] Consequentially, this task had to be completed by local organisations with modest resources.

The seventh criterion about two-sided and many-sided polarisation of actors: The chaos and presence of multiple factions in Syria, both local or international players, along with the shifts in alienations and polarisations amongst the active factions from one area to another, makes any attempt to form a comprehensive understanding of the events a very complex task. The events could be interpreted by some observers as a two-sided polarisation between two camps; however, events on the ground may prove them wrong, as the degree of complexity gets more ambiguous when placing the daily events under scrutiny. For instance, military factions in one area could be enemies, and then become allies in a clash involving a third party. This complexity is also characteristic of the world order. Whilst the United States opposes the stay of Assad in power and support to the opposition-helds, it won't hesitate to take part in the international coalition which is tasked with attacking specific areas and strengthening the regime's strategic position on the ground.

The tenth criterion about the continuity of post-war coverage: This criterion could be hardly applied to the Syrian crisis, as the conflict did not end yet. It is obvious that the emerging local media outlets were first to provide comprehensive coverage of truces on a local level, and their repercussion and viability, as compared to national and regional agencies, which do not cover local truces and ceasefire agreements.

The fourth criterion: about the focus on schisms or commonalities along with the sixth on the binary of good and evil, and the twelfth criterion on vilifying the different factions, weren't all discussed at length, as they were incorporated in the discussion of other criteria. These criteria were dismissed to avoid overlapping, or because of the lack of data. The questions

in this sample focused on specific criterions. Some criteria were included in the written surveys; whilst others were discussed in FGDs, and the answers of all participants around the specified benchmarks were interconnected and interlinked.

The characteristics of the emerging local media and its stance from peace and war journalism

1 – Conflict-effects reporting

Peace journalism pays great attention to the type of news which will be featured throughout the agencies' news coverage. News has great influence on how spectators set their priorities. We live in an era where news is dense, and where the media plays a focal role in filtering the type of news it wishes to redirect to the general audience. In other words, media is the gatekeeper. Even if media agencies do not show an obvious inclination towards one specific genre of conflict solutions (military, political, victory, negotiation), their broadcast evolving around specific type of events, over a considerable period of time, would affect the audience's perceptions of the conflict, and hence, their respective expectations. What is striking in the Syrian case is that media workers in the emerging media local hubs tend to criticise the coverage of international media as it focused on military defectors whilst neglecting thousands of peaceful protestors. Nowadays, those local journalists themselves are focusing on the effects of the armed conflict whilst neglecting its repercussion and impact on civilians. This tendency could be tied to the militarisation of the conflict and the recurrence of the violations committed by the warring parties. The protracted conflict had a direct impact on the number of media outlets dedicated to civic work.

The statements issued considering the dialogue sessions which were held in the self-administered zone, show that the participants have indicated that the biases amongst activists have had a direct impact on the coverage provided by the different AMGs. That is the AMGs' coverage of the conflict, the involved parties, and the type of news which will be given the priority. AMGs do often tend to report the good deeds of the party which they favour, regardless of its type (military, political, or service-related), whilst they neglect their wrongdoings. The findings of this study have showed that the residents of this zone believe that the media outlets in this zone tend to focus more on the military developments and

31 https://goo.gl/T9AfWW

the news from the battlefield, whilst they partially neglect other aspects, such as relief operations, civic work and service provision. "The news agencies cover the event on the ground and prioritise the updates from the battlefield."

In the ISIS-held zone, the participants found that local media outlets tend to focus on news from the battlefield, such as casualties and military developments, as well as the violations committed on personnel and properties. The agencies in this zone focus on the violations committed by ISIS, followed by those committed by the Syrian regime. Moreover, the media reports on all updates related to the areal bombings by the regime, US-led collation and Russia. The local media in this zone reports on tribal affairs, as tribalism is an important aspect of life in this area, and could facilitate a well-informed understanding of the dynamics between the inhabitants themselves, and between the latter and the various warring factions. This aspect is often neglected by the conventional media agencies. "They focus on battlefield news and casualties... and victory, whilst they neglect the conferences and global agreements." ISIS's control over this area had led to a total media blackout with the continuous attacks on journalists and reporters, be it those who live in the area or outside. This has weakened media coverage in this zone, and deduced it into the use of few platforms such as "Al Nateq," "Ain Ala Al Madina," and "Free Deir El Zour station." However, residents in this area did not have access to these platforms due to technical constraints and surveillance. News coming out of this zone was not deemed credible for the lack of sources and new validation resources. The updates from this zone are often deemed inaccurate due to communication problems and the lack of reporters due to the risks they might be exposed to. Most of the agencies have shifted their focus into more general rather than specific news from other areas, hence, the impact of this shift was translated in the loss of the audience's trust in their area.

As in the opposition-helds-held zone, most of the audience sought that the AMGs tend to focus on the visible effects of conflict. 'Their coverage focuses on the battlefield, bombings and genocides. They do partially focus on political updates, political developments and newly formed alliances, whilst they rarely cover news related to services' provision, relief, humanitarian situation and political analyses. The coverage could differ from one platform to another, as most participants found that the local channels which focus on a specific geographical area, as is the case of "Aleppo Today," would tend to cover news and updates on the humanitarian situation

and services provision, whilst some of the local agencies would only report on political updates. The former type of news is also scarce on the level of nation-wide platforms, which focus more on the battlefield and the military affairs. "Aleppo today, as local channel, provides focuses on the citd aspects and their coverage extends to include updates on services such as electricity shortage, water, internet service, as well as they run polls on persistent disabilities."

Most of these local channels are very selective in their coverage. The participants found that most of these channels, which oppose the Syrian regime, would focus on the victories and troops advancement achieved by the opposition, whilst neglecting similar gains if achieved by the regime. Also, some participants found that the number of stories covered by these channels and which are not tied to the battlefield is relatively low. The AMGs in this sample do not allocate more than %20 of their news coverage to service provision in their respective areas. The participants have mentioned that civil and relief affairs are totally dismissed by the channels, as is the case in Idlib. "News outlets rarely cover CSOs events, and the public's access to the respective updates is often provided by the CSOs pages on social media."

In the meantime, the media outlets that were surveyed in the three areas of the research stated that they focus on humanitarian and civil affairs in their coverage more than they do focus on military and political events. The contrast between the answers provided by the audience and those provided by the media is tied to the blurred boundaries between military updates, be those advancements and setbacks, and the news about victims and damage. This blurry distinction could cause confusion between both parties, on how the corresponding news should be classified. Part of the audience considered that the coverage of humanitarian affairs would cover news about civil life, services provision and humanitarian relief, and that this is different from the news about victims and casualties. On the other hand, media workers classify the news about victims and damage as humanitarian affairs in the first place, that could not be separated from the coverage of military updates. It has been noted as well, that the coverage of humanitarian suffering and impediment of education would wan once the conflict escalate. The media would tackle humanitarian issues, by featuring reports about handicaps, impediment of education, child labour, scarcity of healthcare service and medicines; however, these topics are dismissed once the bombings and armed clashes resume.

The analysis of a sample of news headlines

collected from 16 media agencies, indicated the recurrence of specific administrative-related notions (decision, stance, statement, announcement, process, directorate, sit-in, protest) in the self-administered area. Whilst the following notions (victims, slaughtering, killing, smashing, ban, backwardness, terrorism, irrationality, raid, control), along with military and administrative news (laws and imposed sanctions on inhabitants) have overshadowed all other updates which were received from the ISIS-held zone. Nevertheless, in the opposition-held zone, the notions related to casualties and destruction, dominated the headlines (martyrdom, destruction, bloody, targeting, hospital, martyr, wounded, civilian, air strike, jet-fighters), in a direct indication of the brutality and bombings which this area have been subject to, in addition to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation which has drawn the efforts of local news production.

