



**STUDIES FOR STABILISATION**

PRIORITY RESPONSE ISSUES  
IN NORTH-EAST SYRIA

PAPER

**1**

# Social Cohesion in support of Deradicalisation and the Prevention of Violent Extremism:

Programming Entry Points in North-east Syria



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## Executive Summary

Does social cohesion programming in north-east Syria (NES) reflect an appropriate theory of change? How might social cohesion programming better resonate across the region's primary identity groups to promote deradicalisation? For a region in which tribe, clan, and ethnicity play a pronounced role in socio-political organisation, the answers to such questions rest largely within these structures and their interrelation. Fundamentally, initiatives concerned with social cohesion, deradicalisation, and the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) in NES are an exercise in mediating 'clan-based' society and attendant rhythms of conflict-related social change and upheaval.

This report considers how social cohesion programming in NES should interpret tribal, ethnic, and clan-related dynamics.<sup>1</sup> Nesting the discussion in a reading of the region's social landscape, COAR highlights the need for specificity as to how tribe, clan, and ethnicity are understood, both in terms of their relationships with one another and with local and international power holders. Neglect of such an approach can present a range of unintended negative consequences for stabilisation initiatives, ranging from selection bias to the exclusion of vulnerable groups. In some instances, these

shortcomings may exacerbate the very cleavages these programmes seek to diminish.

The report's second half considers a range of dynamics that appear to have been underappreciated in regional social cohesion programming to date including the historic role played by tribes in confronting extremism, the linkages of certain groups with regional power-holders, and a failure to appreciate the nuances of the north-east's local governance systems. As one would expect, there are subtle differences in how each of these oversights play out locally. Social differences vary across the region's communities, and local capacities for the development of social cohesion are equally mixed. In making the case for greater subtlety, we therefore detail the primary social divisions across several key target sites for social cohesion, deradicalisation, and PVE programming, and highlight relevant international entry points for helping alleviate the differences that drive destabilising dynamics. Needless to say, the range of stakeholders is great in communities which have themselves suffered at the hands of extremists for approaching a decade. Donors are therefore encouraged to leverage existing local social and political capital and sensitise their approach to stabilisation accordingly.

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<sup>1</sup> Note, this is an abridged version of the report originally produced for the client. For more information, please contact COAR.

# 1. Contextual Background

## 1.1. Geomapping NES Society

NES is populated by a majority of Arabs and a wide array of religious and ethnic minorities, including Assyrians, Armenians, Turkmen, Chechens, Yazidis, and Kurds. Most of these groups, including the Kurds, reside in the northeastern part of Al-Hasakeh Governorate. The Kurds, unlike other minorities, had experienced decades of systematic discrimination and marginalisation by the Syrian government until the Self-Administration was formed in 2012. For example, Kurds were not allowed to give their children Kurdish names or celebrate their cultural heritage.<sup>2</sup>

While tension has historically existed between the Kurds and Arabs, the state has played a major role in exacerbating it through discriminating policies. Run by al-Ba'th party, whose ideology strongly emphasises the Arabness of the state's national identity, the Syrian government not only repressed the Kurds but also favoured Arabs over them. Tensions resulting from these policies have dominated Kurdish-Arab relations for decades, and became particularly pronounced after the establishment of the Kurdish-dominated Self-Administration in 2012.

On the other hand, Arabs living in NES maintain a transnational tribal identity that connects them with their Iraqi relatives residing on the other side of the border. After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, many of these tribes mobilised and joined their relatives to fight against US troops. Some of them were recruited by the predominant jihadi groups, such as Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (formed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi), which became an al-Qaeda affiliate in 2004 and is viewed as the mother organisation of IS.

## 1.2. The Impact of Social Identity on NES

During the war in Iraq, NES, especially the areas along the border between Syria and Iraq, became a hub for local and foreign fighters crossing to join jihadi groups

in Iraq. It should be noted that these fighters' passage through the border areas into Iraq would have been extremely difficult without the Syrian government's facilitation.

While fighting the US troops in Iraq was a goal for both the Syrian government and the Arab tribes living within its borders, many in the Kurdish community — particularly in Iraq, where they had also suffered for decades under the Iraqi Ba'th party — were eager to witness the defeat of Saddam Hussain's government. The US was and is still perceived by some Arab tribes as occupiers, and those cooperating with it as traitors. This divergence has widened the fissure between the two communities.

