

Transitional Justice Preferences Among Syrians: A Qualitative Exploration

Undergraduate Research Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation  
*with honors research distinction* in Sociology in the undergraduate colleges of  
The Ohio State University

By

Jamie Wise

The Ohio State University

May 2020

Project Advisor: Dr. Hollie Nyseth Brehm, Department of Sociology

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	3
Introduction.....	4
Literature Review.....	5
Determinants of Transitional Justice Preferences .....	5
Ideology in Conflict Studies.....	8
I. Conflict Framing .....	8
II. Perceptions of Us vs. Them.....	10
Summary of Literature Review .....	12
Case Background .....	13
Conditions in 2013 .....	13
I. Military and Political Situation .....	13
II. Human Rights Violations and Atrocity Crimes .....	14
Conditions in 2018 .....	16
I. Military and Political Situation .....	16
II. Human Rights Violations and Atrocity Crimes .....	17
Methods.....	20
Qualitative Approach .....	20
Overview of the Data .....	20
Overview of Interview Guide for SJAC’s Dataset.....	21
Sampling and Interviewing Procedure for Author’s Interviews .....	22
Qualitative Coding and Data Analysis .....	24
Limitations .....	28
Findings.....	30
Extreme Anti-Regime .....	30
I. Perceptions of Us vs. Them & Conflict Framing.....	31
II. Transitional Justice Preferences & Rationales .....	32
Extreme Pro-Regime .....	33
I. Perceptions of Us vs. Them & Conflict Framing.....	34
II. Transitional Justice Preferences & Rationales .....	35
Solid Anti-Regime.....	36
I. Perceptions of Us vs. Them & Conflict Framing.....	37
II. Transitional Justice Preferences & Rationales .....	38

Solid Pro-Regime .....	40
I. Perceptions of Us vs. Them & Conflict Framing .....	40
II. Transitional Justice Preferences & Rationales .....	41
Leaning Anti-Regime .....	42
I. Perceptions of Us vs. Them & Conflict Framing .....	43
II. Transitional Justice Preferences & Rationales .....	44
Leaning Pro-Regime .....	45
I. Perceptions of Us vs. Them & Conflict Framing .....	46
II. Transitional Justice Preferences & Rationales .....	47
Summary of Findings .....	48
Discussion .....	49
Acknowledgements .....	53
References .....	54
Appendix .....	60
Author’s Interview Guide (English Only) .....	60
NVivo Codebook .....	67
Reflections on Positionality and Conducting Fieldwork .....	73

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to all those who have suffered from injustice, that they may one day know true and lasting peace.

## Abstract

In the aftermath of violent conflicts, societies often implement transitional justice mechanisms—like trials, truth commissions, and reparations programs—to reckon with past human rights abuses and atrocity crimes. Recent scholarship has begun to consider who prefers which justice mechanisms and why, recognizing the context-dependence of justice preferences and seeking to better articulate the needs of those affected by violence. This study qualitatively explores the influence of individuals' conflict-related ideologies, consisting of their ideas about the conflict and the actors involved, on their transitional justice preferences. Using the ongoing conflict in Syria as a case study, this research draws from 44 interviews with Syrians—eight conducted by the author in Jordan in 2018, and 36 conducted through the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC) in 2013. During interviews, participants described their perceptions of the cause of the violence, their attitudes about the actors involved in the conflict, and their preferences for various mechanisms of transitional justice. Employing qualitative analytic methods, this study describes patterns that inductively emerged from participants' explanations of their justice preferences. It finds that participants can be categorized into three distinct Opinion Clusters—extreme, solid, or leaning—based on their perceptions of us vs. them, their framing of the conflict, and their transitional justice preferences. These ideal type categories were identified across both pro- and anti-regime participants, and they illustrate how differences in participants' conflict-related ideologies may inform differences in their transitional justice preferences. This discovery attests to the social construction of justice preferences, which are embedded in the complex meanings individuals ascribe to their lived experiences of conflict. This research connects literature on the social psychological dimensions of conflict to scholarship on transitional justice, and its findings can inform future policy, particularly the design of a tailored justice process for Syria.

## Introduction

After mass violence, devising policies for social reconstruction conducive to sustainable peace can present a daunting task. Creating a system of transitional justice which is both comprehensive and publicly accepted is a critical challenge to societies emerging from these devastating conflicts. Recent transitional justice scholarship has shifted from the study of international, top-down mechanisms and has increasingly considered localized, participatory mechanisms that emphasize survivors' agency (Lundy & McGovern, 2008; Nyseth Brehm & Golden, 2017). Consequently, better understanding how individuals define their interests, formulate their opinions, and justify their actions in transitional justice contexts can help in crafting appropriate and effective policies. Accordingly, research on the factors shaping individuals' transitional justice policy preferences benefits both policymakers and practitioners in their endeavors to operate in post-conflict environments.

This study uses the Syrian conflict as a case study to explore the determinants of individuals' transitional justice preferences. It asks, what are Syrians' preferences among various mechanisms for implementing a transitional justice program after the ongoing conflict? Further, how are these preferences informed by participants' conflict-related ideologies, or the ideas they hold about the conflict and its actors? Specifically, participants' ideologies were gauged by considering two distinct, but complementary, types of ideas: 1) framing of the conflict's nature and causes, and 2) perceptions of the in-group versus those of the "other."

To assess Syrians' transitional justice preferences, as well as how these preferences are informed by conflict-related ideologies, this study draws from 44 interviews with Syrians. Eight (8) interviews were conducted by the author with Syrians in Amman, Jordan in 2018. The remaining thirty-six (36) interviews were conducted in 2013 for a report by the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC). Through qualitative analysis of participants' preferences and rationales, this study contributes to a growing body of knowledge that puts survivors' perspectives at the center of transitional justice.

What follows includes a review of the literature, divided between what scholars know about the determinants of transitional justice preferences and what they know about the role of ideology in conflict. Specifically, the latter includes descriptions of two types of ideas: conflict framing and perceptions of us vs. them. Then, an overview of the Syrian conflict is provided,

which is broken down by the two years during which data were collected for this study, 2013 and 2018. This section includes an overview of the military and political situation for each year, as well as a summary of the human rights violations and atrocity crimes documented by the United Nations' Commission of Inquiry during those years. Participant quotes are incorporated into this background section, illustrating the violence they personally had seen or heard about. Next, in the Methods section, the two datasets utilized by this study are described, along with the author's field interviewing procedure. An explanation of the author's qualitative coding and analysis process follows, and the study's limitations are addressed. After that, findings are presented, broken down by each of the categories, called Opinion Clusters—ranging from “Extreme Anti-Regime” to “Leaning Pro-Regime”—identified by this study. For each Opinion Cluster, the characteristics of participants' conflict-related ideologies and transitional justice preferences are described and illustrated through quotes from the data. Finally, in the Discussion section, the author summarizes the key findings and contributions of this study, along with its implications for scholars and practitioners of transitional justice.

## **Literature Review**

### Determinants of Transitional Justice Preferences

Transitional justice, while historically referring to transitions from political repression or authoritarianism to democracy, now encompasses a variety of retributive and restorative mechanisms societies employ to recover from a history of mass violence or gross human rights abuses (Buckley-Zistel, 2018). As Buckley-Zistel (2018) observes, retributive mechanisms—such as trials and tribunals—center on punishment and upholding the rule of law, whereas restorative mechanisms—such as reparations and truth commissions—focus on reconciling divided communities and meeting the needs for truth, healing, and redress among those affected by violence. Often, policymakers, practitioners, and civil society advocates must decide which mechanisms (if any) to employ and how to design them in post-conflict societies.

As such, governments and NGOs have conducted studies and large-scale surveys of transitional justice preferences to better understand a population's justice needs. Such studies act as “formative evaluations,” which assist in the development of transitional justice policies by gauging local knowledge and preferences before program implementation (Pham & Vinck,

2007). For example, surveys have been conducted by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC, 2005) and through the International Center for Transitional Justice in Northern Uganda (Pham et al., 2005). However, these studies are largely descriptive in nature, illustrating which and how many people favor certain mechanisms without interrogating why. Further, most scholarly literature on transitional justice focuses on the effectiveness of its mechanisms, rather than on the determinants of individuals' transitional justice preferences, though more victim-centered studies have begun to emerge (David, 2017).

These victim-centered studies disproportionately focus on how victimization or violence exposure influence individuals' transitional justice preferences. Results have been mixed and predominantly case specific. Some studies have found a positive association between victimization and preferences for retributive justice, such as Hall et al. (2018) in Bosnia, Bratton (2011) in Zimbabwe, and Field and Chhim (2008) in Cambodia. However, others like Nussio et al. (2015) in Colombia, found that victimization did not have a statistically significant impact on attitudes about various transitional justice mechanisms. Further, a qualitative study by Robins (2011) among victimized families in Nepal found that preferences for truth and economic support outweighed demands for judicial mechanisms. These studies indicate that the relationship between victimization and transitional justice preferences is largely context dependent and only beginning to be understood.

A separate strand of research has addressed preferences for forgiveness, as a potential alternative to retributive forms of justice after mass violence and gross human rights abuses. These studies identify a range of relevant social and political factors, while remaining case specific. For example, Samii (2013) found that the desire to "forgive and forget" in post-civil war Burundi could be explained by ethnic-partisan competition in a power-sharing context, where individuals tended to elevate immediate political interests over demands for truth or justice. Mukashema and Mullet (2013) found that forgiveness, especially in the absence of apologies by perpetrators, was positively associated with reconciliation sentiment (characterized by social trust) among survivors of the Rwandan genocide. David and Choi (2006) found that frequency of church attendance and apologies from perpetrators were the two strongest indicators of the willingness to forgive among former political prisoners in the Czech Republic. Regarding a truth commission, Backer (2010) found that support for conditional amnesty, as adopted by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, eroded over a 5-year period,

implying that the appeal of the tradeoff of justice for peace diminished overtime. These studies have laid the foundation for future research to examine how individuals justify restorative versus retributive justice mechanisms.

Relatively few studies have explored the determinants of individuals' transitional justice preferences beyond a single factor or case. In one exception, Aguilar et al. (2011) tested the influence of various individual, social/familial, and contextual factors on transitional justice preferences in Spain, finding support for the influence of political ideology, religiosity, family victimization, and regional context in that case. Further, Meernik and King (2014), relying on a survey administered by the International Committee of the Red Cross in 12 nations, investigated the influence of perceptions about morality and legitimacy, as well as victimization, on support for international prosecution across many cases. These studies show that scholars continue to explore and debate what factors are most relevant to understanding individuals' transitional justice preferences.

With regards to the Syrian case, only a few studies have emerged addressing transitional justice preferences, and they are largely descriptive in nature. For example, Gantri and Mufti (2017), for the International Center for Transitional Justice, conducted qualitative interviews about transitional justice preferences among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, finding no clear consensus about the desirability of forgiveness or accountability. Charney and Quirk (2014), for SJAC, conducted 46 interviews with Syrians, finding that regime supporters and opponents alike favored an institutional, judicial response to atrocities, over other measures, including revenge, a truth commission, or reparations. The present study builds directly on Charney and Quirk's (2014) report, further analyzing their interview data and connecting it to the growing literature on the determinants of individuals' transitional justice preferences.

Specifically, this study extends the literature on the determinants of transitional justice preferences by exploring the influence of conflict-related ideologies. Scholars have long recognized the central role ideologies play in motivating violence and perpetuating conflict (for an overview, see Cohrs, 2012), though relatively few consider how ideologies influence individuals' engagement with transitional justice processes in the aftermath of atrocities (some limited exceptions include Aguilar et al., 2011; Bratton, 2011; and Samii, 2013). Accordingly, the present study explores *ideas* as the determinants of individuals' transitional justice preferences, drawing from a robust literature on ideology in conflict studies.

## Ideology in Conflict Studies

This study relies on genocide scholar Jonathan Leader Maynard's (2014) definition of ideology as: "a distinctive system of normative, semantic, and/or reputedly factual ideas, typically shared by members of groups or societies, which underpins their understandings of their political world and shapes their political behaviour" (p. 824). This broad definition is useful for considering the influence of various *ideas*—beyond the simplified liberal vs. conservative spectrum—as potential drivers of individual action in transitional justice contexts.

More specifically, this study explores elements of what Bar-Tal called the "ethos of conflict," a distinct ideology that serves to justify and perpetuate intractable conflict (for an overview, see Bar-Tal, 2007). The ethos of conflict consists of eight societal beliefs, including: 1) the justness of one's own goals, 2) the need for security and survival, 3) positive perceptions of the in-group, 4) claims to victimhood, 5) delegitimization of opponents, 6) patriotic appeals, 7) internal unity against an external threat, and 8) desire for peace (Bar-Tal, 2007; Bar-Tal et al., 2012). Informed in part by the ethos of conflict, this study considers two types of ideas individuals hold in conflict contexts: those about the conflict itself (here called "Conflict Framing") and those about the actors involved in the conflict (here called "Perceptions of Us vs. Them"). The relation between these categories and the components of Bar-Tal's ethos of conflict are described in the sections below. While it makes sense theoretically to disaggregate conflict frames from perceptions of us vs. them, realistically they are often linked (either explicitly or implicitly) by the individuals who hold these views. Together, these ideas help form coherent ideologies that contribute to and emerge from intergroup conflict.

### *I. Conflict Framing*

Social movement scholars broadly define "framing" as a social process through which individuals make sense of a complex reality (for an overview, see Benford & Snow, 2000). Specifically, framing accomplishes three core tasks: diagnosing a problem ("diagnostic"), proposing a solution ("prognostic"), and motivating collective action ("motivational") (Benford & Snow, 2000). The present study sets out to understand how individuals frame their experiences of conflict and how these ideas may influence their justice preferences. As such, it focuses specifically on conflict frames, which consist of "cognitive structures or interpretations of

conflict...[which] may then guide disputant behavior, strategy selection, outcome concerns, and evaluations of the other party” (Pinkley, 1990, p. 117). For example, Pinkley (1990) described conflict frames along three dimensions: relationship vs. task, emotional vs. intellectual, and compromise vs. win. This study considers conflict frames in a more general sense to include participant descriptions of both the *nature* and *causes* of the conflict.

Regarding the nature of the conflict, this study is primarily concerned with whether participants view the conflict as fundamentally irreconcilable. In line with Bar-Tal’s (2007) concept of intractable conflict, this study assesses whether participants view the conflict as “zero sum,” meaning that parties believe compromise is unacceptable, since all losses for their side are believed to translate into gains for their opponents. This concept is similar to what Pinkley (1990) describes as the “compromise vs. win” dimension of conflict frames, which distinguishes between conflicts where disputants believe both sides are to blame and compromise is preferable, from those where disputants blame the other side and seek only to maximize their own side’s gains. To capture this aspect of conflict framing, this study gauges individuals’ openness to peace negotiations and their optimism about long-term reconciliation prospects in Syria. Thus, it seeks to connect participants’ prognostic framing of the conflict—or their ideas of what should be done to resolve it—to their rationales for particular transitional justice mechanisms.

In addition to the nature of the conflict, the present study also considers participants’ perceptions of the conflict’s causes. As such, it invokes the “justness of the in-group’s goals” component of the ethos of conflict, by capturing participants’ explanations for why the parties are fighting and what they are aiming for during the conflict (Bar-Tal et al., 2012). Explanations for a conflict’s cause are often grounded in context-specific narratives. For example, several studies on the Syrian case have identified terrorism, sectarianism, and foreign intervention as ways political elites and refugees have framed the violence (Corstange & York, 2018; Merz, 2014). Schoon and Duxbury (2019) further demonstrated through qualitative analysis how international elites framed intervention in Syria around the topic of legitimacy. As such, the present study considers a variety of narratives participants told about the goals of the conflict’s actors or the cause of violence as part of their conflict frames. This study is interested in how participants’ perceptions about the conflict’s causes may influence their ideas about accountability and translate into justifications for transitional justice policies.

Scholars have yet to explore the relevance of conflict framing to determining transitional justice preferences. Previous studies considering the impacts of conflict frames have largely focused on their role in conflict resolution. For example, Pinkley and Northcraft (1994) found that different types of conflict frames influenced both the process and outcomes of negotiations between disputants. Shmueli, Elliott, and Kaufman (2006) found that contradictory conflict frames lead to increased polarization between disputants, while reframing might be employed as a successful conflict resolution strategy. Since transitional justice programs are often the result of broader peace negotiations, where disputing parties must reconcile their conflict frames, it follows that conflict framing might substantively influence justice preferences. More generally, some scholars who study “collective action frames” argue that such frames exist to satisfy a need to attribute blame for societal problems or mobilize social movements around grievances (Benford & Snow, 2000). Since perceptions of blame clearly inform ideas about accountability, this implies that framing may be relevant for understanding how individuals determine their transitional justice preferences. As such, this study relies on qualitative data to explore the connections between conflict frames and transitional justice preferences.

## II. *Perceptions of Us vs. Them*

There is a robust literature on the role of intergroup perceptions in conflict, explaining the various ways groups of people justify violence against others. Much scholarship has focused on how enemies are defined and stereotyped. For example, Image Theory in international relations describes how people construct “images” about the “other” in terms of goal compatibility, power, and cultural status, and these images in turn influence foreign policy decision-making (for an overview, see Herrmann, 2013). Such “images” are constructed through various social and psychological processes. This study focuses on one such process of defining the “other,” called *delegitimization* in Bar-Tal’s ethos of conflict. Delegitimization serves as a psychological enabler of violence by morally excluding the “other” and is generally expressed by derogatory labeling (Bar-Tal & Hammack Jr., 2012). The present study is interested in how participants’ perceptions of their out-group—and the extent to which they delegitimize them—influence their transitional justice preferences.