2- Audience-oriented journalism

Peace journalism is often seen as audience-oriented. The audience in this case is treated as the main source of news. This proximity to the audience reinforces diversity and allows a more comprehensive understanding of the ongoing events and the needs of those suffering from repercussions. Moreover, this type of journalism, as it encourages diversity, lessens the polarisation amongst the audience, and resets the media's priorities to serve the public instead of promoting political agendas. War journalism on the other hand, shifts its focus from the public and tilts it towards decisionmakers and officials as a principal source of news. This shift leverages the official discourse and pushes the audience to surrender to it and the priorities set by the major actors in the conflict. As such, the audience acknowledges ultimate victory as a viable solution, even to the most complex conflicts.

Participants from the self-administered zone have noticed that a significant number of media agencies adopt policies that favour officials and decisionmakers, and which restrain journalists from criticising their performance. However, few other outlets have the courage to voice their criticisms, although in a blurry manner by covering-up the officials' names and blaming the organisations which they belong to. It is safe to say that most outlets in this area voice the opinions of politicians who are considered "allies," hence, they promote a polarised approach that intensifies rifts and threatens the public order. "These media outlets are there to promote those officials and their work, instead of

critically assessing their performance."

Furthermore, the participants believe that the media is steering away from the public. They expressed their frustrations against the biased local media's continuous focus on political gains, as well as the elites' and leaders' opinions, by neglecting the citizens' suffering or limiting their coverage in this matter. "They focus on political and military gains, whilst the coverage dedicated to lessening the public's suffering from damages is limited." As for the politically independent outlets, they too refrain from criticising officials as they fear the consequences which critics could have on their work and the safety of its members. Accordingly, they tend to voice their opposition very briefly. It has been noted that few outlets out there do still focus on the public's concerns and prioritise the public's affairs in their respective reporting, as compared to their prevailing media discourse in the region.

In the ISIS-held zone, the participants were divided over the policies of the media agencies. Some believe that the media in this zone focuses on the public, whilst other think that it tends to focus more on officials. "At times, the local agencies focus on the daily life challenges and services' provision, and at other times they focus on leaders and decision makers. The weak reliance of media in this zone on officials is mainly influenced by the tight control of ISIS, and the official's refusal to communicate news to media outlets which are not owned by the latter."

Participants in the opposition-held zone largely agree that AMGs in this area are engaged with the community, and do report on important issues such as displacement, lack of services, and healthcare. Most local agencies focus on the citizens' sufferings, whilst other agencies would voice the leaders and officials' opinions through specific news programs. For instance, it has been mentioned that "Aleppo Today" has conducted interviews with military commanders about their plans, goals and political orientations, in addition to their stance about international conferences and the political developments across the world. The participants stated that these channels do not have the courage to criticize officials, and do not broadcast news which contrasts with their own interests. Critics could be harmful. "These channels do not dare to criticise officials and leaders."

By referring to the analysis of the news headlines in this sample, we notice that the names of actors responsible for specific events are often mentioned compared to the names of victims or those who bear the repercussions. Headlines in

the self-administered zone have mostly covered administrative decisions and new about the administrative councils without saying a word about the affected population. The "other" is often featured in the coverage of violent assaults on civilians, such as bombings, slaughtering and oppression in both ISIS-held and the opposition-held zones. As for the sources, the official sources came on top of the list in the self-administered zone, as the media has easy access to representatives of the administration and the respective committees. In the other two zones there has been a balance between official and popular sources. On the other hand, the media agencies have relied on statements and official communiqués, and to a lesser extent on both official and popular sources. However, the media has rarely relied on quotes provided by individuals who do not hold any official responsibility.

As for the types of the different sources, it was noted from the content analysis that the media outlets rely on officials as their principal source, followed by field reporters. For instance, these outlets rarely relied on the affected population. The steadfast developments, such as bombings, damage to infrastructure and fights over neighbourhoods, villages and cities make the outlets focus more on public rather than individual events and stories, as the repercussions of the former would affect a large proportion of the population. Individual stories are often brought up as guiding examples on specific public events. Moreover, the existence of ethical considerations amongst the audience and the media regarding the use of individual stories as case studies in a broader context should be acknowledged. This approach is often used to explain the repercussions that specific events could have on public lives, nevertheless, to bring sympathies to their cause. Wherever the news on destruction is apparent, many observers think that featuring individual stories could reinforce the victims' image. This controversy is less common in prints, as fake names of victims could be used with no photos which clearly identify the victim. However, long featured articles are not yet popular on the level of the emerging Syrian media in addition to the unfavourable views which the audience has towards this type of journalism. For this reason, prints are being relied on for news summaries, whilst audio-visual reports are the preferred tool for long-standing coverage.

The reliance of the emerging Syrian media on official news sources is often deemed necessary to assert the latter's credibility. The modest means of AMGs limit the news verification and validation capabilities. As such, the reliance of AMGs on individual witnesses at the early

stage of the revolution, to circumvent the regime's surveillance over news' sources, along with the need to ensure protection for whistle-blowers, have led to the violation of secrecy by many agencies to manipulate news stories and circulate rumours which serve their agendas. Consequentially, the public's trust in individual testimonies as a source of news started to wan, and paved the way for local news reporters to become the most credible source of news one year later.

3- Instant coverage of events: Comparison with the causes and consequences

Peace journalism considers the instant coverage of events as a trait of conventional war journalism. This type of journalism is in a constant race to instantly cover all updates. This points-based race is won by whoever ensures media scoops, regardless of the quality of coverage. The war journalism's leaning towards instant reporting of news does not allow a comprehensive coverage of events, nor does it allow a thorough investigation of the broader context within which the event took place. As such, this leaning towards instant reporting could have a direct impact on the quality of media coverage and could impede the audience's understanding of an event's dynamics, as well as its causes and repercussions. Such instant coverage in wartime could have dangerous repercussions as it would encourage ill-informed decisions.

This race would stir sensationalism and promote a consumerist perception of disasters, as the main role of the media coverage in this case is reduced to a propaganda tool, rather than providing a comprehensive analysis of the ongoing events. War journalism provokes emotions and does not reinforce rationality. Thus, it plays an essential role in intensifying the conflict instead of resolving it. Moreover, the persistent attempts of journalists to draw the audience's attention through "shocking news" would make the latter adapt to the coverage of disasters and casualties. This could be applied to the Syrian case, as the news about the regime's brutality and transgressions is no longer covered in international media, because it is deemed "old news." Although the seriousness of the media coverage is an important characteristic, war journalism prioritises propaganda instead of objectivity. The execution of one victim by ISIS would attract more coverage than the large-scale bombings and starvation imposed by the Syrian regime.