Throughout the Syrian conflict, Arab tribes' military-political allegiances have been largely driven by pragmatism and characterised by diversity. In the beginning, the majority of Arab tribes joined the 'moderate' armed opposition of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the former IS affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), while few opted to join IS. It should be noted that until April, 2013, JN had managed to conceal its ties with IS, and won the support of several tribes in NES, particularly in the sub-district of Al-Busayrah. To win over local tribes, JN pursued a policy of limiting its intervention in public life and governance. Although it helped drive out the Syrian government forces from NES, JN generally refrained from imposing its interpretation of Islam on local tribes, and avoided antagonising tribes that it targeted for support. Instead, it shared oil revenues with them, allowed them to govern their own affairs, and maintained close ties with tribal leaders and notables.<sup>3</sup>

By mid-2014, however, the dynamics had shifted. IS gained momentum by defeating the Iraqi army and assuming control of Iraq's second largest city, Al-Mosul. By this point, its disagreements with JN had become uncontainable, leading to a serious rift between the two groups. Smaller clans that felt excluded from the shares of oil profits (which favoured larger clans affiliated with Nusra and certain FSA factions) were effec-

<sup>2</sup> Radwan Ziadeh (2009), "The Kurds in Syria: Fueling Separatist Movements in the Region?", *US Institute of Peace, Special Report 220*

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account of local dynamics and tribal alignments in NES see Charles Lister (2015), *The Syrian Jihad, Al-Qaeda, The Islamic State and The Evolution of an Insurgency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 185-225.

It is therefore not simply the case that Arab disillusionment is restricted to Kurdish political domination and political and economic marginalisation....but much popular Arab anger is targeted at leaders from within their own community.

tively ‘neutralised’ in the battle with IS.<sup>4</sup> A few families that hail from the tribes of Al-Baqqara and Al-Abaid, in addition to the Al-Bakir clan, pledged allegiance to IS. Meanwhile, FSA and JN managed to recruit many members from the largest regional tribe of Al-Akidat, particularly its Al-Shaitat clan. The latter’s decision to defy IS led to what is known as the massacre of Al-Shaitat, during which IS killed more than 700 men from the tribe in August of the same year. The massacre was a clear and loud message sent to all those willing to join the US coalition in its war against IS.

By summer 2014, IS had announced the establishment of the so-called caliphate after defeating the armed faction and their affiliated tribes in NES, and seizing the majority of the oil fields. To maintain its rule over NES, IS largely relied on tribesmen who joined the group for various reasons, such as securing protection from IS, and gaining financial support and social status.<sup>5</sup> Some joined because of their genuine belief in IS’s interpretation of Islam and ideology,<sup>6</sup> although some recent surveys have suggested they were a minority.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the US-led International Coalition recruited a large number of tribesmen under the umbrella of the Deir-ez-Zor Military Council to combat IS. Nevertheless, the involvement of Arabs in the decision-making process and governance in their areas has been and is still nominal.

### 1.3. Current Situation

Since the territorial defeat of IS in March 2019, the tribal communities of NES have split into three blocs: a pro-Syrian Government bloc, a Turkish-backed Syrian opposition bloc, and an SDF-affiliated bloc. Competition for power and resources within and between these blocs has been a major factor in shaping their alliances.

To secure the allegiance of Arab tribes, the SDF has pursued a two-pronged policy: first, offering financial benefits and limited protection to tribal leaders and notables willing to cooperate; and second, employing a security-driven approach in dealing with tribes that do not accept its policies, tarring them with the same brush as those affiliated with IS. The SDF has been accused of marginalising and discriminating against the majority of the Arab population. Arabs who occupy positions in SDF and Self-Administration institutions are often said to possess little actual influence, and are circumscribed by Kurdish political consultants – known as ‘cadres’ – who are often alleged to be more powerful than the nominal Arab leaders.

Nonetheless, a class of SDF-aligned Arab families have risen to the status of new elites in Arab-majority areas, often acquiring great wealth via their involvement in the war economy and monopolisation of service sectors, exploiting their positions as, and/or linkages with, officials (often relatives) in Self-Administration structures. These have been the target of extensive protest campaigns by Arab communities. It is therefore not simply the case that Arab disillusionment is restricted to Kurdish political domination and political and economic marginalisation (though the disparity in fuel prices and shortages between Kurdish-majority and Arab-majority areas are often a key cited example of the latter), but much popular Arab anger is targeted at leaders from within their own community. Moreover, the SDF has routinely carried out compulsory military campaigns, recruiting Arab youth to join the fight against IS and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army in “Peace Spring Areas.”

4 As elsewhere, the FSA was not unified and was often divided into clan-based factions. While some FSA groups joined Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham in fighting IS, others did not.