One of the most researched strategies of delegitimization is *dehumanization*, which refers to the process of characterizing an out-group as sub-human, less than human, or altogether un-

human, for instance by casting them as “animalistic” or “mechanistic” (Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Dehumanization has been associated with reduced prosociality, increased antisociality, and belief in the diminished moral standing of the other, all of which may contribute to aggression and conflict (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). While most literature on dehumanization addresses its role in enabling violence, fewer studies address its influence on perceptions of justice. Several experimental studies have found that dehumanization is associated with retributive justice preferences and punitive attitudes (Bastian et al., 2013; Viki et al., 2012). Zebel et al. (2008) found that dehumanization of the out-group was negatively associated with support for reparations. One of the few experiments on this topic to be conducted in an ongoing conflict context was Leidner et al. (2012), which found that certain kinds of dehumanization increased support for retributive justice among a sample of Palestinians and Israelis. These studies represent attempts to provide quantitative, empirical evidence of the relationship between dehumanization and justice preferences, though largely outside of the transitional justice context. The present study qualitatively explores expressions of delegitimization and dehumanization and their connections to participants’ transitional justice rationales.

Consideration of the “us vs. them” ideologies that contribute to intergroup conflict would be incomplete without addressing the “us.” In-group glorification—as well as claims to victimhood and patriotic appeals—are critical components of Bar-Tal’s ethos of conflict. Thus, in addition to addressing dehumanization of the out-group, this study also considers how positive self-perceptions relate to transitional justice preferences. An important aspect of understanding in-group perceptions of the commission of atrocity crimes or human rights abuses is what criminologists call *neutralization techniques*. Neutralization techniques, as coined by Sykes and Matza (1957), refer to the ways people rationalize criminal or otherwise socially unacceptable behavior to alleviate guilt. Sykes and Matza (1957) identified five techniques, including denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, condemnation of the condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties. Alvarez (1997) expanded and applied this theory to understanding how people rationalized the commission of atrocity crimes during the Holocaust. While neutralization techniques are used to explain the perpetration of atrocious acts, few have considered their role in justifying decisions made after violence. Accordingly, the present study is interested in how individuals in the Syrian case might neutralize violence committed by the

actors involved in the conflict, particularly members of their perceived in-group, and the ways these neutralization techniques appear in their rationales for transitional justice preferences.

Several social psychological experiments have sought to better understand how in-group glorification impacts guilt for collective violence. An experimental study of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by Roccas et al. (2006) found that during times of escalating violence, in-group guilt decreased and “exonerating cognitions” (akin to neutralization techniques) increased. In terms of pursuing justice after group-led abuses, Leidner et al. (2010) found that in-group glorification was related to less support for accountability among the in-group, a relationship mediated by dehumanization of the victim group. Further, Čehajić-Clancy et al. (2011), in a multinational study of Israel and Bosnia and Herzegovina, found that providing group members opportunities for self-affirmation resulted in greater willingness to accept in-group responsibility and to support reparative measures toward the victim group. The present study expands on these quantitative explorations of the relationship between in-group glorification and justice preferences through qualitative exploration of the Syrian case.

### Summary of Literature Review

In sum, scholars know surprisingly little about the determinants of individuals’ transitional justice preferences, given a turn in the literature toward victims’ and survivors’ needs. Existing studies focus disproportionately on a single factor (like victimization), case (like a particular country), or policy (like forgiveness). The present study builds on this body of knowledge by investigating how ideas about a conflict and its actors—or conflict-related ideologies—mediate individuals’ transitional justice preferences, using a recent and understudied country case, Syria. Inspired by Bar-Tal’s ethos of conflict, this study draws together existing theories about conflict framing (particularly, notions of a conflict’s nature and cause) and perceptions of us vs. them during intergroup conflict (demonstrated by processes of delegitimization, dehumanization, in-group glorification, and neutralization). While ideology has been studied primarily in relation to causing violence and aggression, relatively little is known about its role in shaping justice preferences, especially after mass violence. Thus, this study bridges divides in this literature to posit new explanations for why individuals prefer some transitional justice policies over others.

## Case Background

This study relies on the ongoing Syrian conflict as a case study (for an overview of case study methodology, see Thomas & Myers, 2015). The Syrian conflict is an apt case for studying the determinants of individuals' transitional justice preferences, as its history of atrocity crimes and human rights abuses makes it a seemingly viable candidate for a future transitional justice process. Narratives about the cause of the violence in Syria and the aspects of Syrian history that are most relevant to understanding the present conflict are deeply contested by Syrians and external observers alike (for some accounts, see Hokayem, 2013; Lynch, 2016; and McHugo, 2014). Some specific narratives identified as Conflict Frames among participants in this study are described further in the Methods section.

While the drivers of the Syrian conflict remain disputed, the United Nations has copiously documented its devastating humanitarian consequences, including human rights abuses, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. In 2011, the UN Human Rights Council established the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (from now on referred to as "the COI"), which regularly reports on atrocities and abuses committed by all parties.<sup>1</sup> Since this study relies on two cross-sectional samples from 2013 and 2018, the conditions of the conflict and the human rights violations reported during those times are summarized below.

### Conditions in 2013

#### *I. Military and Political Situation*

The conflict between the Syrian government, under President Bashar al-Assad, and opposition forces escalated to a full-scale civil war in late 2012. Throughout 2013, opposition forces split into various factions, including moderate nationalists, Islamists, radical jihadists, and Kurdish forces (United Nations, A/HRC/25/65, para. 16). Among these, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was influential early on, although Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) gained support representing radical jihadists (United Nations, A/HRC/24/46, para. 33). During 2013, opposition groups made significant territorial gains outside of government

---

<sup>1</sup> See the official website for the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic here: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/iicisyria/pages/independentinternationalcommission.aspx>

strongholds in the southern and coastal regions of the country (United Nations, A/HRC/22/59, para. 20). The Syrian government held on to major cities, like Homs and Damascus, while opposition forces staged significant offensives in Aleppo, Daraa, and Dayr Al-Zawr (United Nations, A/HRC/23/58, para. 19; United Nations, A/HRC/24/46, para. 29).

Politically, the Syrian opposition was represented by the National Coalition for the Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces; however, the organization lacked legitimacy among fragmented opposition groups (United Nations, A/HRC/22/59, para. 14; United Nations, A/HRC/24/46, para. 16). In early 2013, peace prospects appeared unlikely, due to the Assad regime's rejection of a political transition and the opposition's insistence on Assad's removal from office (United Nations, A/HRC/22/59, paras. 16-17). During the year, political dialogue stalled, opposition forces became further decentralized, and international actors intervened on behalf of various armed groups providing funding and weapons (United Nations, A/HRC/23/58, paras. 10-11, 16) In 2013, the COI reported that "both the Government and anti-government armed groups believe that they can achieve a military victory," contributing to armed confrontation (United Nations, A/HRC/24/46, para. 14). By early 2014, the conflict had reached a stalemate, as government and opposition forces continued fighting over major urban centers and strategic routes (United Nations, A/HRC/25/65, para. 7).

## *II. Human Rights Violations and Atrocity Crimes*

During this period, the COI reported on various human rights violations, some amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity, in Syria. COI findings were consistent with the accounts of participants in this study interviewed in 2013 (see Methods for more on this dataset, obtained from SJAC). These violations included:

**Civilian Killing** – By July 2013, the death toll in the Syrian conflict reached an estimated 100,000 people (HRW, 2014). Both government and opposition forces were implicated in massacres, indiscriminate shelling, summary executions, and unlawful killings in breach of international law (United Nations, A/HRC/22/59, paras. 42-64; United Nations, A/HRC/24/46, paras. 40-53). Many participants in the present study told stories of civilian killings.

For example, Nawaf,<sup>2</sup> a 32-year-old man from al-Qamishli, said, “Everyday there are bombings on buildings without knowing if there were civilians in them or if they were locations for armed groups...” Fatima, a 29-year-old woman from Hama, said, “There was a massacre in the place where I live...in which my cousins and all my brothers have been killed, they also burnt our homes and sons in front of us...”

**Chemical Weapons Use** – The COI reported that, on August 21, 2013: “In Al-Ghouta, significant quantities of sarin were used in a well-planned indiscriminate attack targeting civilian-inhabited areas, causing mass casualties” (United Nations, A/HRC/25/65, para. 128). Participants in the present study also referenced the use of chemical weapons during the war. Faisal, a 50-year-old man from Homs, said, “...we hear about massacres now, for example the massacre of the day before yesterday in Eastern Ghouta, five thousand and three hundred martyr[s], also three thousand and six hundred chemical injuries...” Another participant, Khalifah, a 38-year-old man from Raqqah, said, “The situation in Syria is killings, crimes, firing and robbing after we used to live in safety and eventually they came with chemical weapons...”

**Sexualized and Gender-Based Violence** – The COI primarily reported on the commission of sexualized and gender-based violence by government forces, perpetrated during house searches, at checkpoints, and at detention centers (United Nations, A/HRC/22/59, para. 106). By early 2014, the COI noted sporadic sexualized and gender-based crimes committed by opposition forces, including ISIS (United Nations, A/HRC/25/65, para. 70). Participants in this study referenced acts of sexualized violence, including Fatima, who said, “...they enter houses and rape women.” Another participant, Daud, a 25-year-old man from Damascus, said, “...there are crimes committed in Syria [that] won’t be forgotten, a man raped [an]other man...”

**Enforced Disappearances, Kidnappings, and Torture** – Both government and opposition forces have engaged in kidnapping, hostage-taking, arbitrary arrests, and the torture and ill-treatment of detainees (United Nations, A/HRC/22/59, paras. 65-103; United Nations, A/HRC/24/46, paras. 54-94). A participant in this study, Nawaf, said, “The regime is the reason we started these protests, because it is based on intelligence systems, killing, torture, dark rooms

---

<sup>2</sup> All participant names were replaced with pseudonyms. Note also that direct quotes from participants throughout this paper include ellipses (...) when excerpted from larger text, (sic) when grammatical errors were identified, and bracketed words to express omitted content. These edits were made selectively to enhance the reader’s understanding and do not alter the essential meaning of participants’ statements.

and investigations...” Many participants referenced missing and disappeared persons, including Maryam, a 40-year-old woman from Hama, who said, “The region is in destruction, killing, missing people, and filled prisons.”

**Destruction of Property and Looting** – During 2013, the COI reported that government forces intentionally engaged in looting and destruction of private property (United Nations, A/HRC/22/59, para. 153). There was also some evidence of looting by opposition forces (United Nations, A/HRC/22/59, para. 156). Many participants in this study spoke about widespread destruction. For example, Katya, a 48-year-old woman from Damascus, said about her hometown, “It is so demolished, no services nothing is there, all people left, nobody is there...” Another participant, Khadija, a 25-year-old woman from Aleppo, said, “My district was totally demolished before I left my house...all buildings were damaged, demolished, hit with mortar, [and] tank shells.” Other participants referenced theft and robbery as a common occurrence.

### Conditions in 2018

#### *I. Military and Political Situation*

By 2018, the balance of power in Syria had shifted significantly. The Syrian government had made military gains throughout the country, such that, by early 2019, the opposition presence was mostly confined to Idlib governorate, parts of Homs, and the territory controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the east (United Nations, A/HRC/40/70, para. 22). During 2017, the Syrian Army, with Russian support, seized Dayr al-Zawr from ISIS, while the SDF, with the support of the U.S.-led coalition, took Raqqah (United Nations, A/HRC/37/72, paras. 36-56). The Turkish government also intervened in support of the FSA in Afrin, while opposing the SDF along Syria’s northern border (United Nations, A/HRC/39/65, para. 4; United Nations, A/HRC/37/72, para. 28). As for the opposition forces, several FSA factions joined into an umbrella organization called the National Liberation Front (United Nations, A/HRC/39/65, para. 10). Meanwhile, Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a radical Islamist group derived from JAN, faced challenges to its control in Idlib and Aleppo, including resistance from other opposition groups and attacks from pro-government forces (United Nations, A/HRC/37/72, para. 28; United Nations, A/HRC/39/65, para. 6; United Nations, A/HRC/40/70, para. 19).

Throughout 2017-2018, diplomatic efforts at conflict resolution largely failed. Russia, Turkey, and Iran met in Astana in mid-2017, attempting to de-escalate tensions in the northwest (United Nations, A/HRC/37/72, para. 30). A renewed round of UN-led peace talks in Geneva fell through in late 2017 (United Nations, A/HRC/37/72, para. 34). Around that time, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party moved toward more autonomous control of territory in the east (United Nations, A/HRC/37/72, para. 29). During summer 2018, the UN Special Envoy brought together international actors from both sides to work towards a political settlement (United Nations, A/HRC/39/65, para. 11). While these talks stalled, Russia and Turkey agreed to create a demilitarized zone to subdue the humanitarian crisis in Idlib (United Nations, A/HRC/40/70, paras. 14-15). Despite Russian and Turkish efforts, the Syrian government and HTS resumed hostilities in November 2018 (United Nations, A/HRC/40/70, para. 16). Attempts to establish a constitutional committee and reach a political settlement to the conflict also faltered in late 2018 (United Nations, A/HRC/40/70, para. 17).

## *II. Human Rights Violations and Atrocity Crimes*

The COI continued to report on gross human rights violations and atrocity crimes in Syria during 2017-2018. The experiences of participants interviewed for this study by the author reflected the broader trends documented by international observers (see Methods section for the author's interviewing procedure). Notably, all of the author's interviewees in 2018 said they had either seen or heard about most of the violations described below:

**Civilian Killing** – As of March 2018, an estimated 500,000 people had been killed during the Syrian conflict (HRW, 2019). Violence in Syria was characterized by flagrant disregard for civilian life by all armed actors. The Syrian government led protracted sieges of opposition-held areas, including Aleppo, Eastern Ghouta, and Homs, and conducted indiscriminate bombings, including in Idlib (United Nations, A/HRC/37/72, paras. 70-71; United Nations, A/HRC/39/65, para. 32; United Nations, A/HRC/40/70, paras. 24-30). Opposition forces were also involved in civilian killings, such as the use of car bombs and IEDs in Afrin and Azaz after the Turkish-led operation there in 2018 (United Nations, A/HRC/40/70, para. 35). Further, ISIS extensively used civilians as human shields in Raqqah and Dayr al-Zawr, and they claimed responsibility for targeted attacks against Druze civilians in July 2018 (United Nations, A/HRC/37/72, paras. 47-

48, 53; United Nations, A/HRC/40/70, para. 13). Participants in this study told stories about neighbors and family members who were killed. For example, Besma, a 51-year-old woman from Tartous, said, “One time, from three years ago, one of my relative’s husband was killed in his gold store. They stole everything from him and killed him in the store.” Dalia, a 36-year-old woman from Deraa, described an attack:

“The government’s army blockaded this village for a full month. It was Ramadan...They would tell them that on Eid, they had a surprise for them, a very nice one. And unfortunately, poor people. They stormed them. They slaughtered them, slaughtering. There were more than 700 martyrs that day.”

**Chemical Weapons Use** – The COI continued to document the use of chemical weapons by government forces, particularly in Eastern Ghouta (United Nations, A/HRC/37/72, para. 71; United Nations, A/HRC/39/65, paras. 36-39). By early 2019, the COI was investigating an alleged chemical weapons attack in Aleppo that occurred in November 2018, injuring an estimated 100 civilians (United Nations, A/HRC/40/70, para. 94). All participants in the present study said they had seen or heard about the use of chemical weapons. Dalia said, “It happened in our village too. Like, if the government’s army couldn’t come into a town, they’d throw chemical weapons on the town. We heard a lot of this. It also happened in Duma too...”

**Sexualized and Gender-Based Violence** – In March 2018, the COI published a special report on sexualized and gender-based violence committed in Syria since 2011, which details systematic abuses by government forces, as well as discrimination and persecution against women, girls, and sexual minorities by HTS and ISIS (see United Nations, A/HRC/37/CRP.3). In this study, participants mentioned hearing about rape during the violence. Aziza, a 37-year-old woman from Aleppo, said, “[Armed forces] either let them go, or keep them stranded, or rape them. It depends on the situation, whatever they feel like.” Abdullah, a 41-year-old man from Aleppo, said, “You’d hear of kidnappings, deaths, rape, from many numerous unknown sources.” Finally, Dalia said, “Around us, no I didn’t hear [about it]. But they used to say that they would detain and rape girls.”

**Enforced Disappearances, Kidnappings, and Torture** – By August 2018, an estimated 90,000 people had been disappeared in Syria (HRW, 2019). In Eastern Ghouta, Daraa, and Homs, government forces engaged in arbitrary detentions to spread fear and gather intelligence (United Nations, A/HRC/40/70, paras. 8, 73). Opposition forces, including FSA-affiliates, also

committed arbitrary arrests after a major offensive in Afrin (United Nations, A/HRC/39/65, para. 26). Hostage-taking and unlawful detention were also reported in areas controlled by HTS and the SDF (United Nations, A/HRC/40/70, paras. 6, 10). Several participants in the present study described family members who were disappeared. Dalia said, “Two of them were my cousins. To this day, we do not know where they are... There are so many individuals like them. They were all kidnapped and lost.” Adil, a 48-year-old man from Aleppo, describing his brother-in-law, said, “...the police came and captured the people in three buses at the bus stop and he was one of them. This was 7 years ago. Until now we don’t know if he is still alive or [if] he’s dead.”