Most analysts tie this tendency to the media's

economic structure, which is designed to maximize profit. This tendency has a direct impact on the emerging media hubs, as local AMGs are largely non-profit organisations. For instance, the videos and archival material could be a potential asset which, if sold, could provide funds and income for journalists in these hubs, as they also work for additional shifts in commercial companies to sustain a living. Even donors, who provide technical and financial support to these AMGs, often base their decision to either fund AMGs or not, on profitability. Therefore, it is almost impossible for journalists to delink the coverage of local events from the agendas set by international agencies, as their media skills are still developing on both educational and training levels, since they are rarely offered opportunities to delve into media theories and media coverage of wars. Additionally, The vast number and magnitude of horrific events, such as daily bombardment across the country, makes it nearly impossible to research the causes and consequences of the conflict. Despite the modest means available to reporters in the research area, and their exposure to aerial bombing, detention and suppression, they commit to international ethical norms in their coverage. Most of the groups have offices outside Syria and could conduct more in-depth analysis of the causes and repercussions of the Syrian conflict.

The event's steadfastness does not completely rule out the publication of personal posts on social media by local journalists. Most posts show photographs with a corresponding caption. These could be photos of kids transforming cemeteries into playgrounds, or surgeries being performed on injured cats in local hospitals, or photos of price tags on essential commodities which have increased because of embargos, agriculture recession and currency inflation.

FGD participants in the self-administered area reported that AMGs often report on events without delving into their causes and potential repercussions. They also end their coverage of a specific event when a new one takes place. This is almost a recurring case in Syria. "These AMGs tend to briefly discuss updates, so they could cover all ongoing events." In other words, these outlets look for media scoops for a higher viewership by sharing news updates. The thorough discussion of a given update depends on its importance to the media outlet's agenda, and that of the alienated factions. If the news is deemed important, it would be published and discussed thoroughly. If the news was not of great importance or has a negative impact on the factions alienated with the AMG, it would be briefly featured, if published at all. "All AMGs

have pre-defined agendas for their media coverage depending on the importance of the news updates to the faction alienated with the given AMG." However, this does not imply a total absence of outlets which offer balanced coverage of events, and which investigate their causes and repercussions. Hence, these outlets are still few.

The same applies to the ISIS-held zone, as participants have found that the media outlets focus on instant updates and do not discuss the causes and repercussions of the respective events. The participants shed the light on how Al Jazeera was able to produce a report on the chemical attack on East Ghouta, whilst Deir El Zour Channel (Al Jisr nowadays) was not able to cover the event. "Al Jazeera's coverage of the chemical attack in Damascus was not only limited to instant coverage, as they sent a team to investigate the incident. On the other hand, the local channel Deir El Zour did not show interest in the event, as its coverage was restricted to local events within a defined geographical scope." The participants linked the lack of local media's detailed coverage of events to their limited resources, such as the lack of the professional staffs, expertise, and financial resources, as compared to regional and international news outlets. "They don't have the essential human resources to report on all events or to independently investigate them." On the other hand, many other participants have referred the lack of coverage to the lack of sources, often caused by the tight control of ISIS and the scarcity of essential services such as electricity and the internet, in addition to the surveillance imposed by ISIS on internet cafes and their constant inspection of portable devices. The aforementioned challenges impede the news gathering processes and cause delays in news coverage. News updates would take weeks to share. The local news agencies publish their reports based on the availability of the essential information from sources, if the latter were present. In rare cases, some agencies would investigate the news around a specific event; however, this is mostly tied to the importance of the news update, the availability of a credible source, and their respective consent to share and publish the info they provide. "The coverage of specific updates is often tied to the importance of the news update itself and the affiliated actors. However, this is a rare incidence." These challenges were brought about by ISIS' take-over, as news coverage prior to ISIS control was an easy task to achieve, was thoroughly updated, and the causes and repercussion of events were discussed at length with officials in the area to find suitable solutions.

In the opposition-held zone, the answers which

were provided by the participants were similar to those provided in the two other areas. The participants confirmed that the media agencies in this zone also publish updates instantly and do not follow up afterwards to investigate the cause and repercussions of the ongoing events. "The often provide an overview of the existing problem without discussing the consequences or the potential solutions." The participants have also indicated that the coverage provided by some of these agencies is biased as they selectively share the details with the audience. If the events were deemed positive by the factions which the agencies are alienate with, they tend to thoroughly discuss the respective details, causes and repercussions.

On the other hand, if the events were deemed negative, updates around it would be briefly featured or neglected. "They only share the news deemed positive by the opposition and the wrongdoings of the other factions. In other words, they only publish what the news that flows with their political orientation." Some of the participants found that this selectivity is related to the "juvenility" of these groups and the lack of expertise, as they tend to focus on the instant coverage of news and step over the importance of the thorough coverage and investigation of events. "The reason why they do not provide additional details about the news updates they cover is their lack of expertise and professionalism." The importance of the news updates or the affiliated actors plays an essential role which influences the extent of the in-depth coverage. For instance, the detention of civilians by any faction is not treated as a high priority by the media. In contrast, the detention of another well-known figure would be thoroughly covered and the media would publish relevant information on the detainee's life and history. It was striking that the participants from the opposition-held zone indicated that the media would deliberately cover-up the details, specifically all news related to the violation committed in this zone. The news coverage of the bombing of Al Quds hospital in Aleppo jumped over the fact that the hospital is surrounded by the opposition-helds' military bases. The incidence was not documented by the media, as the agencies focus on provoking the public's emotions. Despite the claims that "Aleppo Today" and "Fresh Radio" do usually investigate all events, many participants agreed that the media do not make enough effort to provide comprehensive media coverage.

The results of the content analysis have shown contradictory data, as it was obvious that the media have focused on the news, updates and the repercussions. The coverage has more often featured news updates as well as thorough review of the effects and repercussions of events. The news could be shared first as a post on social media and would be regularly updated to provide a significant amount of information. However, the inspection of the sample showed that the publication of detailed reports which feature a thorough description of the event's circumstance and context is a recurring fact. Nevertheless, the contradiction in this context could be attributed to the importance of the specific events in the content analysis' sample. Hence, the aforementioned supports the hypothesis that the importance of a given event would drag more detailed and full-fledged coverage. However, the dismissal of the conflict causes in the media coverage was striking. This could be attributed to the constant recurrence of the violations and transgression by the very same actors. Moreover, at times, and in specific cases, the causes were obvious, i.e. taking-over an airport, cancellation of exams.

On the other hand, an event such us the aerial bombing of a hospital would be extensively covered, but without any reference to the motivation of the air forces. Nevertheless, the dismissal of the causes of a specific eventIt could be that some AMGs lack the intricate knowledge of local dynamics needed to accurately analyze the causes of a specific event. As showed in the sample, the media had often focused on the consequences as compared to the causes. However, cases where the media focused on instant coverage were equal in numbers to the cases where media offered a thorough overview of the causes and repercussions.

As for the context and justifications, the tendency to explain the motivations and justifications of actions committed by specific actors was equal to the tendency to refrain from doing so. This could also be attributed to the recurrence of violations over a long period of time. The clarity of the picture does not invite any additional elaborations. However, impartiality had only been featured once in this sample, and to this we turn now.

4 - Impartiality

Most of the media outlets studied in this research emerged as a response to the regime's repression and the constraints on the freedom of expression, as well as the media coverage of events in Syria. That is why they find it all right for them to clearly express their opposition to the regime, be it for political, humane, or professional reasons. Not all of them are necessarily classified pro-opposition media platforms. Many of the employees respect

their journalistic work and see it as a response to the regime's oppression. On the other hand, their humanitarian convictions are above the political beliefs, which drives them to being biased against the major cause of the destruction and killings in Syria in terms of the scale of damage and the number of victims. Regardless of the reason, the opinion and direction of the platform is clear most of the times. This does not interfere technically with the principle of impartiality and objectivity, but it does when it influences the content of the coverage.