5 Haiyan Dukhan and Sinan Hawat profile IS’s former senior Saddam al-Jamal and argue that pragmatism and opportunism, not religious beliefs, were the main drivers behind al-Jamal’s and other individuals’ decision to join IS. See Halan Dukan and Sinan Hawat (2020), “How the Islamic State Commandeers Syrian Tribal Networks—The Case Study of Saddam al-Jamal”, *Militant Leadership Monitor*, 12(3).

6 For more about why individuals join IS see Haid Haid (2018), “Reintegrating ISIS Supporters in Syria: Efforts, Priorities and Challenges” *International Center for the Study of Radicalization*.

7 Jasmine M. El-Gamal and Hanny Megally (2021), “Preventing the Reemergence of Violent Extremism in Northeast Syria”, *NYU Center on International Cooperation and UNESCWA*.



Women in Deir-ez-Zor discuss social cohesion in their communities.  
Credit: IPV

The SDF's often discriminatory policies towards Arab elements coupled with its failure to provide security to Arab communities not only exacerbates social divisions in NES, but also creates social, political, and economic grievances which are leveraged by IS. Constantly seeking to remind communities of its continued relevance, IS wastes few opportunities to exploit the disaffection of Arabs that do not necessarily support the group's ideology, but which are disillusioned with SDF policies.

Concerns about IS's resurgence are valid, and were voiced by the French Ministry of Defense on 10 April, 2021, warning that "ISIS in Iraq and in Syria has resurfaced." Recently, IS waged an attack on the Al-Omar oil base in eastern Deir-ez-Zor, which hosts US troops. Since March 2021, it has carried out more than 70 operations against the SDF and cooperating tribesmen and civilians. Eschewing both the SDF's harsh policies and IS's retaliation has been challenging for many Arabs in NES.

Earlier this year, the SDF launched a security campaign allegedly targeting IS cells inside al-Hol camp, and has captured several suspects. The SDF's narrative regarding the scope of radicalisation inside al-Hol camp must be treated with caution, however, due to potential bias. Many reports suggest that al-Hol is a timed disaster that could be triggered by simple missteps or conversely, by inaction. There are concerns that the refusal of many countries to repatriate children and women linked to IS members, in conjunction with the dire humanitarian conditions and alleged heavy-handed SDF policies in the camp, may give rise to a radicalised generation.

The outbreak of the Syrian uprising, the subsequent establishment of the Kurdish-led Self-Administration in 2012, and the rise and demise of the so-called Islamic State (henceforth IS), have created new dynamics between social groups in NES. Kurds who were oppressed and marginalised under the Ba'ath party have now risen to power, while Arabs, whose ethnic identity was previously their trump card, have had to accept their new relegated position in the socio-political structure.

## 2. Social Cohesion in NES

Social cohesion is a complex and multifaceted construct that lacks a universally accepted definition.<sup>8</sup> It is widely understood, however, as a state of sustainable coexistence in which all local communities living in a specific area feel secure in their homes, and have access to livelihoods and available resources, irrespective of social, ethnic, and religious differences.<sup>9</sup> A socially cohesive society is characterised by resilience, which allows it to recover from past traumatic experiences and challenge the narrative of radical ideologies. In that sense, social cohesion contributes to both deradicalisation, which focuses on those who have already been radicalised, and PVE, which targets those susceptible to radicalisation.

In the context of NES, social cohesion programming should be guided by a nuanced understanding of social sensitivities and political cleavages that have historically shaped the dynamics of the communities living there. It should take into consideration interrelated and equally significant fault lines that have been produced by and throughout the conflict, reflecting different socio-economic divides. For example, favoritism, corruption, and war profiteering have exacerbated social and economic disparities between individuals and groups, whether Arabs, Kurds, or other minorities, affiliated with the local authorities on the one hand and locals on the other.

Social tension resulting from these disparities goes beyond the Arab-Kurdish divide. Competition for social, political, and economic gains entrench socio-economic fault lines within the Kurdish community itself. Proximity to local authorities is necessary not only to gain social status and financial benefits, but also to sideline competitors. The Arab community is no different in this regard. SDF-aligned tribes and figures are negatively perceived by fellow Arabs who have been predominantly affiliated with different actors, and therefore marginalised by the SDF. Additionally, the fact that the SDF cooperates with US troops renders Arabs aligned with its forces traitors in the eyes of some other Arab tribes, generating social tension.