**Destruction of Property and Looting** – Indiscriminate bombings and intentional attacks on civilian property continued in 2018. Government forces destroyed civilian infrastructure during major sieges, causing mass displacement (United Nations, A/HRC/37/72, para. 57). Further, there were reports of looting and pillaging by opposition forces after the Turkish-led offensive in Afrin (United Nations, A/HRC/39/65, paras. 27-30). Several participants in the present study said their homes or workplaces back in Syria had been destroyed. For example, Besma said, “There are armed gangs or groups that took advantage of the country’s condition. They killed, they stole, they kidnapped. Like what happened with me too, my house was stolen, and as was my clinic.” Amir, a 51-year-old man from Aleppo whose factory in Syria had been destroyed, said, “I am one of the people that have been harmed. I have been robbed.” Finally, Dalia said, “Stealing we heard a lot about. Like if there were bomb strikes in an area, the people of the area would leave, even if for a day or two. They’d come back and not find a single thing of their house’s belongings. Everything was stolen.”

Since 2011, the Syrian conflict has engendered immense human suffering. By early 2019, the COI reported that the conflict had internally displaced 6.2 million people and led to 5.6 million refugees (United Nations, A/HRC/40/70, para. 11). Understanding the types of human rights violations and atrocity crimes committed, as well as their scope, helps to contextualize individuals’ transitional justice preferences, which were investigated in the present study.

## Methods

### Qualitative Approach

To investigate how individuals articulate and justify their transitional justice preferences, this study draws from the methodological implications of symbolic interactionism (for overviews, see Blumer, 1969 and Prasad, 2018). As such, this study focuses on how Syrians make meaning of their experiences of conflict and on how those meanings inform their preferences for transitional justice mechanisms. Symbolic interactionism's emphasis on understanding how individuals interpret their social worlds and conceive of their identities lends itself well to analysis grounded in qualitative data (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012). Qualitative researchers in the symbolic interactionist tradition have long held that it is necessary to get close to and learn directly from participants themselves about their lived experiences (Goffman, 1989). Taking this approach, the researcher undertook fieldwork to conduct semi-structured interviews that elicited participants' ideas about transitional justice, combining this data with other in-depth, participant interviews.

### Overview of the Data

This study draws from two datasets, totaling 44 interviews with Syrians. The first dataset consists of eight interviews conducted by the author with Syrians in Amman, Jordan, from October-December 2018. Among these participants were five women and three men, with an average age of 40 years, spanning 20 to 51 years. Participants were originally from Aleppo, Deraa, and Tartous. All were Muslims, except one participant who identified as a Christian and one other who did not disclose her religious identification. Additional details about the author's sampling and interviewing procedure are described below.

The second dataset was provided by SJAC, which shared 36 transcripts from interviews conducted from August-September 2013. These interviews were part of an original dataset of 46 interviews conducted for a report authored by Charney and Quirk (2014). Participants in this dataset included 14 women and 22 men, with an average age of 38, ranging from 24 to 58 years. Participants were interviewed in Turkey, Jordan, and Syria. While predominantly Sunnis, interviewees also included Shiites, Alawites, Christians, and Kurds, constituting a diverse cross-

section of Syrian society. For more details on the methods employed for data collection for these interviews, see Charney and Quirk (2014). Summary demographics for the combined dataset are illustrated in the chart below:

<b>Religious Sect</b>	61% Sunni 14% Shiite/Alawite 11% Christian 7% Muslim (Unspecified) 9% Other	<b>Location of Interview</b>	23% Damascus, Syria 23% Amman, Jordan 14% Hama, Syria 14% Raqqah, Syria 26% Other
<b>Gender</b>	57% Male 43% Female	<b>Political Stance</b>	56% Anti-Regime 43% Pro-Regime
<b>Age</b>	Range = 20 to 58 years Average = 38 years	<b>Refugee Status</b>	27% Refugee 9% Internally Displaced 64% Neither

### Overview of Interview Guide for SJAC's Dataset

Although the interviews for this study were conducted at different times and by different interviewers, there was significant overlap in their questions. Specifically, the interviews in SJAC's dataset elicited participants' opinions about the Syrian conflict and the actors involved, as well as about various transitional justice mechanisms. First, participants were asked to describe their views of the current situation in Syria and what they thought the country would be like in 5 years (in 2018). Then, participants were asked whether they preferred a negotiated settlement or victory for one side, as well as whether they thought people with different views could live together again in Syria. These questions allowed for the author to gauge participants' conflict frames, through ideas about peace and reconciliation prospects.

Next, participants were asked whether individuals should be held accountable for war crimes and human rights violations, and if so how. Participants were asked specifically whether they favored the implementation of trials, a truth commission, or a reparations program, with follow-up questions probing for more details about how participants thought these mechanisms

should be designed. In particular, regarding a truth commission, participants were probed with some version of the following:

“To encourage people to tell the truth, in South Africa, people who had committed crimes during the conflict were allowed to go free if they confessed to the Truth Commission. Would it be a good idea to do something like this in Syria?”

Thus, participants were asked explicitly to deliberate on conditional amnesty and the tradeoff between truth and justice characteristic of a truth commission. In the final part these interviews, participants were asked to describe various groups in the conflict by name, including the Syrian government, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN). Thus, SJAC’s interview guide tracked well with the author’s own interview guide (outlined in the next section and included in the Appendix). However, the author’s interviews included more open-ended questions to assess participants’ justice preferences beyond trials, truth commissions, and reparations. This difference was considered during the coding and analysis process. Overall, SJAC’s dataset was exceptionally suited for answering this study’s primary research questions.

#### Sampling and Interviewing Procedure for Author’s Interviews

The author selected Amman, Jordan, as the field site for data collection in order to access the Syrian refugee population there. In 2018, about 650,000 Syrian refugees were registered in Jordan (JIF, 2018). By interviewing refugees, this study helps address the need identified by transitional justice scholars for more studies on diaspora communities (see Haider, 2014 and Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2016; for more on the Syrian diaspora see Stokke & Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2019). Further, the author faced prohibitive security and access restrictions to entering refugee camps or conducting fieldwork in Syria itself, limiting the bounds of this sample. For reflections on the author’s positionality and its impacts on conducting fieldwork, see the Appendix.

The author primarily recruited interview participants through local non-profits serving Syrian refugee communities in Amman. Going through organizations that participants were already familiar with probably made it more likely for participants to agree to an interview, although the author made it clear during the informed consent process that participation in the interview would have no effect on participants’ access to services provided by those organizations. From there, the author conducted snowball sampling, relying on initial participants to refer other interviewees from within their personal networks (Hesse-Biber, 2017,

pp. 56-57). This sampling strategy was selected based on several ethical and practical concerns. In particular, snowball sampling enabled potential participants to hear about the study from people and organizations they trusted, which may have allayed fears about an outsider asking about their political views (for a description of how this sampling strategy has been employed among the Syrian refugee population, see Pearlman, 2016).

The author's interviews generally lasted 1-2 hours and followed a semi-structured format, which enabled the author to ask questions specific to her interest in transitional justice preferences while providing participants the freedom to expound upon topics or concerns of interest to them (Hesse-Biber, 2017, pp. 112-113). During each interview, participants were asked to describe their lives before, during, and after their exposure to the violence. To gauge how participants framed the conflict, the author asked open-ended questions such as: "How did the war start?" and "What is the root cause of the violence in Syria?" The author then asked for participants' opinions about several specific conflict frames, such as Sectarianism, Democracy v. Dictatorship, and Foreign Intervention (described further below), which usually digressed into longer conversations when participants were asked "Why?" Following this discussion, the author asked interviewees to broadly describe what they thought the future held for Syria and when/how the violence might end. The author then asked participants what justice meant to them and to describe what could be done for the victims of violence, before proceeding to ask for participants' opinions about a range of specific transitional justice mechanisms, including the death penalty, trials, reparations, truth commissions, and amnesties. Again, the author probed participants to describe the rationales behind their opinions. In the final part of the interview, the author asked participants to identify and describe the characteristics of whichever actor they considered to be most responsible for the violence in Syria, to gauge their perceptions of the "other." For more details, refer to the full Interview Guide (English only) in the Appendix.

Recognizing the various social, political, and economic vulnerabilities of refugee populations, the author took the utmost care in ensuring the privacy, sensitivity, and confidentiality of these interviews. Interviews were conducted in places agreed on mutually by each participant and the author, usually at the organizations where recruiting took place but other times at participant homes. Due to the sensitive nature of interview questions regarding political attitudes and violence exposure, the author ensured that such questions were worded following best practices to avoid re-traumatization. In accordance with IRB requirements, all participants

were informed in Arabic of the study's aims and how their information would be used, and all gave verbal consent before beginning the interview. Participants were reminded that they could terminate the interview at any time or skip questions they did not want to answer for any reason. All but one participant agreed for their interview to be audio-recorded in order to be transcribed verbatim for data analysis. To protect participants' identities, all were randomly assigned pseudonyms drawn from a list of common Arabic names based on gender.

Given the importance of precise language for interpretation in qualitative analysis, interviews were conducted with the assistance of a translator. The translator was a student at a local university who is fluent in both Arabic and English and who identified as a Palestinian. Before conducting interviews, the author held a training with the translator to clarify informed consent and interviewing procedures, as well as review standards of research confidentiality and sensitivity. To ensure that translations were as accurate as possible for text-based analysis, audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by a second translator, a Syrian student at the researcher's home university. This allowed for any potential translation errors to be identified and considered during data analysis.

### Qualitative Coding and Data Analysis

To analyze interview data, the researcher conducted qualitative coding using the software NVivo. The researcher imported all interview transcripts from both datasets into a single database and systematically processed each interview based on a single codebook (see in Appendix). Each interview was coded for themes relating to the participant's: 1) background and experiences during conflict, 2) conflict frames, 3) perceptions of conflict actors, and 4) transitional justice preferences. The codebook included both descriptive and analytic codes, which enabled the researcher to classify and selectively extract participants' statements from interviews for further analysis. Each section of the codebook is briefly described below:

- 1) Participant Background and Experiences During Conflict – codes in this section captured participant descriptions of their lives before and during the conflict, as well as at the time of the interview. These codes organized demographic information about each participant's sect, occupation, education, and familial background. For participants who were refugees, a code called “refugee narrative” captured the details of their migration experience. This section also included codes for “victimization” and “violence exposure”

to capture participants' descriptions of the crimes or human rights abuses that they personally experienced, saw, or heard about.

- 2) Conflict Frames – codes in this section captured the various ways participants framed the conflict in Syria. This included a general code for “conflict cause,” which identified any discussion about the cause of the violence. Codes also focused on gauging participants' perceptions of the nature of the conflict, including their views on “peace prospects” and “reconciliation prospects,” qualified with “future pessimism” and “future optimism.” In addition, the author was interested in how specific, pre-conceived frames were employed to explain the Syrian conflict. Specifically, this study drew from the four conflict frames investigated by Corstange & York (2018) in their survey-based study of civil war narratives among Syrian refugees in Lebanon. These frames included: Sectarianism (Sunni vs. Alawites), Democracy v. Dictatorship, Religion v. Secularism, and Foreign Intervention (see Corstange & York, 2018, p. 446). Descriptions of these frames as they were defined for the present study are included in the table below:

*Table 2: Definitions of Key Conflict Frames*

<b>Conflict Frame Definition</b>	<b>How It Was Identified</b>
<p><b>1) Democracy v. Dictatorship</b> The conflict is a competition between democracy and dictatorship for the political organization of the country.</p>	Participants may reference protests in 2011, make a claim about the role of “freedom” as a motivator, or specifically mention President Assad’s removal or hold on power.
<p><b>2) Foreign Intervention</b> The conflict is about the competing interests of foreigners in Syria.</p>	Participants may reference specific foreign states and their involvement or claim that “foreign fighters” generally are driving the violence.
<p><b>3) Sectarianism</b> The conflict is between the Sunni and Alawite sects of Islam in Syria.</p>	Participants may describe a proxy war between Iran/Saudi Arabia, claim that Assad’s regime favors/defends the Alawite minority, or argue that sect became an issue during the conflict (in contrast to perceived social harmony before).
<p><b>4) Religion v. Secularism</b> The conflict is about the role of religion in politics in Syria.</p>	Participants may describe the secular Arab nationalism of Assad’s Baath party or emphasize the role of Sunni opposition groups with theocratic visions of governance (ex. JAN / ISIS).
<p><b>5) Economic Cause</b> The conflict is driven by economic interests, at the individual or societal levels.</p>	Participants may describe corruption as a cause, reference economic inequality, or claim individuals are trying to take advantage of or profit from the violence.

- 3) Perceptions of Conflict Actors – codes in this section captured participant descriptions of the various actors involved in the conflict. Specifically, this included descriptive codes to capture each participant’s views of their in-group and out-group, organized by regime stance (explained further below). In addition, codes in this section captured the use of specific delegitimizing labels, such as “criminal,” “thief or gangster,” “traitor,” and “terrorist,” as well as any instances of “dehumanization.” Codes were also applied to perceptions of the power, status, and goal compatibility of the “other” in line with the components identified in Image Theory (see Herrmann, 2013).
  
- 4) Transitional Justice Preferences – codes in this section included participants’ “general justice preference,” as well as their “justice preference rationale.” The researcher also coded for a litany of transitional justice mechanisms, although trials, truth commissions, and reparations were the three mechanisms addressed most often. Descriptions of justice preferences were further classified as “favor,” “oppose,” or “ambiguous.” In particular, the “truth commission\_favor” code was applied only if the participant agreed to conditional amnesty based on truth-telling, as is characteristic of this mechanism. Additionally, attitudes about the “death penalty” as a form of punishment and mentions of “forgiveness” were captured by codes in this section.

During analysis, all participants were initially classified as either “pro-regime” or “anti-regime.” This study uses regime stance as the primary point of reference for determining participants’ in-groups and out-groups, since the Syrian conflict is considered a *civil war*, between the state and various non-state actors (though this is not intended to minimize the relevance of foreign intervention or opposition in-fighting during the conflict). Here, the Syrian “regime” includes President Assad, the Syrian government, the Syrian army, and other pro-government forces, like the security services. The Syrian “opposition” consists of any armed group in competition with the Syrian regime (though these groups may also be competing with others simultaneously). Among this sample, when participants mentioned specific opposition groups, they primarily referenced the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN) (in 2013), and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) (in 2018). Participants consistently identified regime actors as constituting a single, unified “side,” making it an appropriate point of reference. In addition, the

interviews from SJAC’s dataset came pre-sorted based on regime stance; the author reviewed each interview and agreed with each of these classifications.

After coding each interview, the researcher wrote memos summarizing each participant’s perspective based on the themes outlined for the codebook above. During this memoing process, the researcher noted patterns emerging across interviews. Specifically, the researcher noted stark differences in perspectives relating to conflict frames, perceptions of conflict actors, and transitional justice preferences *within* the two regime stance categories. In order to further analyze the nuances of these differences, the researcher decided to conceptualize “regime stance” as a spectrum with varying degrees, rather than as a binary category. Using the summary memos, the researcher sorted participants into sub-categories within their “regime stance” based on the qualitative similarity of their perspectives. This categorization is depicted in the table below (boxes highlighted in black denote the author’s interviewees):

*Table 3: Summary of Participant Categorization by Regime Stance*

Anti-Regime			Neutral	Pro-Regime		
Extreme Anti-Regime (n = 9)	Solid Anti-Regime (n = 12)	Leaning Anti-Regime (n = 4)		Leaning Pro-Regime (n = 6)	Solid Pro-Regime (n = 3)	Extreme Pro-Regime (n = 10)
Fatima	Ahmad	Katya	Neutral	Hana	Leila	Hakim
Gamil	Daud	Aya		Hassan	Nasrin	Hisham
Ibrahim	Faisal	Amir		Khadija	Tariq	Issam
Karem	Faraj	Abdullah		Dana		Khalifah
Khalid	Hamza			Besma		Masoud
Malik	Huda			Aziza		Qasim
Nawaf	Jamila					Salim
Nawal	Maryam					Zahra
Omar	Samira					Zaynab
	Rabia					Yasser
	Dalia					
	Adil					

What emerged from this inductive process was a classification of like-minded participants as “extreme,” “solid,” or “leaning” within their “regime stance” categories. By assigning each participant in the database an attribute titled “Opinion Cluster” based on these categories (ex. a participant may be classified as “Extreme Pro-Regime” or “Solid Anti-Regime”), the researcher was able to leverage NVivo’s matrix coding function to compare instances of the other codes within the project codebook against these categories. By cross-

referencing ideas about conflict frames, perceptions of conflict actors, and transitional justice preferences both within and between these categories, the researcher was able to define criteria common to each Opinion Cluster (detailed below in Findings).

These Opinion Clusters function as ideal types, grounded in the qualitative data observed in this study. This means that while not every participant fit perfectly with the criteria defining their Opinion Cluster, when viewing participants in each category as a group, certain characteristics appeared “clustered” together in meaningful ways. Thus, while these categories may oversimplify the complexities of each participant’s unique perspective, they are useful constructs for conceptualizing the connections between conflict frames, perceptions of conflict actors, and transitional justice preferences. What follows in the Findings section is a breakdown of each Opinion Cluster, with pull quotes from participants demonstrating the characteristics specific to each category.

### Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this study is that it draws from a small and unrepresentative sample; therefore, its findings are not generalizable, even for the Syrian case. Rather than employing quantitative methods to obtain more generalizable results, this study leverages qualitative methods to investigate and describe the social construction of individuals’ transitional justice preferences to posit explanations grounded in the complexities of human experience. As such, this study contributes to the development of new explanatory frameworks about transitional justice preferences, which can defensibly be obtained from a small “n” sample evaluated as a case study (Small, 2009). While some of the Opinion Clusters described below have as few as three participants, the views they expressed were qualitatively distinct from the other categories. These various perspectives are important to consider for their uniqueness, though the sizes of the Opinion Clusters give no indication of the actual frequency of these perspectives among the Syrian population. Further, while the Syrian case represents a unique cross-section of social, political, and economic factors, it shares commonalities with other contemporary conflicts, such that lessons learned from the Syrian case (and even this small sample of Syrians) may be useful for understanding individuals’ perspectives in related contexts.