In this research, we have adapted the impartiality standards of the peace journalism theory. These standards exceed the agency's declaration of its opposition to this or that party or the agency's silence. These standards overlap to a great extent. We have already covered some of these standards in the preceding paragraphs, however, we will try to summarize them hereunder. The bias of war journalism is reporting only one party's activities -- unconditionally justifying one side while demonizing the other. Positive bias does not play a role in conflict resolution. Having the media aligned with one of the parties increases the polarisation of the public and increases the rifts between them. While it may be thought that the peace journalism theory is being exploited by some media organizations which work to create an inexistent balance in its coverage, under the umbrella of balancing the activities of all parties. impartiality in covering the news does not necessarily mean creating two balanced sides out of the blue, but showing the power relations without neglecting or exaggerating news.

Participants in the self-administered zone pointed out the impact of bias and lack of impartiality in the agencies' coverage of the conflict, and its effect on how in-depth they investigate the events and their cause and consequences amongst other details. The media outlets in these areas are elite-oriented, as they rely on them as a source of information. They constantly talk about the latter achievements and statements, and avoid voicing critics to those officials. This bias has caused a variation in the public's confidence, where some felt that being biased is a negative role that complicates the existing problems, while many have expressed that they got accustomed to everyone's biased directions, and that's how they are now using each one of them. In other words, they may choose to follow or not follow the platform depending on how much it goes with their opinion; or they choose to watch it, and since it is biased, they do not believe it's news as it is but they take only fragments of information. "The media is neither professional nor neutral and does not have a positive impact,

only a negative one." On the other hand, some participants attributed the lack of diversity in opinions to the difficulty of covering them all due to their limited financial resources. The technical and financial shortage may force them only to focus on a story from one point-of-view, which matches the opinion the target audience. The high security risks in some areas (danger of arrest, kidnapping, assassination, bombing, etc.) do not allow reporters to work freely in other areas.

The participants also said that the local media operating in this region targets specific segments of people within the geographic areas covered. Most classifications were based on ethnicity. This is due to the great ethnic diversity in this region, unlike the rest of the areas studied. As for the language used in the media, the participants felt that all agencies use the language of their target audience, and the material submitted in other languages is for those who agree with the agency's orientations from amongst the public in different areas. "Kurdish media is addressing the Kurdish audience… Even if they address the Syriac and Arab audience, they address the sympathizers from other nationalities."

Participants have given Ronahy TV as an example, which is directed to supporters of the Syriac Union, while Yeketi Media is directed to the audience of the Assyrian Democratic Organization. Most participants said that all agencies are politicized and are subject to either one of the conflict's parties. They work on promoting these parties and their policies to show the negative aspects of the other parties. For example, they said that Rodawa channel are against PYD, while the Ronahy Channel is against the Kurdish National Council, and so on.[31] "The media in the whole region is politicized and is neither independent nor transparent." But this does not deny the presence of media organizations that try to be balanced as per some participants. Radio Arta has been mentioned several times in the discussions as an example of the media outlet that covers the news fairly.

Most participants think that the media platforms in the ISIS-held areas do not address a specific category of people, and do not distinguish on an ethnic or sectarian basis, but the revolutionary nature of these agencies drive their coverage targeting opponents of both the regime and ISIS. Otherwise, these agencies cover the events with equanimity, although this coverage is limited in

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31 The rooted dispute between the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the National Kurdish Council has led to a notable division among Kurds between those who support the former, or the latter.

most cases to local events in this region. "These local news media platforms are directed to the audience supporting the Syrian revolution, that's why they assume that their audience and followers are the opponents of ISIS and Assad. No gender nor ethnic nor sectarian bias." They mentioned the Bridge Channel's position (Deir al-Zour previously), which always supports the armed opposition in the province, and works to show the disadvantages of the regime. In addition to the group "Al Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently" is always against ISIS. These channels avoid publishing any positive news about the opposing parties, which it considers hostile to the orientation of their audience. They publish only negative news about them while they praise the parties that they favour. The participants were able to see the difference between the conventional media coverage and the coverage of the independent media activists, whose news about the various parties is deemed positive.

For instance, some activists reported that ISIS had asphalted the roads in the city of Deir Al Zour, which is one of the services that were not available since the regime withdrew in 2012. This news was covered by most of the activists, while being ignored by most of the media outlets. Participant opinions did not differ than those in the previous two regions regarding the impartiality of the media agencies operating form the opposition-held zone. Participants find that all the means are politicized and cover the news according to what serves the interests of their entities. Most of these means tend to support the opposition, and are working to spread only their point-of-view as a way to show that the opposition is always right while the rest of the parties are wrong. They usually ignore the violations of the opposition; on the contrary, they focus only on the exploitations of the other parties. "The media is not directed to convey the truth; it is against the other party no matter what." For example, they are always attacking the Kurdish forces, and focus only on the negatives about them. This applies to all other parties of the conflict like the regime and ISIS. "The news of banditry by Kurdish forces always tops the headlines to show that they are causing troubles, while there they do not mention the good deeds when they open the roads." Some people mentioned that several media platforms manipulate the news and use false or misleading information to guide the audience in a particular direction.

However, a portion of the audience was considerate because they believe that bias may not be optional, taking into consideration the conditions and the risks and pressure surrounding those who work in the media. This means that sometimes they have to avoid certain news due

to threats they might encounter. "Some platforms display the news cautiously, without specifying or criticising directly of one of the parties in order to avoid negative repercussions on the media station or the crew." This was confirmed by the analysis of the content. For example, in the opposition-controlled areas, there were protests and demonstrations in a few towns in Idlib against the presence Al Nusra forces, their military and administrative practices, and the imposition new systems on the people. Of the four] platforms working in the area where the demonstrations took place, only one of the platforms stated that the demonstrators waved banners against Al Nusra during the demonstrations, while the other three chose to cover them as regular anti-regime protests without mentioning the slogans. It is worth mentioning here, that Radio Fresh for example, which was previously attacked and closed by Al Nusra, developed a more cautious policy in its coverage of news related to Al Nusra, because they constantly harassed them afterwards.

Content analysis in the various regions also showed that media did not provide in its coverage even justifications and reasons for the conflicting parties, except in one case of the sample analysis. While the rest of the sample was equally divided between the direct bias in giving justifications and reasons for a certain party, or failing to provide justifications for any party. It was obvious that the whole responsibility was usually on one party in each region depending on the main players. The platforms opposing PYD in the self-administered areas often blame the party and self-administration for the violations which often occur. This also applies to Al Raqqa media personas, who blame ISIS for dominating earth, and the regime for controlling the skies. Numerically, the regime is said to be primarily responsible for various events, followed by ISIS for a one-third portion, and then equally Al Nusra forces and the Democratic Union party (numerical proportions were affected by the selection of the sample events).

Concerning the terminologies used by the media to describe the events, it was clear from the research sample that the media used in its coverage a language closer to objectivity, and focuses on the actions and names (even if not their official names), by two-thirds. In the remaining one-third, they used more emotional language and ideological coverage. It is worth mentioning here that, naming a certain party in Syria today is subjected to some bias or judgment by the media. Knowing that the official name of "ISIS" is "the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria," they refer to them using ISIS. Some media

organizations prefer calling it "ISIS" instead of the mentioning the whole name, arguing it validates their propaganda. However, others see that their professional duties require the use of the official name announced by this party. This also applies to the Syrian regime forces. Some platforms use the official name, "Syrian Arab Army" and others call it the following: the regime's army, security forces, al-Assad Army, (shabiha), etc.

