Mapping Local Governance in Syria
A Baseline Study

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United Nations publication issued by ESCWA, United Nations House, Riad El Solh Square,

P.O. Box: 11-8575, Beirut, Lebanon.

Website: www.unescwa.org.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Inter-Syrian dialogue is increasingly converging on the establishment of a form of democratic decentralization as a cornerstone of the country's future political order. The purpose of this report is to lay the groundwork for any future local governance assistance framework as part of stabilization programming following a political settlement based on United Nations Security Council resolution 2254. Despite the wealth of studies on the future shape of the Syrian State, the debate has remained largely removed from local governance dynamics on the ground. This study seeks to map the functional presence of local governments and the varieties of de facto decision-making arrangements in five sites across the country. The selected areas fall under the control of the Government, the autonomous administration in the north-east, the Turkish authorities along the border, and Hay'et Tahrir al Sham (HTS) in the north-west. As background to the mapping exercise, the report begins by analysing the officially prevailing local administration system in the country, including contradictions, gaps and challenges in the implementation of decentralization reforms enacted in the wake of the uprising, through Law 107. Our analysis shows that there are significant gaps across the various de jure local governance models, on the one hand, and de facto local power dynamics, on the other hand. These can be attributed to the weak institutional development of local authorities, which not only lack resources and technical capacities but also compete with powerful parallel hierarchies. Findings from this baseline mapping demonstrate significant divergence in organizational structures of local authorities, their autonomy, capacity to raise revenues, and prevailing centre-periphery relations. Nonetheless, they also highlight the following five shared local governance deficits: lack of democratic accountability, weak institutionalization of local council structures and restricted de facto powers, lack of technical capacities, community disengagement with ad hoc or sporadic horizontal decentralization initiatives, and uneven decentralization on the administrative, fiscal and political fronts.

HIGHLIGHTS | KEY MESSAGES

• "While decentralization may carry important implications for State-society relations, the nature of these effects are contingent on not just the actual design of reforms and the relative capability of actors to take advantage of reforms, but also pre-existing power structures that shape the process."

• "The number of administrative units in the country has nearly doubled with the passing of a decree in 2011; 26 new cities, 242 new towns and 428 new townships were created."

• "Consecutive local elections reveal a relatively modest ratio of candidates of just above 40,000 contesting the elections for the total of 18,478 seats in 2018 and 43,000 competing for 17,629 seats in 2011."

• "Article 33 of Law 107 empowers a governorate council to undertake all decisions and measures necessary to exercise the competencies of the Ministry or administration or central institution whose competencies have been transferred to the Local Authority in accordance with the National Decentralization plan."

• "Local councils are politically weak structures even though, in certain contexts, they are formally in charge of administering public services."

• "The lack of responsiveness to concerns regarding access or quality of services such as water, electricity, roads, relief, and education, often due to shortages in resources and expertise, have undermined residents' willingness to participate."

• "Reliance on the influence of local tribesmen hinders collective mobilization around larger community needs or deficits in local governance, such as composition of the council, and equal distribution of jobs and services."

• "In many cases, dominant political actors and armed groups select local council members top-down, in consultation with community leaders and representatives from notable families."

• "Local governance structures lack the necessary technical capacities. Massive displacement and losses in human capital in the course of the conflict significantly undermined the ability of local institutions to perform their normal functions."

• "Powers have been decentralized unevenly. Formal attempts are being made to establish or activate local councils as spaces for political representation at the subnational level, although these entities lack important democratic credentials."

• "Local governance institutions need to be socially embedded through horizontal decentralization and social accountability reforms, such as open and competitive procurement, performance budgeting, participatory planning and budgeting, civil society performance monitoring, social audits, and others."

• "Lifting legal, bureaucratic and security restrictions on civil society operations and NGOs is an essential step towards activating social accountability mechanisms, as is the strengthening of capacities of local-level civil society organizations and civic-based NGOs."

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ABBREVIATIONS *and* ACRONYMS

DCADZ	Democratic Civil Administration of Deir-ez-Zor
DZCC	Deir-ez-Zor Civil Council
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
FSA	Free Syrian Army
GoS	Government of Syria
GTF	Global Taskforce
HTS	Hay'et Tahrir al Sham
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ISF	Internal Security Forces
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LAC	Local Administrative Council
MLAS	Ministry of Local Administration and Services
MoLA	Ministry of Local Administration and Environment
NAFS	National Agenda for the Future of Syria
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PYD	Democratic Union Party
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SC	Security Committee
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIG	Syrian Interim Government
SYP	Syrian Pound
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
YPG	People's Protection Unit