Disparities between the two interview datasets used in this study presented another challenge. For example, the interview guides used by the author and the interviewers for SJAC’s

dataset were different; thus, even when questions addressed the same topic (ex. preferences for trials), they were sometimes framed differently. Accordingly, while the author could ask open-ended, probing questions during her own interviews to uncover participants' deeper meanings, there was no way to obtain more detailed information from participants in the SJAC dataset when their responses were unclear or insufficient. Further, the SJAC interviews took a more structured format, meaning there were fewer opportunities for participants to freely proffer information most relevant to them, and they were often much shorter than the author's interviews, narrowing the scope of topics that could be considered in analysis. Finally, the time differential between the datasets, 2013 to 2018, was substantial (see Case Background for an overview of each year). This meant that different contextual factors might have impacted differences observed between participants in these datasets. In particular, the author suspects that more of her 2018 interviewees were categorized in the "leaning" categories due in part to increased violence exposure and war weariness than their 2013 counterparts. Despite these differences, the two datasets were similar enough overall to allow for meaningful comparisons between them to answer this study's research questions.

It should also be noted that the combined dataset used for this study was missing values for some of the criteria the author used to construct the Opinion Clusters. For example, consider opinions on the death penalty. While the author asked explicitly about the death penalty among her interviewees, this question was *not* asked among those in SJAC's dataset. Thus, many interviews were coded at "no data" for the death penalty. However, spontaneous references to the death penalty *were* prevalent among certain participants in SJAC's dataset. The author interprets these individuals' insistence on having their opinion about the death penalty known—without being directly solicited or primed—as a strong indicator of its importance to them. The author treated other criteria that were not asked about directly or consistently—but nevertheless emerged inductively in the data—in a similar this way. As a result of this missing data, it would be misleading to report for example that "n" out of 44 total participants favored the death penalty. Therefore, the author represents this study's findings using non-numerical language, such as "some" or "most," to approximate the prevalence of these themes among participants without distorting perceptions with unnecessary quantification. When numbers *are* reported below, they refer exclusively to instances when there were no missing values, and the author has determined numerical data would be meaningful.

## Findings

This study found that participants clustered around three distinct categories based on qualitative differences in their perceptions of us vs. them, framing of the Syrian conflict, and transitional justice preferences. These three Opinion Clusters—extreme, solid, and leaning—constitute a spectrum of political opinion across both regime supporters and opponents. Below, each Opinion Cluster is defined in-depth based on examples from interview data. Specifically, each of the six subsections—ranging from Extreme Anti-Regime to Leaning Pro-Regime—includes a demographic summary of the participants classified in that category, followed by descriptions of the conflict-related ideologies they expressed, and concluding with explanations of their transitional justice preferences. This section concludes overall with a chart summarizing the defining criteria for all six Opinion Clusters.

### Extreme Anti-Regime

Nine (9) participants in this study fit the “Extreme Anti-Regime” category. As the chart below indicates, more than half of these individuals were Sunni men. The average age in this category was 36 years, with 78 percent men, 67 percent Sunnis, and 22 percent refugees or internally displaced persons. These participants came from diverse locations in Syria and represented various occupations. All nine of these individuals were interviewed for SJAC’s dataset in 2013.

*Table 4: Demographics for Extreme Anti-Regime Category (n=9)*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Religious Sect	Home in Syria	Refugee Status	Interview Year	Occupation	Education
Fatima	F	29	Sunni	Hama	Yes	2013	Housewife	Secondary
Gamil	M	34	Sunni	Damascus	No	2013	Salesman	Elementary
Ibrahim	M	45	Sunni	Raqqah	No	2013	Barber	Secondary
Karem	M	30	Sunni	Hama	No	2013	Merchant	University
Khalid	M	34	Sunni	Raqqah	No	2013	Painter	Secondary
Malik	M	40	Sunni	Hama	No	2013	Trader	Grade 8
Nawaf	M	32	Unknown	Qamishli	No	2013	Nurse	Technical
Nawal	F	34	Sunni	Raqqah	No	2013	Unemployed	Secondary
Omar	M	50	Christian	Homs	IDP	2013	Trader	Secondary

### *I. Perceptions of Us vs. Them & Conflict Framing*

In terms of their perceptions of regime actors, Extreme Anti-Regime individuals expressed strong dehumanizing language alongside other delegitimization techniques, constituting a rigid “us vs. them” mentality. Participants attributed a morally inferior status to regime actors, reflected in both animalistic and mechanistic dehumanization. For example, referring to President Assad, Khalid said, “He is a ravenous beast, and his claws ravage the beloved country’s body.” Additionally, Nawaf characterized President Assad as, “A killing and destruction machine who only cares for his best interests and keeping the presidency chair even if it was on (sic) the expense of all Syrians...”

As these examples also attest, Extreme Anti-Regime individuals tended to delegitimize the regime by claiming it was unpatriotic and failed to represent the interests of all Syrians. This narrative often coincided with the glorification of opposition forces and the neutralization of violence committed by opposition actors as self-defense. For example, Nawaf said:

“At first we went out peacefully asking for reforms, we did not have and did not think of having weapons until the violence and abuse started, so we had to defend ourselves against that criminal killing machine, he is the one who should be held accountable.”

Extreme Anti-Regime individuals generally framed the conflict as zero sum. Specifically, most were pessimistic about reconciliation prospects with their perceived opponents. For example, Fatima said, “We can’t return and live with them and tell them that they are welcome, after what they have done. I can’t see those who slaughtered my son, dad and my brother in front of me and keep silent.” Several Extreme Anti-Regime individuals expressed the will to exterminate anyone affiliated with the regime in Syria. For example, Khalid said, “The country is destroyed and destructed because of Bashar; he’s holding the ruling chair with his arms and legs... The decisive military [victory] is the best way to get rid of all Assad’s regime pollutants.” Along these lines, most participants in this category insisted that victory for opposition forces was the only solution to the Syrian conflict, refusing any possibility of a negotiated settlement.

Individuals in the “extreme” category across regime stances generally expressed both pessimistic reconciliation prospects and an insistence on victory (see the “Extreme Pro-Regime” category below). However, the narratives individuals on each side proffered about the core issues driving the Syrian conflict diverged dramatically. For their part, Extreme Anti-Regime

individuals primarily used Democracy v. Dictatorship framing to explain the conflict. For example, Karem said:

“At the beginning of the revolution we came out peacefully asking for reforms, but this regime knows nothing but oppressing, killing, and torturing demonstrators. We had therefore to face it militarily...It is not right to say that both sides committed violations because we are protecting ourselves from the machine of death and oppression.”

As this quote demonstrates, some participants linked the Democracy v. Dictatorship conflict frame with dehumanization of the regime and blaming the government for the violence.

## *II. Transitional Justice Preferences & Rationales*

All nine Extreme Anti-Regime participants supported trials to pursue justice in Syria. Often, these participants assumed that trials would be led by a post-Assad government and would be trying primarily regime supporters, aligning with their group’s political interests. Dehumanizing language appeared throughout their rationales. For example, Omar said:

“Holding trials would be the best solution, because truth commissions would not restore the dignity of those we lost in the face of Assad’s killing machine and his bloodthirsty army. Trials would punish those criminals...”

Further, individuals in this category tended to advocate for harsh punishments, including the death penalty. Malik said, “They should be held accountable with the maximum penalties, as I said before we do not accept anything other than execution or torture to death, because they have no conscience or heart.” Most participants insisted that President Assad receive the death penalty, while several argued that all regime supporters should be killed. This included Khalid, who said about President Assad: “...all [the] world’s leaders are to protect their people but this as I told you is a donkey [who] knows only how to hit, I am against that he lives in exile nor in Syria, Bashar and his supporters should die.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly given their emphasis on retributive justice, individuals in this category largely refused the truth commission option. Their rationales for opposing a truth commission centered on claims to a right to retributive justice, as well as arguments that amnesty was unacceptable. Often, they employed dehumanizing language against perceived perpetrators. For example, Ibrahim said:

“The guilty responsible (sic) should get his penalty, this gangster has no pity or mercy, and you’re saying to let them go free, all these massacres and innocent victims and you say let them free, these are slaughterers and killers...certainly execution is too little with them.”

Most Extreme Anti-Regime individuals claimed that punishment could prevent future violence. This argument also appeared in criticisms of a truth commission, as Khalid said, “If we let them go, this will be a game, whoever wants to steal could steal, whoever wants to kill could do that too and if they were caught, they only confess and after they will go free. This thing is not acceptable at all.”

Finally, most Extreme Anti-Regime participants supported reparations on the conditions that their side receive the benefits and anyone associated with the regime be excluded from the program. For example, Karem said: “Those who took part in the destruction and looting or helped this bloodthirsty criminal with his evils cannot be compensated for they do not deserve it even if they had some losses.” Thus, reparations were viewed by individuals in this category as a politicized endeavor that could bolster their side at the expense of a strongly delegitimized other.

### Extreme Pro-Regime

Ten (10) participants in this study were classified as “Extreme Pro-Regime.” These individuals had an average age of 39, with 80 percent men and 40 percent Sunnis. Notably, no Extreme Pro-Regime individuals were refugees or internally displaced persons, and all were interviewed in 2013 for SJAC’s dataset.

*Table 5: Demographics for Extreme Pro-Regime Category (n=10)*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Religious Sect	Home in Syria	Refugee Status	Interview Year	Occupation	Education
Hakim	M	25	Alawite	Damascus	No	2013	Sales manager	University
Hisham	M	32	Sunni	Hama	No	2013	Blacksmith	Secondary
Issam	M	42	Sunni	Hama	No	2013	Taxi driver	Grade 8
Khalifah	M	48	Sunni	Raqqah	No	2013	Mechanic	Secondary
Masoud	M	38	Sunni	Unknown	No	2013	Baker	Secondary
Qasim	M	34	Unknown	Qamishli	No	2013	Clothes dealer	University
Salim	M	42	Alawite	Tartous	No	2013	Food trader	Grade 7
Yasser	M	56	Christian	Damascus	No	2013	Food trader	Business admin
Zahra	F	35	Alawite	Unknown	No	2013	Housewife	Secondary
Zaynab	F	36	Christian	Unknown	No	2013	Décor engineer	University

### *I. Perceptions of Us vs. Them & Conflict Framing*

Extreme Pro-Regime individuals expressed strong delegitimization of opposition forces, primarily by using dehumanizing language and the labels “traitor,” “terrorist,” and “mercenary.” Specifically, all ten participants in this category delegitimized opposition forces by claiming they were controlled by foreigners. For example, Salim said the FSA, “is an animal not an army...they are a group of mercenaries who want to control a country with any price, even on (sic) the expense of the Syrian blood...” Delegitimization of the other as “foreign” was paired with patriotic and nationalist appeals to the regime. As Salim further explained, “...they did not live in Syria and they have a Western politics against the resistant national Syria, how can we live with those mercenary traitors who have been bought by the Gulf countries...” Many Extreme Pro-Regime individuals neutralized violence committed by the Syrian army by claiming they were protecting the homeland. As Zahra said:

“Of course we should prosecute the criminals. The Syrian army, however, cannot be prosecuted because it is supposed to protect the country inside and outside. The Takfiris who brought arms and murdered people should be prosecuted.”

Like their anti-regime counterparts, Extreme Pro-Regime participants tended to view the conflict as zero sum. They were largely pessimistic about reconciliation prospects, arguing that coexisting with their perceived opponents would be difficult, if not impossible. For example, Zaynab said, “Innocent Syrians can go back to their houses and neighborhoods, but those who killed and looted should go to hell. They do not deserve to live in Syria...” Many claimed opposition forces should be exterminated or forced to leave Syria. This coincided with an insistence on military victory for the regime and dehumanizing language. As Qasim said, “I prefer fighting until Bashar Assad and all who stood beside him win because those infidels and pork don’t deserve to live as they destroyed our houses, killed millions of innocent kids...”

All ten Extreme Pro-Regime individuals framed the conflict as Foreign Intervention, blaming external actors for the violence, including the United States, France, Israel, and the Gulf countries. Along these lines, several participants argued that foreign countries had exported terrorists to Syria to support the opposition, or that there was an international conspiracy against the Syrian government. For example, Khalifah said, “Isn’t it ill-gotten to destroy the country of peace and stability by mercenaries with dealing with petroleum countries and the Israelis and

American plans to demolish our country.” Notably, most Extreme Pro-Regime individuals directly refuted Democracy v. Dictatorship framing of the conflict, claiming that it was a farce to disguise the role of foreign intervention. For example, Masoud said:

“There should be a decisive victory for our army, because these degraded mercenaries has (sic) to be eliminated, they do not want freedom for this country, they want to destroy it and implement foreign American projects.”

Foreign Intervention framing, paired with delegitimization based on the idea of “foreign-ness,” constituted an incredibly coherent us vs. them narrative—it’s Syria against the world.

## *II. Transitional Justice Preferences & Rationales*

All ten Extreme Pro-Regime participants favored the implementation of trials as a mechanism of transitional justice, mostly led by the Syrian government. For example, Salim said, “...anyone who stood against Bashar and the country should be punished, you should understand that we want Bashar punishing all the pigs and we do not accept anything else...” While calling for punishment for a dehumanized “them,” notions of patriotism inspired leniency toward “us.” Several articulated that the regime’s forces should be exempted from trials, which should primarily prosecute members of the opposition. For example, Masoud said, “...who pushed the country into this sedition are these traitor mercenaries, they should stand in front of the Syrian judiciary and be held accountable.” Further, most participants in this category favored the death penalty and other harsh punishments. For example, Khalifah said, “Traitors should be destructed (sic) by our valiant army not only send them to prison, no they should be killed because they are criminals against the country, people and army.”

Individuals in this category also overwhelmingly opposed the idea of a truth commission. Many argued that the tradeoff of truth for amnesty was unacceptable. For example, Hakim said, “...there is a lot of opposition stained with blood, it is not reasonable to forgive them even if they confess; they shall be trailed (sic) and judged under the supervision of the Syrian judiciary system.” Most argued that trials were necessary to prevent future violence, as Salim said, “How can we forgive those who killed children and destroyed the country? They should be punished even if they confessed with their crimes, if we let them go they will return again, so it is better to get rid of them.” Notably, most Extreme Pro-Regime participants also refused a truth commission on the grounds that it could be used as a tool by international actors to pursue their

interests in Syria. This strongly indicates the influence of Foreign Intervention framing on this justice preference rationale. For example, Yasser said:

“I am against the idea of having an outside interference neither with the solution nor with help or investigating, the honorable people of Syria are capable of solving their problems and helping each other. These commissions (sic) decisions are known before they are declared, they will be against the president and the current regime, they will serve America's projects to protect Israel.”

Finally, most Extreme Pro-Regime individuals favored a reparations program, so long as it excluded opposition supporters. For example, Zaynab said, “The innocent victims whose houses were destroyed and businesses stopped deserve to be compensated most. Those who killed, destroyed, and helped the extremists enter Syria should be punished to be an example for others.” In sum, Extreme Pro-Regime individuals viewed transitional justice as a politicized process that should be implemented by and for the winner of the conflict.

### Solid Anti-Regime

The largest category (n=12) was “Solid Anti-Regime,” consisting of over 25 percent of participants. Notably, this category was divided evenly between men and women, as well as between participants interviewed within and outside of Syria. The average age was 36 years. Of these participants, 83 percent were Sunnis and 42 percent were from Damascus. This category included two of the author’s original interviews conducted in 2018.

*Table 6: Demographics for Solid Anti-Regime Category (n=12)*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Religious Sect	Home in Syria	Refugee Status	Interview Year	Occupation	Education
Adil	M	48	Sunni	Aleppo	Yes	2018	Artist	Some high school
Ahmad	M	31	Sunni	Khan Shekhon	Yes	2013	Student	University
Dalia	F	36	Sunni	Deraa	Yes	2018	Housewife	9th grade
Daud	M	25	Sunni	Damascus	Yes	2013	Pharmacist	University
Faisal	M	50	Sunni	Homs	Yes	2013	Trader	Elementary
Faraj	M	24	Sunni	Damascus	No	2013	Unemployed	University
Hamza	M	38	Sunni	Damascus	No	2013	Clothing manufacturer	Secondary
Huda	F	48	Sunni	Damascus	Yes	2013	Housewife	Elementary
Jamila	F	28	Sunni	Damascus	IDP	2013	Unemployed teacher	University
Maryam	F	40	Sunni	Hama	No	2013	Housewife	Secondary
Rabia	F	37	Unknown	Qamishli	No	2013	Housewife	Grade 8
Samira	F	30	Alawite	Tartous	No	2013	Teacher	University

### I. *Perceptions of Us vs. Them & Conflict Framing*

Solid Anti-Regime participants clearly supported opposition forces over the regime and were firmly committed to their side's view. However, name-calling against the regime was less reflective of animalistic or mechanistic dehumanization than their "extreme" counterparts. Regime actors were delegitimized using other labels. For example, Faisal said, "Whoever follows the regime is a murderer and a criminal..." Unlike their "extreme" counterparts, Solid Anti-Regime individuals demonstrated weaker in-group glorification, for example by recognizing that opposition forces were not totally without fault. As Daud said, "The Free Army nowadays is not good as it was before... but most of the violations that Free Army committed wouldn't reach to those of the Regular Army..."