5- The inevitability of conflicts and integrative solutions

Peace journalism often criticizes the tendency of conventional media to promote a sole solution to conflicts, that is, the absolute victory of one party over other contenders. Despite the truces and cease-fire agreements, the conflict is never perceived as solved until one warring party delivers a decisive defeat to its opponents. Moreover, war journalism does not encourage compromises, as agreements lessen the brutality of the conflict. However, peace journalism considers that the delivery of a lasting defeat could reinforce the existing rifts and does not solve the conflict. In addition to the existing challenges, this approach could reinforce a sentiment of oppression which could stimulate future conflicts. For instance, peace journalism believes that the media should promote integration as a viable solution and not the inevitability of conflicts, which could be embedded in the agendas of the totalitarian warring factions.

The audience in the self-administered zone have found that the media's coverage of events is superficial, as they step-over the discussion of potential solutions and the different opinions on how to deal with the ongoing events. They also found that even when promoting solutions, they focus on those which show the factions they favour as vanquisher, whilst others have only one option left, to surrender. There is no place for such integrative approaches, like "it's either black or white." This tendency, as per the participants, would only stimulate further conflicts in the region. This is the outcome of the media's tilt towards absolute victories as acceptable solutions to conflicts – the defeat of their opponents.

The same applies to the ISIS-held zone, as the participants found that that the media channels are focusing on defeating their opponents as a solution to conflict. Otherwise the problems would persist as long as ISIS and the regime are not completely defeated. The audience in this zone found that the media is not promoting solutions. It only provides media coverage of all military developments without delving into the

essential details. "They don't seek the alleviation of the public's suffering; they only focus on sharing the news updates." The participants believe that the media outlets are catalysing conflicts, as the AMGs in this area perceive ISIS and the regime as two sides of the same coin and should not be integral parts in a future solution. "These groups had never aimed at uncovering the common grounds and promoting integrative approaches to the resolution of the ongoing conflict." The participants attributed the poor performance to the lack of expertise, as these AMGs "do not make efforts to seek acceptable solutions,' they only aim to increasing their viewership. On the other hand, numerous are the challenges which might affect the media's performance. For instance, the media's access to the audience and decision makers in the ISIS-held zone is a risky mission which could affect the media's impartiality. Both ISIS and the regime aim to annihilate their opponents, thus, the impartiality of media coverage is perceived as trivial by AMGs.

The situation is not different in the opposition-held zone, as the audience believes that the media agencies aim to influence the public's perceptions, i.e. they are becoming propaganda tools, rather than responsibly discussing the potential solutions and the different points-of-view. "All media agencies focus on convincing the audience with the stories presented by the factions they favour, and tend to bring up supporting evidences." Most participants found that the media is biased for the very fact that they don't feature the different point-of-view in their coverage and do not thoroughly discuss potential solutions to the conflict, or the problems which the communities face as a consequence of the ongoing conflict. This performance was attributed to the inexperience of AMGs and the lack of expertise. They are deemed to play a negative role in the conflict, as they don't aim to mitigate it, but catalysing further the existing schisms. The participants mentioned the efforts made to impede truce agreements by framing truce as a "betrayal of the country, revolution, the cause and dream, Allah and the prophet." However, the role of AMGs were deemed as positive on a local level as they aim to find common grounds between the various opposition's factions and at promoting integrative approaches to resolve the emerging conflicts. "In the case of fighting, the AMGs aim to calm the public and at finding solutions to schisms, as was the case between Ahrar Al Sham and Noureddine Al Zanki brigades (both factions are amongst opposition ranks)."

Based on the content analysis, we found that the sample featured a triumvirate i.e. suggesting

solutions, hesitancy in suggesting solutions, or not suggesting any solution. Moreover, the scrutinised material showed that AMGs would either predict future development (%50), or have been unable to make any prediction (%50). This could be related to the steadfastness of events on the ground and the consequent need for instant coverage (response-based approach) instead of looking ahead to the future. Also, the average young ages of journalists in these AMGs and the lack of expertise and experience would impede all attempts to provide a comprehensive analysis of the situation and the prospects. The content shared throughout AMGs platforms is foremost the work of more experienced journalists. Almost (%50) of the conflict resolution proposals featured on these platforms are addressed to the international community, such as pushing for the implementation of a no-fly zone, or ending the continuous aerial bombing of hospitals and the creation of safe corridors for humanitarian aid, amongst other solutions which could not be sorted out and implemented by the local actors. Moreover, the media coverage of protests in support of the devastated communities does not highlight the importance of such events, although they would indirectly show their tilt in favour of such events. This could be attributed to the journalist' belief that the public no longer has the strength to be actively engaged in finding solutions to the problems they face and the ongoing conflict. The AMGs coverage is mostly redirected to local factions and other stakeholders such as humanitarian organisations which no longer have influence on the nationwide political process. As such, the indirect promotion of media campaigns is attributed to the AMG belief that the latter is not part of the appropriate solution, but a tool to influence decisionmakers who in turn have the power to suggest solutions.

6- The victim and executioner

Conventional media coverage often oversimplifies the conflict in attempts to educate the audience about the events throughout the news bulletin. These agencies attribute the simplification of events to the audience's lack of desire for details, as discussing the updates at length would confuse the public and make them skip this type of reporting. However, this oversimplification of the conflict and the respective portrayal of the conflict as a contention between black and white, promotes a superficial understanding of the facts and increases confusion. In wars, as in the case of life, it is rare to find a party that is innocent of wrongdoing, whilst all wrongdoings are attributed to its contenders and opponents. The intertwined and interlinked disputes

amongst the numerous parties in a specific conflict could not be analysed through a "black or white" lens. This oversimplification reinforces the vilification or praising of parties, as if one party is absolutely innocent, whilst its contender is evil. Thus, oversimplification intensifies the rifts and the polarisation of actors, which hinders the emergence of an integrative approach to conflict resolution. The polarisation of the involved actors is unrealistic. This binary oversimplifies the differences or commonalities between the different factions and sheds light on specific disputes between specific parties, whilst other disputes are neglected. The deduction of the conflict in Syria and its subsequent portrayal as a contention between opposition and regime risks the misleading classification of all opposition factions as having a common view of the conflict, and neglects the disputes between some of the factions and the radical movements such as the opposition and Al Nusra. The conflict is often reduced to be a conflict between ISIS and the regime, ruling out the opposition that is fighting both parties.

This stereotype causes media agencies into committing flagrant mistakes, such as the constant use and employment of the good and evil binary to serve their respective agenda. The reports usually neglect the violations committed by parties which the agencies support, or if highlighted, the responsibility white-washed. This could be applied to international outlets as well, as they tend to anonymise those responsible and victimise their opponents. For instance, the news of aerial bombings on hospitals could be highlighted with no mere indication of the identity of the air forces, or else the identification of the party would be questioned despite the availability of information on all air forces in Syrian, and the fact that the media agencies have the resources to validate the information

As for the attitudes of the local media, the participants from the self-administered zone have found that local media agencies are biased and tilt in favour of a specific party that is always pictured as righteous whilst other are blamed for all wrongdoings. There are always two parties: the oppressed and the oppressor. The participants indicated that this distinction exists between agencies affiliated with PYD and those affiliated with the Kurdish National Council. Following their affiliations, the agencies would cover-up all the good deeds of a specific party, and even manipulate the facts to serve their portrayal of the other. One could predict the coverage of these agencies around specific events based on previous coverage. The news is often analysed based on binaries, such as

good and evil. This tendency is attributed to the politicisation of these outlets in favour of specific political or military outlets. Fear could also be an impediment to transparency and integrity.