A one-size-fits-all programming approach rarely proves useful in regions with complex local dynamics such as NES. Therefore, designing and implementing social cohesion programming entails acknowledging the particularities of each location. In areas with a high concentration of IS-affiliated families and children, efforts should seek to integrate them into the wider community. If they are subjected to marginalisation and stigmatization by the host community and/or local authorities, IS-affiliated families and children may develop all kinds of grievances, which can lead to (further) radicalisation.

8 John Bruhn (2009), "The Concept of Social Cohesion" (Chapter Two), in *The Group Effect: Social Cohesion and Health Outcomes* (London: Springer), 31-48

9 For a general discussion of the different definitions of social cohesion, see: Andreas Novy, Daniela Coimbra Swiatek, and Frank Moulart (2012), "Social Cohesion: A Conceptual and Political Elucidation", *Urban Studies*, 49;9, 1873-1889

## 3. Assessing Social Cohesion Programing

Grasping the specificities of the dynamics outlined above is key to designing effective social cohesion programming linked to deradicalization and PVE. Measuring the impact of any such programmes is challenging due to a lack of systematic methods however, and it is difficult to account for a range of variables, many of which are beyond the scope of a given project. Donors and programme implementers might nevertheless look to base their assessments of programme suitability on three interrelated pillars:

- **Concept:** What assumptions lie behind the programme? Are they valid? Have risks been identified?
- **Inclusiveness:** Sustainable social cohesion cannot be achieved without inclusiveness at all levels: ethnicity (Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians), gender (women), and vulnerable groups (IDP, returnees and families and children affiliated with or affected by IS). Does the project recognise these differences across target areas and is it adapted accordingly?
- **Neutrality:** Maintaining neutrality when dealing with local communities on questions of social cohesion is essential to trust-building and can help eliminate reputational risk to donors, partners, and projects. Does the project demonstrate sensitivity to the way in which it might be perceived by different groups of people? Are any potential downstream negative implications recognised and how will they be managed and/or mitigated?

### 3.1. Concept

While NES is in dire need of basic and social services in general, needs differ across the region and projects should be based on strong background and context analysis of the specific intervention area with knowledge on the ground drawn from key informant interviews or focus group discussions. Even adjacent areas differ considerably in terms of local dynamics, their relationship with local authorities, and interaction with radical groups, so information gathering must take place in the specific area of intervention.

Programming should also be based on a clear theory of change and an understanding of the desired outcomes and processes that lead to such outcomes. For exam-

ple, programmes supporting social reintegration and resilience can have a positive impact on the targeted community and reduce its susceptibility to the violent, extremist narratives of radical groups. While engaging with vulnerable groups is important to help identify their grievances and understand radicalisation, more concerted efforts are required to improve their living conditions. This is not to suggest that dire living conditions are the only factor behind radicalisation. Nevertheless, approaching these groups with workshops and meetings about radicalisation without enhancing living standards is a recipe for failure. It also keeps the door open for IS, which will exploit the disaffection of the targeted group.

### 3.2. Inclusiveness

Social cohesion programming targeting only one group, whether based on ethnicity, religion, or other between-group differences, risks breeding further resentment and grievances. A whole-of-society approach that includes all elements of the targeted community is thus needed, taking into account the specific needs of the intervention area. For example, projects that focus on women or children but neglect to ensure cross-ethnic participation not only fuel resentment, but also pose reputational risk to the implementers who can be seen as biased by local communities.

### 3.3. Neutrality

A common issue that pertains to all social cohesion programming is the level of coordination with local authorities. How and to what extent can donors and NGOs coordinate with these authorities, particularly when selecting the targeted groups, without risking being perceived by beneficiaries as a biased actor? Including local and targeted communities in project design and preliminary research is essential for generating ‘buy-in’ to the project’s aims, as well as the use of independent selection processes for beneficiaries.

All projects necessitate a certain level of coordination with local authorities, but relying on the recommendations of local authorities for background knowledge and project design risks compromising the efficacy of the project and the implementer’s reputation as a neutral actor. The Self-Administration’s and the SDF’s assessments are characterised by ethnic bias, and rarely based





Self-Administration and civil society dialogue in NES.  
Credit: IMPACT.

on systematic methods. International human rights organisations have reported extensive complaints regarding the SDF's discrimination against certain social demographics and arbitrary accusations of linkages to IS. The independent selection of beneficiaries for focus group discussions and key informant interviews is thus essential when building the project's conceptual basis.

While NES is in dire need of basic and social services in general, needs differ across the region and projects should be based on strong background and context analysis of the specific intervention area with knowledge on the ground drawn from key informant interviews or focus group discussions.