Some also demonstrated a willingness to neutralize violence committed by the *other* side, claiming that regime supporters might be forced to commit violence. Maryam said, "Not everyone wants to kill, such as the soldier who executes orders...." Similarly, Ahmad suspected regime supporters were deceived, saying:

"For Bashar Assad if all Alawis died he will (sic) not care about them, the most important [thing] for him is that he will keep in the authority, keeps leading Syria, keeps gathering money he and his followers, this is his only care. I hope from (sic) Alawis from now to know with whom they are walking, with whom they are working, to whom they are giving their souls..."

Coinciding with these more nuanced views of the "other," Solid Anti-Regime individuals were generally optimistic about reconciliation prospects, even if they clearly favored an outcome to the conflict that suited their political interests. For example, Maryam said, "We have been living together for ages, and without the disorder of the regime we wouldn't have problems among us as a nation." Several individuals in this category argued that sectarian tensions could be reversed or that people with different opinions could live together in a free, post-conflict society. For example, Jamila said, "...eventually our homeland is for all, so I have to accept others and they have to accept me without any problems and sectarian conflicts."

Further, most Solid Anti-Regime individuals were willing to support a negotiated settlement with the Syrian government, rather than insisting on military victory. For example, Faisal said he preferred, "To have a peaceful settlement and all the crisis end, because we hate

the blood flow...” However, several insisted on President Assad’s removal as a condition of such a peace agreement, clearly demonstrating the primacy of their political interests. As Huda said, “If the negotiation results with him leaving the presidency then yes, however if the negotiation do (sic) not include him leaving then no.”

In terms of conflict frames, several Solid Anti-Regime participants exhibited Democracy v. Dictatorship framing, like their “extreme” counterparts. For example, Dalia described how the conflict began with the regime’s response to protests:

“Every time they’d protest, they mention that they want rights, he would meet them with air strikes. If he from the beginning listened to the people, and gave them what they wanted, we would not have reached this point.”

Others argued that Foreign Intervention on President Assad’s behalf helped explain the violence. For example, Samira said, “The problem and crisis in Syria was aggravated because of the foreign intervention...” Many participants in this category also mentioned Sectarianism, though there was no clear consensus about its role. For some like Faraj, Sectarianism framing intersected with Democracy v. Dictatorship framing: “The Syrian Army is for a specific sect; its leaders are from a specific sect too. Some of its members are helpless (they can’t do anything); it is an army to protect the regime not the country and citizens.” Thus, those in the Solid Anti-Regime category demonstrated more diverse perspectives on the conflict than those at the “extreme.”

## *II. Transitional Justice Preferences & Rationales*

All twelve Solid Anti-Regime individuals favored the imposition of trials. Though, unlike their “extreme” counterparts, several Solid Anti-Regime participants acknowledged that all sides need to be held accountable. For example, Faisal said, “Any of the sides, whoever committed a crime should be held accountable no matter what.” Similarly, Adil said, “Even the civilians are involved in the crimes in Syria, even the civilians...if crimes of corruption and war crimes were open, it would reach everyone in Syria.” Many argued that trials were necessary to prevent future crimes or revenge killings, including Samira, who said, “...All these acts will be repeated for not having a penalty...It’s necessary to know the truth but the punishment is a must to stop these who think to do that later.” Further, Dalia said:

“It is important that they be tried...if for example, they tried him, the opposing side’s hatred may be reduced, perhaps, and that would be him receiving his punishment. But if they do not punish him, there would be the possibility for the opposing side to seek revenge from him.”

For some, this deterrent effect was directly linked to Democracy v. Dictatorship framing, as Rabia said, “...Bashar should be punished and be an example for each one who thinks to constrain against his people.” While arguments favoring retribution were common, there was no clear consensus on the use of the death penalty among “solid” individuals.

Most Solid Anti-Regime participants also opposed the creation of a truth commission for Syria. Specifically, several argued that the truth was already known or the tradeoff of truth for amnesty was unacceptable. For example, Faraj said, “...I think it's a waste of time. All people saw those who killed and who started killing and torturing and who were in the position of self-defense...” Others reiterated the right to retribution against a delegitimized “other” and vindication for their in-group. As Rabia said:

“We don’t want a Truth Commission, we don’t want them to come and allow the criminal goes (sic) free! If the settlement will bring this kind of commission we don’t want settlement. Martyrs blood shouldn’t go like that, who were martyred to liberate the country from the criminal shouldn’t go like that, all this destruction that was caused by him and after all let him goes free.”

However, some Solid-Anti Regime individuals showed limited support for a truth commission, while articulating that it would be difficult to implement. For example, Ahmad said, “[A] Truth commission has advantages and disadvantages, as I told you if it comes to personal issues no, but if it comes to public issues then it is a very good idea, avoiding mistakes that happened and is happening and will happen.”

Finally, most participants in this category favored reparations, although several argued that delegitimized perpetrators should be excluded. For example, Samira said, “Who destroyed their country, caused violations, helped in distributing sedition and hatreds should be punished not only preventing them from compensation for what they did in Syria and its people.” Thus, Solid Anti-Regime individuals presented more of a middle-ground view than their “extreme” counterparts regarding the conflict, its actors, and transitional justice.

## Solid Pro-Regime

Only three individuals fit the “Solid Pro-Regime” category. However, despite the small number, these participants represented a unique perspective that could not be collapsed into the Pro-Regime “extreme” or “leaning” categories. This category included two Sunni women and a Christian man, all from different cities in Syria. They were all interviewed in Syria during 2013, and their average age was 40 years.

*Table 7: Demographics for Solid Pro-Regime Category (n=3)*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Religious Sect	Home in Syria	Refugee Status	Interview Year	Occupation	Education
Leila	F	39	Sunni	Hama	No	2013	Housewife	Grade 7
Nasrin	F	39	Sunni	Raqqah	No	2013	Housewife	Grade 7
Tariq	M	42	Christian	Homs	IDP	2013	Trader	University

### *I. Perceptions of Us vs. Them & Conflict Framing*

As with the Solid Anti-Regime category, Solid Pro-Regime individuals less intensely dehumanized the “other,” even neutralizing violence committed by opposition forces. Tariq argued opposition forces include both good and bad people, saying about the FSA, “We cannot judge it collectively. Some of it (sic) battalions help and protect people, while others are bloodthirsty with foreign connections, and seek to disunite the country and steal its resources.” Additionally, individuals in this category neutralized violence by the other side by claiming they needed guidance and direction; Nasrin said the FSA was “deceived,” and Leila said, “May God show them the right path and bring them back to their country.” At the same time, these individuals demonstrated a strong preference for their in-group, with both Leila and Nasrin glorifying the Syrian army as a patriotic protector. Tariq recognized flaws on the pro-regime side, saying, “The Syrian Army did not deal with the crisis as it should have. Many times it was violent and persecuted lots of people...”

With regards to conflict framing, Solid Pro-Regime individuals tended to be more optimistic about reconciliation prospects, claiming that sectarianism could be reversed or that people could live together again. For example, Tariq said:

“I do not have any problem with those who disagree with me without being disagreeable. The issue though is with the other side, or in fact the politicians involved. If they wanted our safety and security, coexistence would be pacifying for all viewpoints.”

While signaling more openness to reconciliation, these individuals viewed reconciliation through the lens of their political stance, arguing that peace is less about coexistence than it is about opposition supporters assimilating to the regime’s interests. For example, Nasrin said:

“...who accept (sic) the situation and understand the reality of the hard life we live, we will live with them, but whoever tries to harm the country, they better go find somewhere else to live, because Syria is a country of peace and safety and its people will not allow them to continue their ignorance and betrayals.”

All three Solid Pro-Regime participants were also open to a negotiated settlement to end the conflict, while insisting that President Assad could not be removed (similar to their anti-regime counterparts but to alternate ends). Solid Pro-Regime participants’ narratives about the conflict’s cause were dominated by Foreign Intervention, like their “extreme” counterparts, claiming violent extremists were exported to Syria from abroad. For example, Tariq said, “Things have been deteriorating, and we lost security since the Takfiris entered Syria from Maghreb, Europe, and even the U.S. to destroy our heritage and country.” Thus, the three individuals in this category present nearly an equal and opposite perception of the conflict from Solid Anti-Regime participants.

## *II. Transitional Justice Preferences & Rationales*

All three Solid Pro-Regime participants favored trials, citing the need to end the current violence and prevent it in the future. For example, Leila said, “Without trials the chaos would never end.” Like her Solid Anti-Regime counterparts, Nasrin argued that those who committed crimes on both sides of the conflict should be held accountable, saying, “...we cannot let those who committed crimes and violations go free without punishment no matter who they were.” Leila also thought all should be held accountable, however, punishments should be more severe for “foreigners,” in line with Foreign Intervention framing: “The outlaws should be punished and the foreigners who kill here and there should be executed because Syria is not their country.” There was no consensus among these individuals about the death penalty.

Regarding a truth commission, all three participants argued the tradeoff of truth for amnesty was unacceptable. For example, Tariq said:

“...[a truth commission] would be a partial solution that lets criminals go on with their lives without punishment. People would not feel secure if those murders were not prosecuted because everyone would take the law into their hands and chaos would prevail.”

Leila, again, used Foreign Intervention framing in her justification to oppose a truth commission, saying, “How would you release anyone who came to your country to kill and burn, even if they admit their crimes?”

Finally, Solid Pro-Regime individuals echoed their counterparts in the Extreme Pro-Regime category by favoring conditional reparations that excluded their perceived enemies. For example, Leila said, “Everyone should be compensated except the foreign terrorists who were paid by their masters before coming to Syria. Why should those dogs that kill and destroy be compensated?” While individuals in this category employed such delegitimizing language, those in the “solid” categories were generally more willing to argue for justice with respect to all parties than their “extreme” counterparts.

### Leaning Anti-Regime

Relatively few individuals fell into either of the “leaning” categories, though 75 percent of the author’s interviewees in 2018 fit the “leaning” categories. For Leaning Anti-Regime specifically, participants were evenly divided by gender, with an average age of 45. All identified as Muslim and had either refugee or IDP status. Half were also from the city of Aleppo.

*Table 8: Demographics for Leaning Anti-Regime Category (n=4)*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Religious Sect	Home in Syria	Refugee Status	Interview Year	Occupation	Education
Abdullah	M	41	Sunni	Aleppo	Yes	2018	Factory manager	9th grade
Amir	M	51	Muslim	Aleppo	Yes	2018	Crafted soaps	9th grade
Aya	F	38	Muslim	Deraa	Yes	2018	Housewife	7th grade
Katya	F	48	Sunni	Damascus	IDP	2013	Housewife	Secondary

### I. *Perceptions of Us vs. Them & Conflict Framing*

Individuals in this category generally refused to identify themselves with one side of the conflict, claiming that neither the regime nor the opposition sufficiently represented their interests.

Several argued there was a lack of clarity about who started the conflict and who was to blame.

For example, Abdullah said, “In the beginning of the events, when there were instances of deaths, there were numerous reasons. Like, as they say, there were many parties interested in the topic, and no one knew the exact truth.” Similarly, Amir said:

“...the problems began, as they say, little by little [and] continued to progress and develop between the protestors and the government. Like they began to shoot bullets randomly. Either from those people or the others.”

Rather than aligning with a particular party, these individuals identified more strongly with innocent civilians who had been victimized. For example, Amir said, “I’m one of the people who has no relation to the issue or the events. Actually, quite the opposite, I am from the people under the injustice.” Individuals in this category also tended to neutralize violence on both sides, by saying people may have been forced or tricked into fighting. For example, Abdullah said:

“A soldier in the Syrian Army, when he is committing the crimes he is, and the mistakes that he is committing [it] is under the umbrella that he is defending his government and order. This doesn’t give right to the mistakes...”

Despite lacking strong us vs. them attitudes, participants in this category were considered “anti-regime” due to some evidence of their fear of the regime or distaste for the regime’s international backers, such as Russia and Iran. That said, the “leaning” category was characterized by the near neutrality, either as intended or expressed, by the participants.

Regarding conflict framing, most Leaning Anti-Regime category were pessimistic about *peace* prospects, believing that violence was likely to continue. For example, Amir said:

“I hope that the conditions calm down, and the war settles and peace comes to the country. But that’s obvious, everyone wishes that. But unfortunately, reality shows no evidence of such happening.”

This pessimism may be attributed in part to war-weariness and identification with victimized civilians. Despite this, most individuals in this category were generally optimistic about reconciliation prospects, claiming that people of different opinions could live together again. For

example, Katya said, "...I have my own opinion and others do too, I don't care about this and I don't make them my enemies."

In this category, there was no clear consensus about the conflict's cause. However, several participants employed the Democracy v. Dictatorship and Foreign Intervention frames to explain the violence. For example, Abdullah said:

"There are people, for example, that are against the government order...there was something mixed. We had (sic) forces entered into Syria...And we reached a point of diversion (sic) between Syrians inside Syria, that you wouldn't know who is right and who is wrong."

Along these lines, some participants in this category frankly admitted that the cause of the conflict was too complicated to identify. Aya said only God knows why the conflict started. Overall, individuals in the Leaning Anti-Regime category were distinguishable by the absence of strong us vs. them attitudes coinciding with a lack of consensus regarding conflict frames.

## *II. Transitional Justice Preferences & Rationales*

Leaning Anti-Regime participants generally supported trials, claiming that individuals from both sides should be held accountable. However, they also articulated some disadvantages to holding trials. For example, Abdullah argued that peace was the priority, saying, "More important than judgement, the conditions should be stopped." Similarly, Katya said:

"...I prefer they forgive each other as from both sides there are people who were killed and there were problems. It's better they will forgive each other while if they want to account, the story won't end."

Thus, some "leaning" participants articulated a perceived tradeoff between peace and justice, while this perspective was not substantially represented by individuals in either the "solid" or "extreme" categories. Though some individuals in this category preferred forgetting or forgiving, others favored retribution, with two voicing conditional support for the death penalty.

Along those lines, all four individuals in this category supported the idea of a truth commission. Specifically, Abdullah argued for a truth commission by neutralizing the violence on both sides, saying: "I don't have an issue with this idea. Because most of the people who are

there are ordered people. They are, in their beliefs, they are fighting for the right cause and they are defending the truth.” Katya echoed this argument, saying:

“There may be some people who were forced to fight and forced to kill even [if] they didn’t want to do so; they may [have] killed somebody either from this side or the other side...there may be some from the government who wanted to split but he couldn’t, both sides may be forced to do these things...It’s better to forgive as much as you can.”

Despite largely favoring a truth commission, most thought the idea was unlikely to achieve widespread support and be implemented in Syria. For example, Katya said, “In general, the truth commission is good, but I think it’s too far to be existed, no party will accept this thing...”

Similarly, Amir said:

“It may happen. However, sometimes this doesn’t work. Like today there are people, who lost his son, or his son found out who killed his family, is he going to be silent? No, he will not be silent nor will he accept this.”

Finally, all four individuals supported a reparations program, though with no clear consensus on how to implement one. For example, Amir said, “Who is going to pay them the reparations? I am one of the people. My house was destroyed. Who is going to compensate me?” Thus, the “leaning” category captures distinct transitional justice preferences from the “solid” or “extreme” categories, as it is the only category in which participants rationalized a truth commission.

### Leaning Pro-Regime

Six participants were categorized as “Leaning Pro-Regime.” Notably, 83 percent were women, ranging in age from 20 to 58 years, with an average age of 39 years. These participants represented various religious sects and occupations, though half were from Aleppo. In this category, 33 percent were refugees and 50 percent were interviewed by the author in 2018.

*Table 9: Demographics for Leaning Pro-Regime Category (n=6)*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Religious Sect	Home in Syria	Refugee Status	Interview Year	Occupation	Education
Aziza	F	37	None	Aleppo	Yes	2018	Teacher	Post-secondary
Besma	F	51	Christian	Tartous	No	2018	Dentist	University
Dana	F	20	Muslim	Aleppo	Yes	2018	Student	In university
Hana	F	58	Sunni	Damascus	No	2013	Housewife	Preparatory
Hassan	M	40	Shiite	Unknown	No	2013	Engineer	University
Khadija	F	25	Sunni	Aleppo	No	2013	Marketing	Secondary

### *I. Perceptions of Us vs. Them & Conflict Framing*

Most participants in this category did not explicitly identify with a party in the conflict. For example, Hana prioritized peace over allegiances, saying, "...I don't care about anyone, but I only care about the country's situation and that people love each other, live in peace and security, and help Syria to return to prosperity again." Dana described feeling caught in-between the two sides, saying, "...they don't get hurt, but we get hurt...we are the normal people, and like the people who, like the government and like other sides, they did not get hurt, they just fight." Overall, individuals in the "leaning" category tended to emphasize the suffering faced by civilians over political opinions about who should win the conflict.

Like their Leaning Anti-Regime counterparts, participants in this category tended to neutralize violence or identify faults on both sides. For example, Hana said, "No one is prevented from mistakes and no one is perfect..." Similarly, Khadija said, "I am not satisfied by either parties, neither the regime satisfies nor the other party is good (sic)..." Besma described the motivations of fighters, saying:

"They have their own leanings. In their view, they are defending their mission. Everyone has their own mission. Their foundation is the opposite of that one. There is no respect, there is no respect between each other, so they faced each other with violence."

Aziza claimed that those committing violence were brainwashed, saying, "They are in need, like, not only of guidance and direction, but to return to their old paths. They should know the extent of harm they caused..." Lacking a strong partisan preference, these individuals were considered "pro-regime" based on weak support for regime actors over others. Specifically, half of these individuals held negative views about JAN or other Islamist opposition groups, contributing to their categorization as "pro-regime."

With regards conflict framing, Leaning Pro-Regime individuals were generally optimistic about reconciliation prospects. For example, Khadija argued that sectarianism could be reversed, referring to a utopian past of social harmony; she said:

"From the past we are a symbiotic people, with no sectarianism or sedition which they tried to instill whether they were of those or that, that's why when we return to Syria why should people treat us bad, why even there should be problems..."