Despite the impartiality of the media agencies in this area, there are few others which are deemed objective. Most participants found that the radio station ARTA FM is the most transparent and professional. They cover the news about all events except for organising parties. They also avoid the binary of "executioner and victim" in their coverage. This has been interpreted as the tendency to remain distant to all parties by highlighting all wrongdoings, with no cover-up or without vilifying the warring parties.

On the other hand in the ISIS-held zone, the audience's feedback has varied in its assessment of transparency, and media's ability to report all updates without vilifying a specific party as the absolute evil. Some participants have found that the agencies in this area support a specific party and would defend its stances and promote a bright image. What is different in this area, though, is that the participants believe civilians are a principal actor in the conflict. As such they are often portrayed as victims of ISIS in the media. Other participants have found that media agencies are not opposing any given party, and that their job is to report on news objectively by highlighting the suffering of the respective communities. The employment of the good and evil binary is different in this area, as ISIS control over is not under threat.

The audience in the opposition-held zone agreed that the local news agencies are totally biased and favour the opposition. They cannot be impartial, transparent or credible. It often portrays one specific party as evil, and would deny or neglect all events which might highlight a positive aspect. "The opposition's brigades are often the victim, and only the violations committed by the other factions are reported, such as the wrongdoings of the regime, the Kurdish factions, and ISIS." The participants also agreed that the media agencies do not convey the facts, but would blame one specific party for the conflict and portray the opposition as the 'good' and 'innocent'. The participants attributed this attitude to the affiliation and alienation of most agencies with specific factions, and the promotion of these factions' deeds whilst blaming others.

The warring factions in this zone had relative influence on media content and its production. Moreover, the work in an intense environment would pave the way for self-censorship. Other participants linked this attitude to the financial support which AMGs receive, as they become tied to the donor's agenda and interests. "They are not even allowed to report on the good deeds or aspects of an opponent's activities. On the other hand, a few participants linked this attitude to the general tendency amongst residents to reject any piece of news which carries a positive tone about their "enemies," and the daring agency in this case would be accused of betrayal and categorised as a "traitor."

The analysis of the media content showed that two-thirds of the sample tend to focus on schisms instead of commonalities, as is the case of the remaining one-third. It should be noted that the content did not even feature any comparison between uneven sides of the conflict, such as civilians and air forces. In contrast the dispute between different factions would feature some comparison between actors.

The media coverage in this zone also oversimplified the conflict by using the two-sided approach, without totally neglecting the presence of other actors. In the case of fighting between factions, news around the strongest contenders would be featured in the coverage. Two-thirds of the sample deduced the conflict to the binary of good and evil, whereas one-third highlighted the deeds and wrongdoings of the opponent.

Conclusion

This study has presented an explanatory survey of the local media groups working in northern Syria, outside the Syrian regime's control. The study indicates that the small staff forming these groups are mostly youth and mature people, with a high percentage of males. Even though the percentage of educated people in these groups is high, there aren't many media specialists, due to its recent emergence and reliance on citizen journalists. These groups face lots of challenges, such as the absence of financial support and increasing security threats – which vary from a place to another depending on the parties in control.

According to the study, the self-administered areas are the safest, followed by opposition-held areas, and lastly ISIS-held ones. Moreover, these groups are subject to censorship and pressure from different parties. These restrictions guarantee that some news will not be covered. Yet, many of these groups are politicized and obviously biased to a certain party or movement. The results also showed that the audience believes these groups only focus on military news and ignore non-military. Still they prefer short and concise news channeled through smart phone application such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram newsrooms, all of which make the audience feel closer to the story.

After comparing these groups' performance to the "peace or war press standards," which were adopted in the research, the study revealed that their coverage focuses on the direct effects of the conflict like victims, destruction and military progress or retreat – mostly in the areas under ISIS or opposition control. The audience's opinion on how close these groups were to them varied in the three areas accordingly. The ones operating in the self-administered areas were more distant from the audience than those operating in the ISIS-held zone, whereas they were the closest in opposition areas. Over those three areas, the media groups tend to rely first and foremost on official sources more than individual stories. However, they cover the news in a trivial way without showing enough details and all the different points-of-view. These groups usually promote inevitable victory or defeat, and the importance of defeating the other party. They also focus on differences and ignore the points in common, building up the conflict.

Media plays an important role in every conflict. Media can fuel the conflict, or ease it; it can be benevolent or destructive. The results of this study revealed that although all of the media outlets have engaged in war journalism, technical and financial support - as well as a free and safe environment - can help media shift towards peace journalism. At some point, it is not possible by any means to attain sustainable peace in Syria, in both the short and long terms, if the media has not taken an active role in this. This is possible by spreading the values of tolerance and co-existence. In such a devastating time, sharing the stories of local and national initiatives could strengthen social cohesion. And finally, accurately covering the cease-fire and all of its violations, no matter who is responsbile.

Recommendations

Recommendations to civil socie and international organizations

Provide financial and technical support for the emerging media groups

The results showed that financial constraints are the single biggest challenge AMGs face, where the struggle in finding a financial resource increases their challenges, taking into consideration the tough conditions they function under. This will make them unable to develop their abilities and commit to the professional standards of peace journalism, which, alternatively, increases their negative effect on the conflict. That's why international organizations should pay more attention to these groups, and provide greater technical and financial support. These are easy fixes which will put AMGs in a better position to improve their capacity, and thus contribute to the peace process.

Support the local media groups with the needed expertise and build the capacities of their staff

The lack of the media experience and the shortage of qualified staff in Syria is a major factor that limits their capacity, in addition to the high security risks that cause them to emigrate. That is why more staff must continuously be ready, undergoing enough training to refine their skills and abilities so that they become able to provide better and more objective content. There should also be specialized capacity building programs targeting each group on its own according to its abilities, needs, and the areas they operate in. There shall be coordination with the neighbouring countries that have completely closed the borders with Syria, in order to allow those working in the media field to travel outside Syria to receive training (since the trainers won't be able to enter Syria).

Training the staff on peace journalism

The results have shown a lack in the knowledge and experience of the media groups within the field of peace building, making it crucial for them to receive training and become qualified in the field of peace journalism. This will certainly increase their awareness on the importance of showing all points-of-views, and reducing the conflict rather than enhancing it. It will provide them with the proper skills to do so.

Increasing the number of women working in the emerging media groups

The local media sector suffers from a lack of women working in this field, which is why international organization must encourage women's presence in the field. This could be done by providing dedicated support to motivate and train these institutions to increase the number of working women, in addition to supporting Syrian activists who wish to engage in this type of work. It is indispensable to support these Syrian women for the distinct roles they play in challenging violence and instead engaging in peace building activities and initiatives.

Protecting the independent media organizations and upsurge the biased organizations

One of the negative roles fuelling the Syrian conflict is the bias of many of the media groups and organizations towards a certain party, making them less objective. That is why the local channels must be supported and stimulated to work without bias. This would contribute to the convergence of views and promote solutions to alleviate the conflict, and raise public awareness on the importance and ability to ease the conflict.