## 4. Practical Considerations for Social Cohesion Programming

1. **Local authorities:** Programming in NES must take into account the need to change the role that local authorities (especially those close to the Self-Administration/SDF) play in social cohesion. Local authorities should be approached primarily for coordination and facilitation, not as a primary source of guidance or assessment. Local authorities (and their individual and institutional affiliates) should be included in projects and be given the same weight as other actors in dialogue and assessment exercises.
2. **Technocrats:** In Arab-majority areas, few to no professional unions or syndicates have been established. Key members of professional disciplines and technocrats have been historically marginalised by SDF institutions, which have often relied on SDF-linked families who often lack adequate, or even basic, educational and technical qualifications. Engaging neglected professionals should be a focus of future programming.
3. **Intra-tribal socio-economic disparities:** Intra-tribal differences should be approached with sensitivity, taking care not to exacerbate tensions within clans (i.e. regarding intra-tribal disparities). However, general lines of questioning regarding experiences of inequality have the potential to create common ground across ethnicities, as well as amongst 'lower-ranking' members of different clans. Socio-economically marginalised members of Arab clans formed the greatest recruitment pool for IS, and addressing this issue is key to counter-radicalisation initiatives.
4. **Political allegiance:** In certain areas, some tribes and clans are aligned with political forces that are explicitly adversarial toward the ruling authorities. The historical bases for these linkages and, consequently, the degree of resistance to programming (i.e. programmes implemented in Kurdish-controlled areas being viewed as sponsored by the SDF) should be assessed and mitigations planned. This is the case with pro-Government Arab clans in areas of Al-Hasakeh who have lost economic privileges since the Syrian Government's withdrawal from the region, and with anti-SDF Arab clans in

areas such as Deir-ez-Zor — though the extent of the latter's affiliation with the Syrian opposition is less materially concrete and often more of an ideological sympathy. Ultimately, the continued affiliation of major clans with the SDF often serves as a buffer against the Syrian Government; enthusiasm across clans typically varies.

While Turkey and the Syrian opposition's inroads into Arab clans have been weaker in NES, the Syrian Government will likely attempt to undermine efforts toward social cohesion and seek to solidify rejectionist clan attitudes that refuse engagement with programming under the SDF. For social cohesion programming to have a chance of success, there need to be open spaces in which concerns and grievances against the ruling authorities can be freely aired. It is unclear whether such fora are currently provided, or have been requested from the authorities. A focus on socio-economic impoverishment or marginalisation (whether by the political authorities or within traditional tribal structures) might create a greater sense of shared experience among members of different ethnic groups, for instance, but any such programming should not depoliticise existing divisions. There is often considerable overlap between clan branches and elements that at various points were affiliated with the opposition, IS, and even the Syrian Government. Thus, potential beneficiaries who are currently members of pro-Government loyalist clans may in the future join pro-Government militias that challenge the SDF.

5. **Neglecting the historical role of Arab communities in fighting IS:** There is little mention of the fact that many Arabs in the region offered stiff resistance against IS during its foundational period, particularly in Deir-ez-Zor, where thousands were killed by the group. Indeed, many Arab communities in the region were banished for months by IS, even after they 'repented' and pledged allegiance. While Arab-majority areas may have been more fertile ground for IS to establish itself compared to Kurdish-majority areas, this does not mean that for many in the Arab community, the group represented a fundamentally foreign occupation. While many more Syrian Arabs in the region did join IS

after it succeeded in establishing itself, ignoring this backdrop of resistance and the subsequent exile of many thousands may have possible ‘subconscious’ implications on social cohesion project design. Instead of binaries whereby Kurds are viewed as the victims of IS and Arabs are viewed as the victims of the SDF, fora should be used to give a voice to Kurds (including those who feel marginalised by the SDF), and Arabs (including those who may have resisted against and suffered from IS).

6. **Lack of focus on Kurdish-Kurdish divisions:** There are historical political (e.g. pro-Barzani vs pro-Talibani) and ideological (support for historically established clans vs supporters of left-wing movements) intra-communal rivalries within Kurdish populations. Many Kurds are politically opposed to the ruling authorities, with a large number affiliated with the rival Kurdish National Council (KNC), which has itself complained of marginalisation by the dominant Democratic Union Party (PYD).
7. **Neglecting the role of dominant clans affiliated with the authorities in certain localities:** This includes the risk of beneficiary discrimination, both by inappropriately recommending beneficiaries for PVE programming on the basis of clan rivalries or historical vendettas, or by excluding rivals from programming.