Hassan also rejected social divisions, saying, “Syria is for all Syrian[s].” Individuals in this category were also open to a negotiated settlement to end the conflict, with two expressing no strong opinion about whether President Assad should stay in power.

As with their anti-regime counterparts, those in the Leaning Pro-Regime category had mixed ideas about the conflict cause. Dana described her confusion: “I don’t [think] there’s a person that this (sic) days knows until now who is start the fight. Yeah, and you have to know that it’s not one side and two side, there’s a lot of sides.” Many invoked Foreign Intervention framing, like other pro-regime participants. However, most also emphasized the role of sectarianism in the ongoing conflict. Notably, Besma employed this framing prognostically, arguing that diminishing the salience of sectarian differences was necessary to create a just, post-conflict society; she said:

“[The government] should teach people that there is no differential treatment, that they respect each other and love each other. That we are the sons of one country. Not that he is of one religion and the other has another different religion.”

## *II. Transitional Justice Preferences & Rationales*

All six participants in this category favored trials as a mechanism of transitional justice, most claiming individuals from both parties should be held accountable. For example, Besma said, “Justice needs to be applied to everyone. The law needs to be applied to everyone.” Rationales in favor of trials included the need for punishment to prevent future crimes. For example, Aziza said, “...dependent on his crime, he has to be punished so he doesn’t go back to doing these things.” However, Khadija argued that pursuing accountability might prolong the conflict, saying, “I think we should forget and move forward...because we lost many things and if we wanted accountability, we will need fifteen years more.” Individuals in this category expressed little support for the death penalty, largely focused on reconciliation and forgiveness as the preferred outputs of a transitional justice process.

Accordingly, all participants in this category were interested in the idea of a truth commission, many arguing that a truth commission would be the best solution to reckon with abuses committed on both sides and support reconciliation. For example, Hana said:

“I agree with it and there is no problem, as I told you no one is prevented from making mistakes, some people were deceived and some are needy and accept it, there is no problem to recognize them if they are trialed (sic) and to forgive them...”

Aziza agreed with the essential tradeoff in the design of a truth commission—that knowing the truth is more important than punishment; she said, “...regardless of how severe his punishment is. Or that they removed the punishment, but the important thing is, that I admit what I did. That I talk.” Similarly, Besma argued that pardons might be acceptable under certain conditions, specifically, “If he takes responsibility and fixes his actions, you know. If he takes responsibility that he was mistaken and if he decides to leave the wrong path.” Notably, many participants in this category supported forgiveness. For example, Hassan said, “...these commissions’ duties is (sic) to reveal violations that happened by this party or that so eventually this thing will lead to forgiveness between parties when the involved is recognized.” However, some articulated drawbacks to implementing a truth commission, including Dana, who said, “... it’s [a] bad feeling to lose something or someone, so you cannot like just forgive.”

Everyone in this category also favored the creation of a reparations program, although there was no consensus about how to implement the program. Unlike their “solid” or “extreme” counterparts, some supported unconditional reparations. For example, Khadija argued, “Nobody shouldn’t be compensated, losses were from both sides...” This preference aligned with her perception of the conflict’s actors as equally at fault for the violence. Overall, like their anti-regime counterparts, Leaning Pro-Regime participants favored forgiving and forgetting as alternatives to retributive justice mechanisms.

### Summary of Findings

These findings are summarized in the chart below. Each row represents an Opinion Cluster: leaning, solid, and extreme for each regime stance. The columns are divided thematically between perceptions of us vs. them, conflict framing, and transitional justice preferences, with subsections noted underneath. Each box is shaded based on whether most, some, or few of the participants in that Opinion Cluster exhibited the opinion represented by that column. Those marked “unclear” indicate that there was insufficient data to draw a conclusion for that criterion. The definitional consistency of these Opinion Clusters across regime stances is evident.

*Table 10: Defining Criteria for Six Opinion Clusters*

	Perceptions of Us vs. Them			Conflict Framing				Transitional Justice Preferences			
	Strong delegitimization of the "other"	Strong in-group glorification	Neutralize violence by the "other"	Pessimistic about reconciliation	Insist on victory	Democracy v. Dictatorship framing	Foreign Intervention framing	Favor trials	Oppose truth commission	Conditional reparations	Favor death penalty
Extreme Anti-Regime	Most	Most	Few	Most	Most	Most	Few	Most	Most	Most	Most
Solid Anti-Regime	Some	Some	Some	Some	Some	Most	Some	Most	Most	Most	Few
Leaning Anti-Regime	Few	Few	Most	Few	Few	Unclear	Unclear	Most	Few	Some	Few
Leaning Pro-Regime	Few	Few	Most	Few	Few	Unclear	Some	Most	Few	Some	Few
Solid Pro-Regime	Some	Some	Some	Some	Some	Few	Most	Most	Most	Most	Few
Extreme Pro-Regime	Most	Most	Few	Most	Most	Few	Most	Most	Most	Most	Most

## Discussion

This study's contributions to transitional justice scholarship are two-fold. First, it draws together related concepts about intergroup perceptions during conflict from across disciplinary divides in the literature. Specifically, it expands on Bar-Tal's ethos of conflict by proposing that scholars consider perceptions of us vs. them (encompassing delegitimization, dehumanization, in-group glorification, and neutralization techniques) and conflict framing (including ideas about a conflict's nature and cause) holistically. While it is useful for scholars to consider these factors independently, there is also value in conceptualizing them together as constituting the complex, interrelated ideologies constructed by those affected by conflict. Relying on qualitative data from the Syrian case, this study identifies several ideal type categories that distinguish between like-minded individuals, acting as a model for how scholars might consider the interconnectedness of conflict-related ideologies in future study. Second, this study demonstrates the utility of these categories by illustrating how differences in conflict-related ideologies can help explain differences in individuals' transitional justice preferences. This finding contributes to the growing literature on the determinants of transitional justice preferences, which until now has yet to meaningfully address ideology. It also provides a useful roadmap for transitional justice practitioners, who can better understand the ideological factors contributing to individuals' justice preferences in order to tailor policy interventions.

Drawing from a sample of 44 interviews with Syrians, this study found that both pro- and anti-regime participants could be classified into three distinct Opinion Clusters, based on their perceptions of us vs. them, conflict framing, and transitional justice preferences. Each category is summarized below:

- **Extreme** participants (n=19) exhibited strong us vs. them attitudes characterized by intense dehumanization of their perceived “other,” combined with framing the conflict as zero sum. This led them to view transitional justice as a politicized process that should be co-opted for their in-group’s gain. Their transitional justice preferences were overwhelmingly retributive, advocating for trials with harsh punishments, like the death penalty, leveraged against the other side.
- **Solid** participants (n=15) also exhibited us vs. them attitudes, but with less in-group glorification or outright dehumanization of the perceived “other.” They were more willing to negotiate with the other side and were more amenable to reconciliation, while still strongly advocating for their in-group’s political interests. They also generally favored retributive justice mechanisms in the form of trials, but with less support for the death penalty and more support for trying perpetrators on both sides.
- **Leaning** participants (n=10) did not exhibit strong us vs. them attitudes, with many claiming neutrality or victimhood. They demonstrated a general war-weariness, characterized by pessimistic peace prospects though optimistic reconciliation prospects. They were more likely to hold all sides responsible and to neutralize violence committed by both parties. They generally supported restorative justice mechanisms, including truth commissions and forgiveness, claiming accountability may threaten peace.

These categories illustrate how particular ideas about a conflict and its actors may inform individuals’ transitional justice preferences. When providing explanations for their transitional justice preferences, participants invoked techniques like delegitimization, neutralization, and conflict framing to defend their ideas about who should be held accountable for the violence and how to treat them. This attests to the importance of conflict-related ideologies for the construction of individuals’ transitional justice rationales. Though this study cannot claim that a

direct causal relationship exists between participants' conflict-related ideologies and their transitional justice preferences, it qualitatively illustrates how such ideologies are relevant to individuals' understandings of transitional justice and appear in specific patterns that map onto differences in justice preferences. It is likely that other factors, such as psychological motivators, also influence individuals' transitional justice preferences, either alongside or through their conflict-related ideologies. Future study should further investigate the relationship between conflict-related ideologies and other factors that may determine individuals' preferences.

This study also found important differences between pro- and anti-regime individuals; however, regime stance appeared to be less relevant for understanding transitional justice preferences. Those in the anti-regime categories tended to favor Democracy v. Dictatorship framing of the conflict's cause, while those in the pro-regime categories favored Foreign Intervention framing. These frames trickled down into the language each side employed to delegitimize the other and glorify the self. For example, pro-regime individuals would call the opposition "traitors" and call the regime the "protector of the homeland." While this divergence in conflict framing was represented rhetorically, it did not appear to be meaningfully tied to differences in transitional justice preferences. Rather, the fact that members at the "extremes" strongly delegitimized the other—regardless of the label they chose—was more indicative of their justice preferences. This lends itself to this study's primary categorization of individuals as extreme, solid, or leaning based on a cluster of opinions (beyond framing of the conflict's cause alone) to help explain differences in transitional justice preferences.

While this study demonstrated the existence of these varying perspectives among this sample, it is limited in being unable to determine the frequency of each among the Syrian population. The latter might be valuable to policymakers interested in designing a transitional justice process with mass appeal among Syrians. This knowledge could be obtained through future study by employing quantitative survey methodology among a representative sample, relying on the criteria outlined in this study to conceptualize conflict-related ideologies. This study should be considered as a starting point for future research on the role of ideologies in determining transitional justice preferences, which may add or subtract from these findings by applying its model to new samples and cases.

Additionally, because this study is based on cross-sectional data, its findings are limited in only being able to describe participants' conflict-related ideologies and transitional justice

preferences as they appeared at fixed points in time. However, given their socially-constructed nature, it is reasonable to assume that individuals' ideologies about the conflict—and in turn their transitional justice preferences—are subject to change overtime, especially as the political situation shifts and individuals make sense of new experiences. Differences among participants in this study who were interviewed in 2013 versus 2018 provide some evidence that this may be the case, and specifically that the duration of conflict may be associated with the perspectives outlined in the “leaning” category. Scholars should consider the factors that might cause conflict-related ideologies and transitional justice preferences to change overtime by utilizing longitudinal data. As such, future study can seek to better understand the processes through which these ideas are constructed and deconstructed. Prior literature on the role of victimization in determining transitional justice preferences could be incorporated to this end, by theorizing how violence exposure shapes ideologies about conflict and consequently informs transitional justice preferences. Again, future study should consider the role of conflict-related ideologies in mediating the relationship between a myriad of social and political factors and individuals' transitional justice preferences overtime.

At the time of writing, the Syrian conflict is ongoing. Despite this, efforts to pursue accountability for atrocity crimes and human rights violations committed during the violence are already underway. This includes prosecutions by European Special War Crimes Units, investigations by the UN-led International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism on Syria, and various efforts by civil society groups and the family members of victims to document and raise awareness about transitional justice for Syria (see overview in SJAC, 2020). The present study can contribute to these efforts by helping policymakers and practitioners better understand how various transitional justice mechanisms might be perceived by Syrians, who represent diverse demographic traits, political interests, and ideological configurations. Though the Opinion Clusters outlined by this study indicate there is little consensus among Syrians about how to pursue justice, they provide valuable insights to how the ideas individuals develop during their experiences of conflict may impact their transitional justice preferences.

## Acknowledgements

I owe thanks to everyone who has helped me with this project along the way, especially my family and friends, whose unwavering belief in me kept me going. I am immensely grateful for my advisor, Dr. Hollie Nyseth Brehm, for teaching me how to conduct research that keeps humanity at the center and for encouraging me incessantly. I am grateful for the dedication of my other thesis committee members, Dr. Richard Herrmann and Dr. Eric Schoon.

I am grateful for the staff at CIEE Amman, for helping me get established at my field site, and for Z. Aljabali and M. Alghothani, for their tireless work assisting with Arabic-language translations. Of course, I am grateful beyond words for those who agreed to be interviewed or otherwise helped connect me with participants for this study—while they cannot be named, they deserve all of the credit. I thank the Syria Justice and Accountability Center (SJAC) for graciously sharing their interview data for this study. I could not have completed this project without the generous support of the Eminence Fellows Program and an International Research Grant from The Ohio State University College of Arts and Sciences Honors program.

Finally, I am grateful to anyone else who patiently listened to me babble on about Syria for the past two years or otherwise acted as a sounding-board, source of inspiration, or guiding hand. Conducting this project has humbled me in innumerable ways. It has affirmed me in what I can do, consoled me in what I cannot do, and encouraged me to trust that that is enough. I hope this work can help, even in some small way, those who strive for justice in Syria and other places that have felt the scourge of war. شكرا كثير لكم

## References

- Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). (2005). *A call for justice—a national consultation on past human rights violations in Afghanistan*. Refworld. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/47dfad50.html>
- Aguilar, P., Balcells, L., & Cebolla-Boado, H. (2011). Determinants of attitudes toward transitional justice: An empirical analysis of the Spanish case. *Comparative Political Studies*, 44(10), 1397-1430. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414011407468>
- Alvarez, A. (1997). Adjusting to genocide: The techniques of neutralization and the Holocaust. *Social Science History*, 21(2), 139-178. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1171272>
- Backer, D. (2010). Watching a bargain unravel? A panel study of victims' attitudes about transitional justice in Cape Town, South Africa. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 4, 443-456. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijq015>
- Bar-Tal, D. (2007). Sociopsychological foundations of intractable conflicts. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 50(11), 1430-1453. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764207302462>
- Bar-Tal, D., & Hammack Jr., P.L. (2012). Conflict, delegitimization, and violence. In L.R. Tropp (Ed.), *The oxford handbook of intergroup conflict*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199747672.013.0003>
- Bar-Tal, D., Sharvit, K., Halperin, E., & Zafran, A. (2012). Ethos of conflict: The concept and its measurement. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 18(1), 40-61. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026860>
- Bastian, B., Denson, T.F., & Haslam, N. (2013). The roles of dehumanization and moral outrage in retributive justice. *PLoS ONE*, 8(4). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0061842>
- Benford, R.D., & Snow, D.A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 611-639. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611>
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Bratton, M. (2011). Violence, partisanship and transitional justice in Zimbabwe. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 49(3), 353-380. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23018897>
- Buckley-Zistel, S. (2018). Transitional justice. In C. Brown & R. Eckersley (Eds.), *The oxford handbook of international political theory*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198746928.013.10>
- Čehajić-Clancy, S., Effron, D.A., Halperin, E., Liberman, V., & Ross, L.D. (2011). Affirmation, acknowledgement of in-group responsibility, group-based guilt, and support for reparative measures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(2), 256-270. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023936>

- Charney, C., & Quirk, C. (2014). "He who did wrong should be accountable": Syrian perspectives on transitional justice. Syria Justice and Accountability Centre. <https://syriaaccountability.org/library/he-who-did-wrong-should-be-accountable-syrian-perspectives-on-transitional-justice/>
- Cohrs, J.C. (2012). Ideological bases of violent conflict. In L.R. Tropp (Ed.), *The oxford handbook of intergroup conflict*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199747672.013.0004>
- Corstange, D., & York, E.A. (2018). Sectarian framing in the Syrian civil war. *American Journal of Political Science*, 62(2), 441-455. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12348>
- David, R. (2017). What we know about transitional justice: Survey and experimental evidence. *Advances in Political Psychology*, 38(1), 151-177. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12395>
- David, R., & Choi, S.Y.P. (2006). Forgiveness and transitional justice in the Czech Republic. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 50(3), 339-367. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002706286950>
- Field, N.P., & Chhim, S. (2008). Desire for revenge and attitudes toward the Khmer Rouge Tribunal among Cambodians. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 13, 352-372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325020701742086>
- Gantri, R., & Mufti, K. (2017). *Not without dignity: Views of Syrian refugees in Lebanon on displacement, conditions of return, and coexistence*. International Center for Transitional Justice. <https://www.ictj.org/publication/syria-refugees-lebanon-displacement-return-coexistence>
- Goffman, E. (1989). On fieldwork. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 18(2), 123-132. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124189018002001>
- Haider, H. (2014). Transnational transitional justice and reconciliation: The participation of conflict-generated diasporas in addressing the legacies of mass violence. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 27(2), 207-233. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feu002>
- Hall, J., Kovras, I., Stefanovic, D., & Loizides, N. (2018). Exposure to violence and attitudes towards transitional justice. *Political Psychology*, 39(2), 345-363. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12412>
- Haslam, N. (2006). Dehumanization: An integrative review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(3), 252-264. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1003\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1003_4)
- Haslam, N., & Loughnan, S. (2014). Dehumanization and infrahumanization. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 65, 399-423. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115045>
- Herrmann, R.K. (2013). Perceptions and image theory in international relations. In L. Huddy, D.O. Sears, & J.S. Levy (Eds.), *The oxford handbook of political psychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199760107.013.0011>
- Hesse-Biber, S.N. (2017). *The practice of qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Hokayem, E. (2013). *Syria's uprising and the fracturing of the Levant*. Routledge.