Reducing the security risks that face people in media

Arresting, kidnapping and assassinating a lot of those who worked in media indicates an urgent need for improving the security conditions media personnel live in. Being harassed and persecuted by the dominant armed groups makes it difficult for them to work objectively and provide a full picture of what is actually happening. Therefore, imposing more pressure on the parties to reduce the targeting of media groups could increase the chance of bringing views together and alleviating the conflict.

Recommendations for the emerging local media groups

Developing the infrastructure and building the capacities

Most of the emerging media groups need to improve their organizational structures and strategic plans, along with a clear division of the roles that would increase their effectiveness and

abilities to cover all aspects of the conflict and contribute to finding a solution.

Increasing women's participation within the local media groups

Research has shown male dominance and female absence for a clear majority of the surveyed groups. Thus, the media groups should work to increase women's participation in journalisim. It is important to achieve a gender balance in the structures of these groups, which can contribute to a better representation of the different points-of-view, and thus mitigate the provocative role these groups play.

Approaching the audience

The local groups should work on an in-depth study of audience preferences to the media and use the data to boost their performance and increase their rates, such as using new communication platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram chat rooms, and Facebook groups. In addition to focusing on covering the humanitarian side and the different points-of-view by telling personal stories and experiences instead of just referring to official sources and focusing on covering military news.

Increasing the objectivity and proficiency and reducing the bias of the local groups

Increasing the objectivity and proficiency, and reducing the bias as well as showing different points-of-views, would raise the audience's confidence and make them follow these groups. This includes staying away from the binaries of winning and losing, good and evil, the victim and the executioner, and working on balancing the appearances of the different sides and mentioning the negatives and positives of each of them. Emphasizing the differences between each side intensifies the conflict; if the goal is conflict resolution, AMGs would do better to emphasize the similarities. The media groups shall also provide complementary solutions and promote them, and portraying the military defeat of opponents as the only solution.

Working on covering the early indicators of the conflicts

The emerging media groups should increase their coverage to the early indicators of the conflict using clear standards, such as the increase in hate speech, increasing the frequency of the personal clashes, incitement to violence, and other standards that allow early forecast of the local conflicts before they happen. For example, there is an obvious increased tension and stress between the Arabs and Kurds in Syria, which indicates the possibility of an armed ethnic conflict in the near future, where it is clear that the local groups have no intention to mitigate the conflict before it turns into a violent one. [32]

Working on covering the direct and indirect effects of the conflict

Most of the emerging media groups work on covering the direct effects of violence, such as the number of killed and injured and military news, while neglecting the reasons of the problem and its direct effects which may last for a long time, such as the social fracture in the local communities and a drop in the educational level, as well as other economic damages. This might make the audience focus only on the current events, thereby ignoring longstanding context, as well as shared experiences between the people. Syria is experiencing an economic catastrophe, and has given birth to an entire generation of kids who only know war and have missed out on school. Peace journalism could help the people find solutions to these challenges, which will last long after the war is over.

Surpassing the dualism of good and evil while covering the conflict

The media groups must act professionally and mention the positive and negative sides of all the parties as a way of presenting a realistic picture highlighting the infringements to avoid them and hold the responsible accountable. In addition to taking the lessons learned of the positive cases and urging them to repeat or stimulate it. This shall definitely increase the credibility of the media groups and boosts its ability to effectively limit the violations and subsequently reduce the conflict.

Avoid simplifying the conflict or the parties involved

The media groups must show enough details about the conflict as a way to present a real picture of its complexity and difficulty to reach a final critical solution to one of its parties. The regime's military victories in Aleppo and other cities allowed expectations for near military takeover in the favour of the regime to spread. The fact that the regime controls less than one-third of the country, and is fighting against a hundred-thousand- opposition, makes this theory impossible on the medium-term.[33] Nevertheless, such a false and simplistic narrative demonstrates the complexity of the conflict, and demonstrates why a single solution is unrealistic.That's why

32 Haid, Haid. The emerging conflict between Arabs and Kurds in Syria. Now Media. December 2015 ,8. Accessed on December 2016 ,13.
https://goo.gl/q7C4Zo

thoroughly capturing all of the information might help people realize that there is no military solution to the conflict.

Full coverage of the cease-fire news and peace discussions

The media groups should shed the light on the discussions of peace and the details of applying the local cease-fires, in addition to showing its positive and negative aspects. This shall display a full picture of the peace obstacles and the parties hindering it. Going forward, it is these good practices that let mistakes of the past become lessons for the future.

33 Haid, Haid. Aleppo's fall won't end the Syrian conflict
– it will signal a more terrifying stage. The Guardian.
December 2016 ,8. Accessed on December 2016 ,13.
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/
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Index no. 1

Brief about the media organizations included in the search

Due to the short age and localized manner of many of these organizations, it is difficult for any observer of the emerged Syrian media today be aware and knows enough about all these agencies. That is why we decided to attach some basic information about the institutions, which their names were significantly received in the lists of preferences of the public in the three areas of the research.

TV Stations:

Aljazeera: Qatari satellite news channel, covering regional Arab countries news. It was founded in 1994 and is of the most popular news channels in the Arab world. It has taken an opposition stance to the Syrian regime since the beginning of the revolution in 2001.

Al Arabiya: Saudi satellite news channel, it consists a part of the Saudi media network. It began broadcasting on March 2003, and it is concerned with political, economic and sports news. It covers the Arab world news in the first place, and adopts the Saudi political point of view. Regarding the Syrian issue, Al Arabiya has taken a stand against the ruling regime.

Al Hadath \ Al Arabiyah EJ: a Saudi satellite channel branched from the Arabiya channel. It began broadcasting in 2012. The channel offers the widest coverage on the situation in the Arab countries, which witnessed the Arab Spring. It has political dialogues, documentaries and live broadcasting.

Now TV: It is a satellite television channel broadcasted to the Arab world, based in Dubai. It was established in 2006 and broadcasts a variety of news and entertainment. The channel is said to be directed towards the empowering women, where most of the staff working in are women.

BBC Arabic: News TV channel broadcast to the Middle East by the British Broadcasting Corporation "BBC". It was launched in 2008. It is officially based in the UK, and has offices around the world, the largest one in Egypt.

Orient \ Orient News: Syrian satellite channel owned and headed by the Syrian businessman Ghassan Abboud. It was launched in 2009 and then it closed its offices in Damascus as a result of merchant disagreements between the owner and men of the Syrian regime, and it continued broadcasting from the United Arab Emirates. After the start of the revolution in 2011, the channel has adopted a stand against the regime. It offers a variety of news programs and entertainment.

Aleppo today: satellite Syrian channel opposing the Syrian regime. It undergoes a protective religious nature. Founded in 2012, it follows the Syrian affairs and its variables, and is mostly concerned with the news of Aleppo and northern Syria. It has a number of correspondents on the ground.

Free Syrian: Local opposition television channel. It was founded after the start of the Syrian revolution; it is characterized by intensive follow-up of military news.

Al Jisr TV: satellite Syrian channel that opposes the Syrian regime. It was established after the start of the Syrian revolution. The channel's icon and name are taken from Deir El Zour suspended bridge. A new look of the channel is being prepared after it was shut down in 2014 after the Isis control of the province.

Ronahi: satellite television channel belongs to the Kurdish Democratic Union Party PYD. It broadcasts news segments in addition to a variety of entertainment programs.

Rudaw: Kurdish satellite television channel broadcasted from Iraqi Kurdistan, based in Irbil. It covers mainly the Kurdistan news in the Middle East and some events in the Middle East and worldwide. It was founded in 2008.