8. **Lack of emphasis on the centrality of peer networks:**

Peer networks and peer relations have been of central importance to IS recruitment. Where possible, programming should focus on including multiple members within the same peer networks, and not only on creating new linkages with peers outside of established networks.

9. **Long-term sustainability:** Social cohesion is a long-term process that requires sustained commitment. However, uncertainty around Syria’s political future can make it difficult for donor states to make long-term investments. Nonetheless, the very nature of social cohesion within volatile and fluid conflict settings means that social cohesion efforts must not be ‘stop-start’, as interruptions are likely to undermine the sustainability of any positive impacts. That is not to say that projects should continue indefinitely, but that continuity requires projects to build on the legacies of others that have previously demonstrated success, rather than ‘starting afresh’.

The efficacy of social cohesion programming will likely continue to be undermined so long as grievances are not addressed. Partners and donors should seek to use their influence with the Self-Administration to push for inclusive reforms, especially vis-à-vis less intractable and more achievable demands such as the creation of independent unions and syndicates in Arab-majority areas.

## 5. Key Dynamics and Entry Points for Programming

### 5.1. Al-Hasakeh (subdistrict) - Highly mixed population

Nature of Division	Type	Description
Pro-government Arab tribes/clan branches (Al-Tayy, Al-Jabour, Bani Saba'a) vs Kurds (authorities and their constituency)	<b>Inter-communal:</b> ethnic, political, socio-economic	Pro-government Arab clans enjoyed economic benefits that have since been lost, and oppose Kurdish educational curricula and social policies that, for instance, focus on women's empowerment.
Arab vs Arab tribes/clans (Tai, Al-Jabour, Bani Saba'a vs Shammar, branches of Al-Sharabin)	<b>Intra-communal:</b> political, socio-economic	The Shammar and branches within the Al-Sharabin have been beneficiaries of the SDF's rule, and they compete with rival pro-Government clans for positions of authority and leadership of governance and economic institutions
Christians (Assyrians) vs Arabs and Kurds	<b>Inter-communal:</b> ethno-religious, socio-economic	The majority of the Assyrian Christian community have left Syria during the conflict, and there are reported complaints against the authorities trespassing on absentee lands and properties for the implementation of rehabilitation projects and seeking to 'manage' absentee properties as trustees on their behalf. There is also reported pressure by both the authorities and parts of the Arab community to purchase Assyrian lands and properties. The Assyrian community has also rejected the Self-Administration's educational curriculum and complains of exclusion from administrative appointments within the Self-Administration, and the Self-Administration has in the past closed down Assyrian schools and arrested some Assyrian public figures.
Internal divisions within tribes and clans (Tayy, Al-Sharabin)	<b>Intra-communal:</b> political, socio-economic	The Tayy tribe has many clans and a large number of clan leaders are alternately affiliated with the SDF and the Syrian government. However, many of the SDF-affiliated leaders are considered to have less social influence. A similar notable division exists within the Sharabin. Large number of clan leaders within the Sharabin tribe are considered to be affiliated with the Syrian Government, compared to a smaller number who are affiliated with the SDF and have been major beneficiaries of its rule.

#### Stakeholder entry points in Al-Hasakeh:

- Farmers' Union and Agricultural collectives
- Teachers' Syndicate
- Lawyers' Syndicate
- Doctors' Syndicate
- Engineers' Syndicate
- Veterinarians' Syndicate
- Ar-Raqqa workers' Union - Al-Hasakeh branch
- Union and Chambers of Commerce
- Municipal Communes
- Self-Administration's women's committee
- Self-Administration's women and child bureau
- Clan leaders
- Christian Religious Figures
- Christian Charities
- Islamic Religious Figures
- Islamic Charities