- Human Rights Watch (HRW). (2014). *World Report 2014: Syria*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/syria>
- Human Rights Watch (HRW). (2019). *World Report 2019: Syria*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/syria>
- Jordan INGO Forum (JIF). (2018). *Syrian refugees in Jordan, a protection overview*. Relief Web. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/JIF-ProtectionBrief-2017-Final.pdf>
- Leidner, B., Castano, E., Zaiser, E., & Giner-Sorolla, R. (2010). Ingroup glorification, moral disengagement, and justice in the context of collective violence. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36(8), 1115-1129. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167210376391>
- Leidner, B., Castano, E., & Ginges, J. (2012). Dehumanization, retributive and restorative justice, and aggressive versus diplomatic intergroup conflict resolution strategies. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39(2), 181-192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167212472208>
- Lundy, P., & McGovern, M. (2008). Whose justice? Rethinking transitional justice from the bottom up. *Journal of Law and Society*, 35(2), 265-292. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20109794>
- Lynch, M. (2016). *The new Arab wars: uprisings and anarchy in the Middle East*. Public Affairs.
- Maynard, J.L. (2014). Rethinking the role of ideology in mass atrocities. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26(5), 821-841. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2013.796934>
- McHugo, J. (2014). *Syria: A recent history*. Saqi Books.
- Meernik, J., & King, K. (2014). A psychological jurisprudence model of public opinion and international prosecution. *International Area Studies Review*, 17(1), 3-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2233865913515449>
- Merz, F. (2014). Adversarial framing: President Bashar al-Assad's depiction of the armed Syrian opposition. *Journal of Terrorism Research*, 5(2), 30-44. <http://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.881>
- Milliken, P.J., & Schreiber, R. (2012). Examining the nexus between grounded theory and symbolic interactionism. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 11(5), 684-696. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691201100510>
- Mukashema, I., & Mullet, E. (2013). Unconditional forgiveness, reconciliation sentiment, and mental health among victims of genocide in Rwanda. *Social Indicators Research*, 113, 121-132. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-012-0085-x>
- Nussio, E., Rettberg, A., & Ugarriza, J.E. (2015). Victims, nonvictims and their opinions on transitional justice: Findings from the Colombian case. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 9(2), 336-354. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijv006>
- Nyseth Brehm, H., & Golden, S. (2017). Centering survivors in local transitional justice. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 13, 101-121. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-110316-113444>

- Pearlman, W. (2016). Online appendix for 'Narratives of Fear in Syria.' *Perspectives on Politics*, 14, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592715003205>
- Pham, P., Vinck, P., Wierda, M., Stover, E., & di Giovanni, A. (2005). *Forgotten voices: A population-based survey on attitudes about peace and justice in northern Uganda*. International Center for Transitional Justice/Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley. <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-HRC-Uganda-Voices-2005-English.pdf>
- Pham, P., & Vinck, P. (2007). Empirical research and the development and assessment of transitional justice mechanisms. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 1(2), 231-248. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijm017>
- Pinkley, R.L. (1990). Dimensions of conflict frame: Disputant interpretations of conflict. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75(2), 117-126. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.75.2.117>
- Pinkley, R. L., & Northcraft, G.B. (1994). Conflict frames of reference: Implications for dispute processes and outcomes. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 37(1), 193-205. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/256777>
- Prasad, P. (2018). Symbolic interactionism: Searching for self and meaning. In *Crafting qualitative research: Beyond positivist traditions* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Routledge.
- Robins, S. (2011). Towards victim-centered transitional justice: Understanding the needs of families of the disappeared in postconflict Nepal. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 5(1), 75-98. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijq027>
- Roccas, S., Klar, Y., & Liviatan, I. (2006). The paradox of group-based guilt: Modes of national identification, conflict vehemence, and reactions to the in-group's moral violations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91(4), 698-711. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.91.4.698>
- Samii, C. (2013). Who wants to forgive and forget? Transitional justice preferences in postwar Burundi. *Journal of Peace Research*, 50(2), 219-233. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343312463713>
- Schoon, E.W., & Duxbury, S.W. (2019). Robust discourse and the politics of legitimacy: Framing international intervention in the Syrian Civil War, 2011-2016. *Sociological Science*, 6, 635-660. <https://doi.org/10.15195/v6.a24>
- Shmueli, D., Elliott, M., & Kaufman, S. (2006). Frame changes and the management of intractable conflicts. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 24(2), 207-218. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.169>
- Small, M.L. (2009). 'How many cases do I need?': On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research. *Ethnography*, 10, 5-38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138108099586>
- Stokke, E., & Wiebelhaus-Brahm, E. (2019). Syrian diaspora mobilization: Vertical coordination, patronage relations, and the challenges of fragmentation in the pursuit of transitional justice. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42(11), 1930-1949. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1572909>

- Sykes, G.M., & Matza, D. (1957). Techniques of neutralization: A theory of delinquency. *American Sociological Review*, 22(6), 664-670. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2089195>
- Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC). (2020). *The state of justice: Syria 2020*. <https://syriaaccountability.org/library/the-state-of-justice-in-syria-2020/>
- Thomas, G., & Myers, K. (2015). *The anatomy of the case study*. SAGE Publications. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473920156>
- United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/22/59 (5 February 2013), available from [undocs.org/en/A/HRC/22/59](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/22/59)
- United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/23/58 (18 July 2013), available from [undocs.org/en/A/HRC/23/58](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/23/58)
- United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/24/46 (16 August 2013), available from [undocs.org/en/A/HRC/24/46](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/24/46)
- United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/25/65 (12 February 2014), available from [undocs.org/en/A/HRC/25/65](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/25/65)
- United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/37/72 (1 February 2018), available from [undocs.org/A/HRC/37/72](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/37/72)
- United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/39/65 (9 August 2018), available from [undocs.org/A/HRC/39/65](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/39/65)
- United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/40/70 (31 January 2019), available from [undocs.org/A/HRC/40/70](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/70)
- United Nations, Human Rights Council, *"I lost my dignity": Sexual and gender-based violence in the Syrian Arab Republic, Conference room paper of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/37/CRP.3 (8 March 2018), available from [undocs.org/A/HRC/37/CRP.3](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/37/CRP.3)
- Viki, G.T., Fullerton, I., Raggett, H., Tait, F., & Wiltshire, S. (2012). The role of dehumanization in attitudes toward the social exclusion and rehabilitation of sex offenders. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 42(10), 2349-2367. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2012.00944.x>
- Wiebelhaus-Brahm, E. (2016). Exploring variation in diasporas' engagement with transitional justice processes. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 11(3), 23-36. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15423166.2016.1226933>

Zebel, S., Zimmermann, A., Viki, G.T., & Doosje, B. (2008). Dehumanization and guilt as distinct but related predictors of support for reparation policies. *Political Psychology*, 29(2), 193-219. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20447112>

## **Appendix**

### Author's Interview Guide (English Only)

#### (Introduction)

It is possible that our conversation will include topics that may be sensitive; if there are any questions you do not want to answer, that is fine. In addition, I would like to remind you that participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you will not receive any direct benefits if you do participate. And, if you do decide to participate, you are still free to stop the interview at any time or choose not to answer any question. Furthermore, please know that this study is about your life since 2011 and your perceptions of the conflict in Syria.

Lastly, I'm wondering if you are ok if I tape-record the interview. All names will be anonymous; tape-recording allows me to type the interview for analysis purposes, and then the tape will be destroyed. Your name will never be used in the results of this study. Is tape-recording ok?

Thank you. Do you have any questions before we begin?

## **PART I. NARRATIVES.**

### Antebellum Narrative

1. Can you tell me about where and when you were born?
2. Can you tell me about your childhood?
3. Did you attend school? If so, for how long?
4. Did you go to mosque (or attend another religious service) as a child? Did you in the years before 2011? Do you identify with a religious group or sect today?
5. Did you get married before 2011? If so, when? How old were you?
6. Did you have children before 2011? If so, how many?
7. What was your life like before 2011?
8. What did you (and your spouse) do for work before 2011?
9. Where were you living before 2011?
10. Did you follow the news before 2011? What sources did you get your news from?
11. How did you feel about politics before 2011?
12. How did you feel about the government before 2011?
13. Did you feel safe in your community before 2011?

### Civil War Narrative

14. Was there tension in your community before 2011? What did you think of the protests that were occurring in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere at that time?
15. What did you think of the protests that began in Syria? Was your community impacted by the protests?
16. What was your life like after 2011?

17. When did the conflict begin? How did it start?
18. Who are the main actors in the conflict today? Who is fighting who? Has this changed over time?
19. What do you think is the root cause of the violence? What is the conflict really about?
  - a. People have explained the violence in Syria in many different ways. For the following statements, please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree or feel neutral.
    - i. The conflict is between Sunnis and Alawis.
    - ii. The conflict is between democracy and dictatorship.
    - iii. The conflict is between religion and secularism.
    - iv. The conflict is between foreign forces.
20. What are people fighting for today?
  - a. I am going to list some reasons people have given for why people are fighting in Syria. Please, tell me how important you think each is in the conflict: very important, important, somewhat important, not important.
    - i. Democratic freedoms;
    - ii. Sectarian differences;
    - iii. International rivalries;
    - iv. The role of religion and politics;
    - v. Minority rights;
    - vi. Terrorist activity;
    - vii. The bad economy;
    - viii. Corruption.
21. Do you think the fighting is about something different today than it was when it started? If so, why? How is it different?
22. How long did you think the war would last at the beginning? What did you hope the outcome would be? Who did you think would win?
23. What did you and your family do as the war went on? What was a typical day like before you left Syria? How did your circumstances change over time before leaving Syria?
24. What do you think were the major turning points in the war? Why did you choose these? How did you react to these events?
25. What events during the war are particularly memorable to you? Why are these memorable? How did you react to these events?
26. Why do you think the war has lasted so long?
27. Did you follow the news before you left Syria? What sources did you get your news from?
28. Even though you have been away from Syria for some time, can you explain to me what the situation in Syria is like today?

### **Refugee Narrative**

29. When did you first flee your home?
  - a. Why did you leave? Where did you go? Who came with you?

- b. Did any of your family members or good friends stay behind? If so, how often do you hear from them?
  - c. Did you face any difficulties? Did anyone help you when you fled?
30. When did you leave Syria? Why did you leave? Did you face any difficulties crossing the border? Did any people or organizations help you flee?
31. Did you spend time in a refugee camp?
- a. Where and for how long? What were conditions like in the camp? What did you do during this time? What was a typical day like? What were your priorities or most pressing needs?
32. How did you come to Jordan? Why did you come to Jordan? How long have you been in Jordan?
33. During the time you were fleeing, did you follow the news? Where did you get your news from?

## **PART II. POST-CONFLICT OUTCOMES.**

### **Repatriation**

34. Do you think you will be able to return to Syria one day? Why or why not?
35. Under what conditions would you return to Syria? (examples: When it is safe? When you can find a job? When you can participate in politics?)
- a. What needs to happen for those conditions to be met? Do you think this will happen? If so, when do you think it will happen?
36. Do you plan to return to Syria one day? Why or why not?
- a. If yes, would you want to return to your original home or somewhere else?
  - b. If yes, what would be your priorities, upon your return?
  - c. If no, where will you stay or go? Why?

### **Peace Settlement**

37. What do you think the situation in Syria will be like one year from now? What about five years from now? What about ten years from now?
38. What does peace mean to you?
39. Do you think it is possible for there to be peace in Syria? Why or why not?
40. How do you think peace can be achieved? What are the obstacles to peace in Syria?
41. Who should be involved in future peace negotiations (and who should not)? Why? Do you think the United Nations, or another third party should be involved? Who? Why or why not?

### **Post-War Governance**

42. What do you think the government should be like in Syria after the war ends?
- a. Should there be elections? Should there be political parties? What rights should people have? Which do you think should have more power, the local government or the national government (or could they be equally empowered)?
43. Who should be able to hold a position in government (should anyone be excluded)?

- a. If there are elections, who should be able to vote (should anyone be excluded)?
- b. What should the role of the current government be after the war ends?
- c. Should power be shared between different groups of people? If so, how?

### **PART III. TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE.**

#### **Justice and Crime**

44. What does justice mean to you? Do you think justice is important? Who deserves justice? How do you think justice can be achieved?
45. Have you seen or heard about any crimes being committed during the war in Syria? What kinds of crimes? Who committed these crimes? Why do you think they committed such crimes? Who is ultimately responsible for these crimes?
46. Have you seen or heard about any human rights abuses in Syria since 2011? What kinds of abuses? Who committed these abuses? Why do you think they committed such abuses? Who is ultimately responsible for these abuses?
47. For the next set of questions, I will read a list of several acts usually considered to be crimes or human rights abuses. Please, answer only yes or no for each question. I would like to remind you that if you feel uncomfortable answering any question, we can skip it. I will not ask you for any additional details.
  - a. Have you seen or heard about **theft or the destruction of property** during the war?
  - b. Have you seen or heard about the **destruction of cultural heritage (ex. historic sites or artifacts)** during the war?
  - c. Have you seen or heard about the **use of chemical weapons** during the war?
  - d. Have you seen or heard about **disappearances or kidnappings** during the war?
  - e. Have you seen or heard about **torture** during the war?
  - f. Have you seen or heard about **sexual violence or rape** during the war?
  - g. Have you seen or heard about the **use of landmines** during the war?
  - h. Have you seen or heard about the **killing of civilians** during the war?
  - i. Have you seen or heard about any acts you think could be considered under Hirabah (حراية)?
48. Do you think the injustices in Syria should be remedied? Why or why not? If so, how?
  - a. What do you think should be done for the victims of violence and injustice in Syria?
  - b. Who (if anyone) should be held accountable for these crimes? Should it be individuals? Institutions? Groups? Leaders? Why?
49. Who is responsible for providing justice?
  - a. Should the current government have a role? Should the international community have a role? If so, what roles?
  - b. Should justice be provided at the local level? National level? International level?
50. Do you think the methods of achieving justice should align with the principles of Shari'a? Why or why not?

51. What do you think are the obstacles to achieving justice in Syria right now? What do you think might be obstacles to achieving justice in Syria in the future?

### **Preference for Mechanisms**

For the following questions, imagine that the war in Syria is over. A peace agreement has been signed, and the fighting has stopped throughout the country.

### **Truth and Collective Memory**

52. Do you think it is important that people know the truth about what has happened in Syria, or should people be allowed to forget and move on? Why?
53. Would you support amnesties or pardons for those responsible for the violence (i.e. immunity from punishment)? Why or why not?
- a. If so, for whom? For which crimes? Should confession be a requirement for amnesty? Why or why not?
54. Do you think those responsible for the violence should be required to apologize for crimes committed during the war? Why or why not?
- a. If so, for whom? For which crimes? To whom should they apologize (examples: To the victims or their families? To society?) Should this be done in public or in private?
55. Do you think the people of Syria should preserve the record of crimes committed during the war? Why or why not?
- a. If so, what purpose do you think this might serve? (examples: Will it prevent future crimes? Will it console victims?)
  - b. If so, how should these memories be preserved (examples: By creating memorials? Through commemoration ceremonies? Through historical records?)
56. Do you think there should be a truth commission in Syria (i.e. a public forum for perpetrators of crimes to confess)? Why or why not? If so, should amnesty be offered in exchange for truth-telling? Why or why not?
57. In my research, I came across the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria, which has been collecting evidence of crimes and human rights abuses during the conflict. What do you think of the work it is doing?

### **Trials and Tribunals**

58. Do you think there should be criminal trials for the perpetrators of violence in Syria? Why or why not? If so...
59. What crimes should be tried?
60. Who should be tried (and who should be excluded, if anyone)?
- c. Should President Bashar Al-Assad be tried? Why or why not?
61. What kind of court should be used? (examples: A domestic court? An international tribunal? The International Criminal Court?) Why?
62. What kinds of punishments should the courts be able to give?
- d. Do you think there should be **prison sentences**? If so, for whom? For which crimes?

- e. Do you think there should be *lifetime prison sentences*? If so, for whom? For which crimes?
- f. Do you think the **death penalty** should be a sentence? If so, for whom? For which crimes?
- g. Do you think **mandatory community service** should be a sentence? If so, for whom? For which crimes? For how long?
- h. Are there any other punishments you think might be appropriate?

### **Other Mechanisms**

- 63. Do you think reparations should be paid to the victims of crimes committed in Syria? Why or why not? Do you think diya (دية) should be considered appropriate for the crimes committed during the war?
  - a. If so, how should they be paid? How much should they be paid? Who should pay?
- 64. Do you think Syrians should be compensated for their lost property? Why or why not?
  - b. If so, how should they be paid? How much should they be paid? Who should pay?
- 65. Do you think it would be permissible for people to seek revenge against those who committed crimes against them or their loved ones during the war? Why or why not? Do you think qisas (قصاص) should be considered appropriate for crimes committed during the war?
- 66. Do you think government officials involved in crimes during the war should be removed from office? If so, whom? For which crimes? What should happen to them?
- 67. Is there anything I haven't mentioned that you think could be part of a program for achieving justice in Syria?

### **Cases and Hypotheticals**

Now I would like to ask your opinion on how justice has been pursued in other countries after conflict. For each, please describe whether you think the outcome was appropriate or not.

- 68. After the civil war in Bosnia, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia indicted, tried and convicted the former president of Serbia for war crimes and crimes against humanity. He was sentenced to 40 years in prison.
- 69. After the collapse of the apartheid system, South Africa had a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where victims could publicly testify about their experiences and perpetrators could confess and receive amnesty.
- 70. After the internment of Japanese-American citizens during World War II, the United States government passed a law to compensate each internee \$20,000.
- 71. After the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, members of the ruling Baath party became ineligible for government and military service.
- 72. After the genocide in Rwanda, local courts were convened, where panels of elected citizens judged cases in their communities. Defendants who confessed their crimes in public were offered shorter prison sentences or became eligible for community service.
- 73. After eight years of civil war, Sierra Leone agreed to a blanket amnesty law, which made perpetrators of crimes immune to prosecution under the peace deal.

#### **PART IV. COGNITIVE IMAGES OF THE “OTHER”.**

In this part of the interview, we will return to discussing the ongoing conflict in Syria.