Kurdistan 24: Kurdish satellite television channel broadcasted from Iraqi Kurdistan with Erbil at its centre. Founded in 2015 in Kurdistan, it covers the Kurdish and regional news.

Soriuru TV: is a Chaldean Syriac Assyrian satellite channel that broadcasts programs from Sweden. The Surroio broadcast news bulletins is in Aramaic, Syriac and Arabic.

Radios:

Arta FM: Syrian independent radio station. It broadcasts its news bulletins in Kurdish and Arabic, Syriac and Armenian. It covers up to five cities in the Syrian island, and have a platform on the Internet can listen to it through. It was established after the start of the Syrian revolution.

Oorkic: a new Syria Kurdish radio channel, it

was established in 2014 in Amoda. It broadcasts to all areas in the countryside of Amoda, and broadcasts a variety of programs and news.

Welat FM: socio-cultural independent radio station broadcasting in the city of Qamishli, it have a platform on the internet to listen to it through.

Alwan radio: a Syrian community radio, launched in April 2013. It broadcasts from the city of Saraqeb, covering the countryside of Idlib region. It provides political and technical, cultural and sports programs, and it has a platform to broadcast over the Internet.

Radio Fresh: a Syrian radio station broadcast news and various material. It was established after the start of the Syrian revolution. It broadcasts from the city of Kafr Nabl. Its coverage reaches the northern countryside of Hama and the southern countryside of Idlib, and offers a number of diverse programs.

Radio Al Kul: is a Syrian local radio broadcast in both Aleppo and Idlib, it was established after the start of the Syrian revolution. It covers Syrian news on the political and economic levels through field reporters, and offers a number of social and news programs and debates.

Radio Now: is a Syrian radio station, belongs to Now TV channel. It broadcasts news about the latest news of the revolution and the situation in Syria for six hours a day of live broadcasts, in addition to a number of diverse programs.

Publications:

Buyer Press: neutral newspaper with political and socio-cultural variety, bi-monthly, published in Arabic and Kurdish by Boer Press Media Center, Arab and Kurdish sections contain the same basic chapters, but the materials are not necessarily identical (ie it is not translated from one language to another).

Yekiti Media: a local newspaper published monthly, belongs to Yeketi Media Center, it is the media centre of the Yekiti Kurds party in Syria. It is issued in Arabic and Kurdish.

Char magazine: a monthly cultural magazine that covers a variety of topics, and monitors the various issues facing the civic life of the conflict in the island region, it is issued by the Char for Development organization and is published in Arabic and Kurdish.

Inab Baladi: a weekly political and social newspaper, issued by Inab Baladi Media Foundation.

Al Nabaa: (no info here)

Ronahi: socio-political newspaper. Ronahy is issued by the Ronahy Foundation for Media and Publishing. It was founded in 2011 in Qamishli, a subsidiary of the Democratic Union Party.

Sorma: quarterly cultural, intellectual magazine published by Jarjara library for Kurdish Culture. Seven years ago, nearly six editions were published and then it stopped. It reopened in 2015 in the city of Qamishli. It is issued in Arabic and Kurdish.

Al Harmal: a bi-monthly cultural and political magazine. It is independent, issued in cooperation with Al Raqqa House for all the Syrians.

Mantara: Local critic magazine, revolutionary, issued by the media office in Kafr Nabl, most of its staff are locals from Kafr Nabl and the surrounding villages.

Tamaddon: Independent, bi-monthly, political, cultural and diverse newspaper. It is committed to the democratic thought and aims to revive and strengthen it. Its administration is civilians, politicians, journalists and activists from various Syrian regions.

Sadaa Al-Sham: Independent, weekly newspaper, published every Monday by Sham for Media and Development Institution. It contains primarily of four sections 1 – Politics Section 2. Culture and Art Section 3. Locals and Economics Section 4 – Investigations and Affairs Section. It is oriented to all the Syrian people, but it focuses mainly on the youth, especially in areas of the Syrian opposition, due to the possibility of delivering paper copies of them.

Hibr: socio-political weekly newspaper, diversified, independent, issued from Aleppo every Saturday morning. It was established in 2013 and is distributed in the city of Aleppo and its countryside.

Facebook pages:

Al-Jazeera: the official page of Al Jazeera TV (which was introduced above)

Faysal Al Qasem: Syrian media figure against the Syrian regime. He works at Al-Jazeera as a creator and a presenter of one of the most

famous political talk shows in the Arab world "The Opposite Direction". He publishes a lot of news and opinion articles on his pages on his social networks (Facebook and Twitter).

Orient: the official page of Orient TV (which was introduced above)

Rudaw: represents Rudaw Kurdish channel platform on Facebook (which was introduced above)

Amoda Now: a Syrian media group that was established in 2011. It defines itself as an independent page that is not affiliated to any organization or entity or party. Directed against the Assad regime and against terrorism in all its forms and against those who stand in the face of the national rights of the Kurdish people.

Yekiti Media: the platform of the Yeketi Media Centre and newspaper on Facebook, a subsidiary of Yekiti Kurds party in Syria.

Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently: This is the "Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently" campaign Facebook page. The campaign was made up by a group of young opponents of both the Syrian regime and Isis. It primarily covers the military and civilian news of Al Raqqa province, and various violations of the regime, as well as all the related international changes. Its reporters work on field undercover.

The Official Speaker: a news network interested in Syrian affairs, especially in Deir El Zour and Raqqa and Hasaka provinces. It has sources and correspondents in different areas, covering several topics: political, military, economical, cultural, etc. It was founded in March 2011.

Al Jisr: The Bridge is the channel's Facebook page. The channel's definition is mentioned above.

Aleppo Today: It is the channel's Facebook page. The channel's definition is mentioned above.
Cham: Its full name is: Cham News Network. It is one of the first news networks, which was established after the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011. It was founded by Syrian activists from different regions in Syria who oppose the Syrian regime.

Syria Breaking: an independent political Syrian media network, it follows up on the latest developments and events on the Syrian arena in general.

Shahba Press: It is the Shahba Press News platform on Facebook. Shahba Press is a local and independent Syrian news agency. It was founded by a number of journalists, activists, journalists on 1 April 2013 in the province of Aleppo. It supplies various news Arab and international agencies with news, images and videos about the situation in Syria, and provides information on the most important events for local as well as followers in the Arab nation and the world.

News Websites:

Al-Jazeera: The official website of Al Jazeera Media Network. Above is the definition of Al Jazeera news channel of the same network.

Al-Arabiya: The official website of the Network of Arab media. Above is definition of the Arabic channel network.

BBC: The website of the BBC, above is the definition of the BBC Arabic belonging to the same network.

Orient: The official website of the Orient channel. Above is the definition of the channel of the same network.

All for Syria: Syrian news site opposing the Syrian regime. It was created in 2003. Its basic ideology is "all citizens, men and women are partners in their homeland Syria." It covers and documents the events and variables on the Syrian arena as a whole.

Zaman Alwasl: the official website of an electronic independent newspaper in Syria called *Zaman Alwasl*. It was founded in 2005 in the city of Homs. Opposing the Syrian regime.

Rudaw: The official website of the Rudaw Media Network. Above is the definition of the channel and the network.

Welate Me : a website that belongs to the *Welate Me* media network. It specializes in Kurdish affairs in general and the Syrian Kurds in particular. There office is in the town of Kobani in northern Syria. The network has announced the stoppage of its work on May 2016.

Al Jisr: It represents the official website of the Bridge channel. Above is the definition of the channel of the same network.

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