## 5.2. SDF-Controlled Deir-ez-Zor (subdistrict) - strong Arab majority

Nature of Division	Type	Description
Pro-government Arab tribes/clans (Al-Baqqara) vs Kurds (authorities)	<b>Inter-communal:</b> ethnic, political, socio-economic	A large part of the Al-Baqqara tribe is affiliated with the Syrian government and is seeking to recruit units to fight the SDF. Shared opposition to Kurdish educational curricula and policies of women's empowerment.
Pro-opposition/ autonomous Arab tribes/clans (Al-Aqidat subclans, Al-Abaid) vs Kurds (authorities)	<b>Inter-communal:</b> ethnic, political, socio-economic	Formerly affiliated with the armed opposition, Al-Aqidat and Al-Abaid tribes benefited from generous oil revenues under opposition control. These tribes joined the fight against IS, and continue to demand a greater share in governance and of economic resources. They seek to create autonomous military and security structures. Shared opposition to Kurdish educational curricula and policies of women's empowerment.
Arab vs Arab tribes/clans (Al-Baqqara vs Al-Aqidat, Al-Abaid)	<b>Intra-communal:</b> political, socio-economic	The major clans of Al-Aqidat tribe and other smaller clans such as Al-Abaid continue to refuse the Syrian government's return to the area, unlike their historical rivals, Al-Baqqara, leaving it reluctantly aligned with the SDF.
Divisions within clans (various)	<b>Intra-communal:</b> political, socio-economic	The SDF has favoured certain families and branches within clans for leadership positions, leading to tensions with rival branches. This has been compounded by branches accumulating wealth and asserting influence in employment, service provision contracts, trade, and control over the smuggling economy.
General population vs ruling authorities and local allies	<b>Inter- and intra-communal:</b> ethnic, political, socio-economic	Locals complain of extensive corruption, shortages of basic supplies, monopolisation of economic sectors, unfair distribution of oil resources, and arbitrary targeting by security forces — both Kurdish-dominated (Asayish, HAT) and Arab members of powerful rival clans within the Deir-ez-Zor Military Council (DMC).

### Stakeholder entry points in Deir-ez-Zor:

- Farmers' Union and Agricultural collectives
- Veterinarians' Syndicate
- Union and Chambers of Commerce
- Deir- ez-Zor Civil Council (DCC), local municipalities, and municipal 'communes'
- Clan leaders
- Islamic Religious Figures
- Islamic Charities
- No unions or syndicates have yet been established for teachers, doctors, engineers, or lawyers.

### 5.3. Al-Busayrah - almost exclusively Arab population

Nature of Division	Type	Description
Pro-opposition/ autonomous Arab clans (various Akidat clans, Al-Bu Frio) vs Kurds (authorities)	<b>Inter-communal:</b> ethnic, political, socio-economic	The area has witnessed widespread protests in recent years against the SDF and its subordinate Deir-ez-Zor Military and Civil Councils (DMC and DCC). Locals also accuse the SDF of complicity in the assassination of tribal figures and former opposition commanders who have been critical of the SDF.
Arab vs Arab clans (various Akidat clans, Al-Bu Frio vs Al-Bakir)	<b>Intra-communal:</b> political, socio-economic	Various clans of Al-Aqidat tribe are increasingly alienated by the dominant Al-Bakir (itself a subcomponent of Al-Aqdiat, but one considered to be overrepresented and threatened in the past with excommunication by some within the Aqidat), which has also repeatedly targeted small historical rivals such as Al-Bu Frio based on allegations of IS affiliations (even though the Al-Bakir itself historically had IS recruits).
Divisions within the same clan (Al-Bakir)	<b>Intra-communal:</b> socio-economic	Though members and families of Al-Bakir clan occupy many governance and economic positions in the area, and are considered to be favoured by the SDF, clashes have broken out between some of its branches, such as l-Kusaiba vs Al-Kassar, in part fuelled by financial competition.
General population vs ruling authorities and local allies	<b>Inter- and intra- communal:</b> ethnic, political, socio-economic	Locals complain of widespread corruption, shortages in fuel and basic staples, monopolisation of important services and economic sectors by certain families, unfair distribution of oil resources, and arbitrary targeting by security forces — both Kurdish-dominated (Asayish, HAT) and members of Al-Bakir within the Deir-ez-Zor Military Council (DMC)

#### Stakeholder entry points in Al-Busayrah:

- Farmers' Union
- Revolutionary Movement Collective
- Union of Commerce
- Doctors' Syndicate
- Clan leaders
- Deir-ez-Zor Civil Council, local municipalities, and municipal communes
- Islamic Religious Figures
- Islamic Charities
- No unions or syndicates have yet been established for teachers, engineers, or lawyers.

#### 5.4. Ar-Raqqa (subdistrict) - strong Arab majority

Nature of Division	Type	Description
Pro-opposition/autonomous Arab tribes/clans (Al-Afadla, Al-Bayatra, others) vs Kurds (authorities)	<b>Inter-communal:</b> Ethnic, political, socio-economic	As in Deir-ez-Zor, local clans complain of political discrimination, though the extent of economic marginalisation and shortages in basic supplies and staples is less acute. Clans seek greater autonomy and the ability to establish their own military and security structures, and refuse Kurdish educational curricula and the SDF's women's empowerment policies. They enjoy closer ties with the Syrian opposition and Turkey than their counterparts in Deir-ez-Zor, and share a fear of a return of the Syrian Government) especially as part of any future agreement with the SDF). Many local Arab clans lost lands as a result of the construction of the Euphrates dam in the late 1960s/early 1970s, and call on the authorities to compensate them for these losses, in addition to losses sustained during the anti-IS Coalition campaign.