74. Which actor (or actors) involved in the war in Syria do you think are most at fault for the ongoing violence? Does this (or these) actor(s) least represent your interests? Why or why not?
75. How would you describe this (or these) actor(s)?
  - c. What are their personalities like? What are their characteristics?
  - d. What are their goals? Do you think you can both get what you want out of the war?
  - e. What are their abilities? How powerful are they?

Now I am going to give you a series of statements. Imagine these statements are referring to the actor you just described. Please, tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree or are neutral toward each of these statements.

76. Although I disagree with them, I respect their beliefs.
77. They will keep fighting until the end.
78. They are helpless.
79. They are motivated by self-defense.
80. They are as exhausted from fighting as others.
81. Ultimately, they have good intentions.
82. They are uneducated and backwards.
83. They are looking to destroy my way of life.
84. They are powerless to achieve their goals.
85. They are evenly matched with their opponents.
86. They only care about their own interests.
87. They need guidance and direction.
88. I could see myself living peacefully alongside them one day.
89. They are prone to losses and setbacks.
90. They are better trained and equipped than others.
91. They are immoral and commit deplorable acts.

#### **PART V. VICTIMIZATION.**

I am now going to ask you a series of questions about the crimes committed against you or your family members since 2011. Please, answer with only yes or no. If any questions are too upsetting for you, please feel free not to respond.

92. Property destroyed or lost
93. Serious illness
94. Sexual violence
95. Physical injury
96. Killed

## PART VI. CONCLUSION.

### Life Today

97. Where are you living now? (Generally – no need for specific addresses).
98. Who do you live with?
99. What is a typical day like for you? Do you work? If so, where?
100. Do you go to mosque (or attend another religious service)?
101. Do you keep up with the news? Where do you get your news?
102. What do you consider your most pressing needs?
103. What plans do you have for the future?
104. What are you thankful for? What do you enjoy? What gives you hope?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this project. Remember, you can contact me if you have any questions about this study in the future.

### NVivo Codebook

#### **I. Participant Background/Experience of War**

- a. Demographics
  - i. **Age**
  - ii. **Sect**
  - iii. **Education**
  - iv. **Occupation**
- b. Life history
  - i. **Life before 2011:** any description of the participant’s life before 2011, including information about their childhood, employment, or family life.
  - ii. **Government before 2011:** the participant’s opinion about or involvement in politics before 2011. Include “Utopian past” and “Dystopian past” nodes as needed.
  - iii. **Protests:** any description of protests in Syria or the Arab Spring broadly. Include their opinion of the protests, coding for pro/anti- regime or opposition appropriately.
  - iv. **Life during war:** any descriptions of life during the war, including exposure to violence or a typical day after the fighting broke out in their community.
  - v. **Refugee narrative:** capture anything about their migration, including the decision to leave, when they left, who they left with, and how they came to Jordan.
  - vi. **News source:** any discussion of where the participant gets their news, especially about what is going on in Syria.
  - vii. **Life/family today:** general description of the participant’s life today, including details about their neighborhood, work, and family. Include questions on pressing needs and future plans.
  - viii. **Hope today:** answer to what gives them hope.

- c. Crimes, Victimization & Violence Exposure
  - i. **Victimization**: capture any references to personal or family victimization, including the scale on victimization.
  - ii. **Violence exposure**: violence that the participant mentions occurring in Syria (may be specific acts seen or heard about or a more general description of the “what” of the violence). Code generally for descriptions of specific acts of violence considered crimes or human rights abuses, and specifically for:
    - i. **Theft or Destruction**
    - ii. **Destroy Cultural Heritage**
    - iii. **Chemical Weapons**
    - iv. **Disappearances**
    - v. **Torture**
    - vi. **Sexual Violence**
    - vii. **Landmines**
    - viii. **Civilian Killing**

## II. Conflict Frames

- a. Causes of the Conflict
  - i. **Conflict cause**: any discussion of the cause of violence, including when it started and as it has changed overtime. Any response to why people are fighting or why the war has lasted so long. Capture response to the “list of reasons” question, if asked (from author’s interviews).
    - i. **Conflict cause unknown**: participant has difficulty explaining the cause of the violence. They may say that they don’t know, they don’t follow politics, or it is too complicated.
    - ii. This will capture framing of violence including:
      - a. **Democracy/Dictatorship** (Agree, Disagree, Unclear)
        - i. Differentiate from discussion of hopes for democracy after violence. Must specifically be about the cause of conflict or ongoing violence.
      - b. **Sectarianism** (Agree, Disagree, Unclear)
        - i. **Sect became issue**: participant specifically argues that sectarianism was not an issue at the beginning of the war but became one. Include their explanation for how it became problematic.
      - c. **Foreign Intervention** (Agree, Disagree, Unclear)
        - i. Differentiate from “foreign forces description” which involves images of foreign forces as actors in the conflict, aside from their attribution of the cause of conflict (might double code).
      - d. **Religion/Secularism** (Agree, Disagree, Unclear)

- i. Differentiate from other mentions of religion, which should be under “other religious reference.”
    - e. **Economic cause** (Agree, Disagree, Unclear): participant mentions corruption, economic despair, or other economic motives as a cause of violence.
  - b. Perceptions of the Violence
    - i. **Violence perception:** how the participant describes the violence beyond what happened, including judgements about its severity or character. Especially capture if they rationalize or condemn the violence.
    - ii. Do they see it as an intractable conflict?
      - a. **Zero sum:** expressions of the zero sum or existential nature of violence. Participant claims if their side does not “win” it is all over. Might overlap with “perception of goal compatibility\_disagree”
      - b. **Claims victimhood:** the participant claims that their group has been unjustly victimized by another group, or identifies themselves as victims.
      - c. **Neutralization technique:** participant neutralizes the violence committed by a particular actor.
      - d. **Claims conspiracy:** the participant claims that evidence of crimes have been fabricated or exaggerated, or that there is a wider conspiracy against their “side.”
    - iii. Describing the “Shift” in 2011
      - i. **Utopian past:** talks about the good life they had in Syria before the war. In particular, capture statements favorable to the government beforehand. Especially include descriptions that sectarianism was NOT a problem before the war or that social harmony existed.
      - ii. **Dystopian past:** talks about the hard life they had in Syria before the war. In particular, capture statements critical of the government beforehand. Especially include descriptions of a culture of silence.
  - c. Peace & Reconciliation Prospects
    - i. **Victory prospects:** participant believes their “side” can or will “win” the war. Narrowly capture perceptions of military victory, as opposed to a negotiated settlement.
    - ii. **Peace prospects:** capture discussion about the prospects for peace in Syria. Use the “Future Optimism” and “Future Pessimism” nodes as needed. Also capture other discussion about obstacles to peace or its meaning. How does the participant think the violence will end? Will there be a negotiated settlement?
    - iii. **Repatriation:** participant’s discussion about whether they can or intend to return to Syria. Or discussions of others repatriating to their neighborhood for those who did not flee.

- iv. **Reconciliation prospects:** capture discussion about whether reconciliation is possible in Syria, specifically capturing ideas about what relationships between groups will be like after the violence. Will people be able to “live together?” Include positive statements, as well as negative, including expressions of hate.
- v. **Post-war government hopes:** what the participant thinks the government should be like after the war in Syria, including discussion of elections, political parties, power-sharing, and democracy.
- vi. **Future pessimism:** participant is pessimistic about their future or the future of Syria (including prospects for peace and justice).
- vii. **Future optimism:** participant is optimistic about their future or the future of Syria (including prospects for peace and justice).

### III. Images of Conflict Actors

- a. Who is fighting?
  - i. **Conflict actors identified:** who the participant identifies as the parties to the conflict.
  - ii. **Conflict actors unknown:** participant has difficulty explaining who the parties are to the conflict. They may say that they don’t know, they don’t follow politics, or it is too complicated.
- b. Parties to the Conflict: *Capture broad descriptions including any characterization of these actors, their motives, and their capabilities.*
  - i. *For pro-opposition attributed people:*
    - i. **Anti-regime:** statements by pro-opposition people about the regime.
    - ii. **Pro-opposition:** statements by pro-opposition people about their group/various opposition groups (except for ISIS).
  - ii. *For pro-regime attributed people:*
    - i. **Pro-regime:** statements by pro-regime people about their group/loyalists/the regime.
    - ii. **Anti-opposition:** statements by pro-regime people about the various opposition groups (except for ISIS).
  - iii. **Assad opinion:** any mention of President Bashar al-Assad.
  - iv. **ISIS opinion:** any mention of the Islamic State or Jabhat al-Nusra or AQ.
  - v. **United States:** any mention of the United States or its policy toward Syria. May capture how interviewer’s positionality influenced interview.
  - vi. **Foreign forces description:** any description of foreign involvement in Syria. Include the perceived motive as well, whether it was sectarian, self-interest, etc.
- c. Perpetrators of Violence (May overlap with Parties to the Conflict nodes)
  - i. **Hold accountable:** answer to who should be held accountable for the violence/crimes/abuses. This might be mention of specific actors or broad

characterizations, like “the people who killed civilians.” Include especially if they say members of their own group should be held accountable.

- ii. **Most responsible:** who the participant describes as most responsible for the violence, if they do so.
  - i. **Most responsible unknown:** participant struggles to define who is most responsible or blames everyone equally.
- iii. **Perpetrator image:** any description of “perpetrators” that is ambiguous/not clearly tied to a particular group, including information on personalities, goals and abilities.
- iv. **Criminal label:** any time the participant calls another actor a “criminal” or specifically alleges that their actions are “illegal.”
- v. **Thief or gangster label:** any time participant calls actors in the violence “thieves” or “gangsters.”
- vi. **Traitor label:** any time participant labels other actors “traitors” or says they were unpatriotic or disloyal by committing violence.
- vii. **Terrorist label:** any time participant labels other actors “terrorists.”
- d. Analytic Codes for In-group/Out-group Images (*apply to ANY description of another actor, either specified by group or simply as perpetrator/most responsible*)
  - i. **Perception of Power** (Superior, Inferior, Equal) – apply to descriptions of power/capabilities, often militarily defined but may include economic.
  - ii. **Perception of Status** (Superior, Inferior, Equal) – apply to descriptions of the “cultural” status of the other, especially ideas about respect or contempt for the “other’s” values, worldview, motives, etc.
    - i. **Dehumanization:** adjectives or name-calling language that specifically casts the other as nonhuman or subhuman. Most likely also “perception of status\_inferior.”
  - iii. **Perception of Goal Compatibility** (Agree, Disagree) – apply to descriptions of the goals attributed to others and whether there is perceived room for cooperation or only conflict in relation to that actor.
  - iv. **Us vs them distinction:** clearly comparative statements between the participant’s in-group and a perceived out-group. Only if they explicitly state something like, this is the difference between us and them.
  - v. **Patriotism:** statements about loyalty and patriotism, to the Syrian state or nation.

#### IV. Transitional Justice Preferences (Descriptive)

- a. General Perceptions
  - i. **Justice meaning:** how the participant defines justice.
  - ii. **General justice preference:** answers to open-ended questions about what should be done to remedy injustice or to help victims of violence not captured elsewhere.

- iii. **Justice preference rationale:** capture any salient narratives describing why a participant favors a particular justice mechanism.
    - b. Opinions of Mechanisms
      - i. **Truth Commission** (Favor, Oppose, Ambiguous)
        - i. Esp. response to a case example about South Africa or a hypothetical scenario where amnesty is exchanged for truth.
        - ii. Only mark agree if they agree to the tradeoff between truth and punishment.
      - ii. **Amnesties** (Favor, Oppose, Ambiguous)
      - iii. **Apologies** (Favor, Oppose, Ambiguous)
      - iv. **Reparations** (Favor, Oppose, Ambiguous)
      - v. **Trials** (Favor, Oppose, Ambiguous)
        - i. Include any description of participants' preferences for who should hold trials or what kind of punishments there should be.
        - ii. **Assad on trial** (Favor, Oppose, Ambiguous)
      - vi. **Revenge** (Favor, Oppose, Ambiguous)
      - vii. **Death Penalty** (Favor, Oppose, Ambiguous)
      - viii. **Lustration** (Favor, Oppose, Ambiguous)
        - i. **Removing Assad** (Favor, Oppose, Ambiguous)
    - c. Other Transitional Justice Nodes
      - i. **Truth:** any discussion about truth.
      - ii. **Memory:** any discussion about preserving the memory of past crimes or remembering the victims of violence.
      - iii. **Forgiveness:** any discussion of forgiveness.
      - iv. **Prevention:** any discussion of preventing future violence (may be through not revenging or conversely punishing perpetrators).
- V. **Other Codes**
- a. **Religious reference:** any other discussion of religion apart from sectarianism.
  - b. **Hard question:** participant mentions that they are unable to answer the question, saying something like it is for “experts” or “victims” or “politicians” to decide. Meant to capture perceptions that “ordinary” people don’t understand or have transitional justice preferences.
  - c. **Interviewer issue:** flag anywhere the interviewer may have impacted the interviewee’s response.
  - d. **Participant confusion:** flag anywhere the participant seems confused by what the question is asking.
  - e. **Translation error:** flag any suspected error in translation.

### Reflections on Positionality and Conducting Fieldwork

Sociologists are particularly concerned with the impact of positionality, or the unique social position one occupies, on research design and outcomes. As such, qualitative researchers seek to cultivate a constant awareness of how they are perceived by participants, what their own assumptions are, and how they might be impacting the directions of their studies. Yet, even among qualitative researchers, there remains substantial disagreement over whether it is more valuable to be an “insider” or an “outsider” in the community being studied (for an overview, see Merton, 1972). This debate is especially relevant to research on transitional justice, considering contemporary efforts to reckon with histories of racism and colonialism in qualitative research (for example, Smith, 1999). Recognizing the importance of these considerations, I have included here some reflections on my positionality, especially during my fieldwork.

I consider myself to be an outsider to the population in this study: I am not Syrian. I am not fluent in Arabic. I am not a refugee. However, on the most basic level, I shared with all my participants a concern for what was happening in Syria. I assume that for many, this shared concern was enough of a similarity to warrant an interview. But I will not pretend to know what exactly made participants volunteer for an interview. Perhaps the fact that I was a young woman, who introduced herself as a “student” made me seem more approachable, as someone genuinely interested in learning and probably perceived as non-threatening. While those qualities may have worked to my advantage in the recruiting process, being clearly identifiable as white and American brought its own cultural baggage. As the “United States” code revealed during analysis of SJAC’s interviews for this study, some Syrians have (very) unfavorable views toward the West in general and toward U.S. foreign policy in particular. It is unlikely that someone with such views would have agreed to an interview with an American. Thus, as much as I sought to position myself as a neutral observer of the Syrian conflict during my fieldwork, I ultimately could not control the assumptions others might have made about my own political interests. For better or for worse, I was perceived as a representative of a wider community that shared my nationality, language, and skin color, much as I was perceiving my interviewees as representatives of their social groups. Yet, overall, I was overwhelmed by the generosity, openness, and hospitality of the people I encountered and who agreed to be interviewed. One woman eagerly wanted to introduce me to her mother after our interview. Another participant insisted on serving me tea and cakes at his home. Many participants thanked me for the work I was doing after completing interviews.

Originally, I had planned to conduct 40 interviews with Syrians in Jordan. However, after returning to the United States and reflecting on my initial field experience, I questioned the ethical and practical justifications for returning to the field. I wondered whether I would be able to find 32 more interviewees, given my limited networks on the ground and difficulties recruiting thus far. I also realized after conducting several interviews just how alienating it was to use a translator. I had hoped that my spoken Arabic skills would improve to the point where I could conduct interviews myself, but that did not appear likely in my limited time frame to complete this project. I also became aware that many refugees experience “interview fatigue,” having faced a barrage of formal and informal interviews from reporters, governments, NGOs, and researchers interested in their experiences. I became apprehensive about potentially adding to this “fatigue” by asking questions that had already been asked and were documented elsewhere. Further, while I was careful in my interviewing procedure not to promise results that I could not deliver (like direct monetary assistance or policy changes), it was clear that many interviewees

needed help that I simply could not provide given my situation and inexperience. Given these concerns, I decided to search for other existing sources of data that could help me answer my original research questions and was pleased to receive a favorable response from SJAC. While I learned much from my experience in the field, I was glad this option enabled me to continue my research in a way that made the most sense practically and ethically.

While interpreting the data for this study, I mitigated my own potential biases by making a concerted effort to truly understand all sides and perspectives of what is, objectively, a very bloody and divisive conflict. I hope that the only “bias” that shows through in this work is my desire for there to be peace and justice one day in Syria. Of course, it is not up to me, nor is it my place, to dictate the terms of what that should look like, which is why I have carefully included the full range of perspectives expressed by participants in this study, no matter who they were or what they said. It is my intention that their words speak for themselves as much as possible. Yet, while this study puts primacy on hearing the voices of Syrians by using qualitative methods—in line with the more victim-centered turn in transitional justice scholarship and practice—this method still selectively reports what I set out to hear about when I wrote the research questions, namely, transitional justice. This fact revealed itself when several participants during my own interviews either demonstrated a lack of familiarity with transitional justice concepts or overtly expressed their indifference or disinterest in the topic. This ignorance or reluctance itself might reveal an interesting “truth” about who transitional justice is really for. Consequently, no assumption should be made from this study’s findings that justice is an inherently more pressing need among Syrians than any of the financial, health-related, familial, or other concerns that participants raised during interviews and could not be included here. In the end, I hope that this work—humble as it may be—does justice to the real people whose lives have been forever changed by this violence and whose futures are yet to be determined.

Merton, R.K. (1972). Insiders and outsiders: A chapter in the sociology of knowledge. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(1), 9-47. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2776569>

Smith, L.T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. University of Otago Press.