##### Stakeholder entry points in Ar-Raqqa:

- Farmers' Union and Agricultural collectives
- Teachers' Syndicate
- Ar-Raqqa Workers' Union
- Chambers of Commerce
- Ar-Raqqa Civil Council (RCC) and local municipalities
- Grain Farmers' Union - set up by locals and independent of the Self-Administration
- Ar-Raqqa Civil Society Forum (more than 18 CSOs)
- Clan leaders
- Islamic Religious Figures
- Islamic Charities

## 5.5. Shaddadeh - exclusively Arab population

Nature of Division	Type	Description
Pro-government/ autonomous Arab tribes (Al-Jabour leading clans) vs Kurds (authorities)	<b>Inter-communal:</b> Ethnic, political, socio-economic	The dominant local tribe is the Al-Jabour, led by the Al-Maslat clan whose authority is widely acknowledged within the tribe. During the conflict, most of the tribe joined the opposition, then some of its members joined IS (though the head of the clan fled to Saudi Arabia), then the SDF. Now, its leader (whose authority is respected by the majority of the tribe) has returned to align with the Syrian Government. The area has seen many protests against the SDF with similar complaints of political and economic marginalisation in other Arab-majority areas, shortages in fuel and basic staples, and the Al-Jabour reject the presence of SDF military bases in the city.
Internal divisions within tribes and clans	<b>Intra-communal:</b> political, socio-economic	Some clan leaders within the Al-Jabour tribe are affiliated with the SDF (Al-Fadel, Al-Mahasen clans), though these are considered a minority. There are members of these clans opposed to the SDF who refuse the position of their leaders, and there are also cross-clan elements who continue to support the opposition and refuse any possibility of the Syrian government.

### Stakeholder entry points in Shaddadeh:

- Farmers' Union and Agricultural collectives
- Clan leaders
- Shadaddeh municipal council
- Islamic Religious Figures
- Islamic Charities
- No unions or syndicates have yet been established for teachers, doctors, engineers, or lawyers.

## 5.6. Tabaqa - almost exclusively Arab population

Nature of Division	Type	Description
SDF-favoured Arab clan branches vs competitors	<b>Intra-communal:</b> Ethnic, political, socio-economic	The SDF has favoured some branches of local clans (such as the Bu Raslan branch of Al-Waldah clan) creating rivalry with other subclans (such as Al-Faraj), which have manifested in armed clashes. Overall, while there have been some protests against the SDF, locals are too fearful of a return of the Syrian government and view the SDF as a bulwark against it.

### Stakeholder entry points in Tabaqa:

- Farmers' Union
- Ar-Raqqa workers' Union
- Clan leaders
- Tabaqa municipal council
- Islamic Religious Figures
- Islamic Charities
- No unions or syndicates have yet been established for teachers, doctors, engineers, or lawyers.



## 5.7. Al-Kasra Subdistrict

Nature of Division	Type	Description
Pro-Government Arab tribes/ clans (Al-Baqqara) vs Kurds (authorities)	<b>Inter-communal:</b> ethnic, political, socio-economic	The dominant Al-Baqqara tribe (increasingly aligned with the Syrian Government) and other locals reject the SDF and want its withdrawal from the area.
Divisions between and within Arab clans and community	<b>Inter-communal:</b> political, religious, socio-economic	Al-Baqqara's loyalties during the conflict were divided according to the identity of its clans and branches, and also where they were based. In the Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, many of the Baqqara joined the armed opposition, but were considered to have only half-heartedly fought against IS, which targeted Baqqara rivals in the Akidat. The Baqqara has since become increasingly aligned with the Syrian Government. In Al-Hasakeh, the Baqqara has formed a recruitment base with the Iranian-backed Al-Baqir tribe, and there are reports of members of the tribe converting to Shi'ism. However, not all members of the tribe have followed suit. There are some locals who are wary of the return of the Syrian Government to the area.

### Stakeholder entry points in Al-Kasra:

- Union of Commerce
- Deir-ez-Zor Civil Council (DCC) and Al-Kasra municipal council
- Clan leaders
- Islamic Religious Figures
- Islamic Charities
- No unions or syndicates have yet been established for teachers, doctors, engineers, or lawyers.

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