*I*NTRODUCTION

*T*he future of local governance in the country has garnered much attention throughout the Syrian conflict, as the Government enacted ambitious decentralization reforms (Law 107) in 2011, activists improvised alternative local decision-making structures in opposition-held areas, and donors promoted stabilization programming aimed at local actors in the periphery. Even as the Government has progressively recaptured areas previously outside its control since 2016, persistent differences in local dynamics shaped the re-establishment of formal local governance institutions. As a result, an important policy debate over the reconfiguration of power relations within the post-conflict Syrian State has taken shape over the last nine years, with actors advocating the applicability of various models ranging from full-fledged federalism or quasi federalism to decentralized governance within a unitary State. Both demographic patterns, in addition to widespread skepticism among both Government loyalists and opposition alike regarding the potential benefits of federalism, however, have paved the way for framing ongoing debates around cultural, economic and political rights within the parameters of decentralization. Indeed, with the exception of some explicit Kurdish calls for local autonomy within a federal state[1], inter-Syrian dialogue seems to increasingly converge on "democratic decentralization" as a cornerstone of the country's future social contract and its post-conflict political order.[2]

Notwithstanding the importance of policy proposals on the future shape of the State, the debate has remained largely removed from local governance dynamics on the ground. This has created significant policy gaps, as "conflict periods can make post-conflict de facto local governance situations significantly distinct from de jure formats"[3] In fact, even as the Syrian Government recaptured control of the bulk territories previously held by the opposition, there are signs of variations in the capacity of re-established local institutions to mobilize resources, deliver essential services or restart market

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activities. Indeed, "identifying the physical and functional presence of local governments and the de facto decision-making arrangements is a prerequisite to any assistance framework".[4] This study seeks to address this critical gap through a mapping exercise of the various local governance arrangements and mechanisms across space. Aside from taking stock of prevailing governance deficits, the purpose of this report is to serve as baseline for any future local governance assistance framework as part of stabilization programming following a political settlement based on UNSC resolution 2254.[5]

The report begins by analysing the officially prevailing local administration system in the country, including tensions, gaps and challenges in the implementation of decentralization reforms enacted in the wake of the protests, through Legislative Decree 107.[6] Next, it takes stock of de -facto local power arrangements in five sites across the country in order to capture parallels and variations in local governance. The selected cases include areas that returned under Government control (Al Tal and Tafas), the model of Kurdish autonomous administration in the north-east (Deir -ez-Zor), strategic locations currently under the control of the Turkish authorities (Jarablus), and the north-western part of the country (Atarib) under *Hay'et Tahrir al Sham* (HTS).

The analytical framework adopted for comparing local governance models focuses on the following five main dimensions: (a) autonomy of civilian-led local administration, as captured by unpacking relations across local administration bodies, and parallel structures of political parties, armed militias or security agencies; (b) mandates, responsibilities and actual powers of local councils, on the one hand, and executive authorities in charge of services provision at the national, subnational and local levels, on the other hand; (c) the degree of administrative decentralization, specifically relations between central-level line ministries and local executive offices in formally devolved sectors; (d) participatory and accountability credentials of governance structures at the local level; and (e) effective fiscal decentralization, including the ability of local actors to impose levies and taxes and to maintain budget transparency and streamlined financial reporting.

As an exploratory baseline for local governance, the study has benefited from analyses, dialogues and recommendations by Syrian stakeholders in the course of two rounds of technical consultations under the National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) programme in Beirut. The first round focused on exploring the role of local governance in post-conflict development, while the second round more narrowly focused on mapping the

prevailing varieties of local governance arrangements across the country. The presented data were gathered through structured and in-depth interviews with key local leaders, community activists and analysts between September and December 2019. In addition, data from secondary sources, such as published statements, laws and regulations were consulted to verify findings and complement the analysis.

The analysis revealed significant gaps between the various formal local governance models, on the one hand, and de facto dynamics, on the other. These can be attributed to the weak institutional development of local authorities, which not only lack resources and technical capacities but also compete with powerful parallel hierarchies ranging from the security apparatus, armed militias and the appointment, by the Turkish Government, of field advisors or *kadros* in the Kurdish self-administration system. Local authorities, which have assumed the functions of managing public utilities, and extending public services predominantly lack legitimacy. Though direct local elections were held in late 2018 in Government-held areas, observers stress that few candidates competed over the seats and the voter turn-out was low.[7]

> *Findings from the mapping demonstrate significant divergence in organizational structures of local authorities, their level of autonomy, prevailing centre-periphery dynamics, and, to a lesser extent, revenue-raising capacity*

In three out of the five cases, individuals espoused as so-called representatives of communities themselves formed local councils or selected members top-down. In other words, local councils across the country lack democratic accountability. This picture is further compounded by the poor record of successive local authorities to deliver public services, with relevant analysis highlighting poor quality, limited or politicized access, high costs, absence of feedback mechanisms, and shortage of personnel and technocratic cadres.

Findings from the mapping demonstrate significant divergence in organizational structures of local authorities, their level of autonomy, prevailing centre-periphery

dynamics, and, to a lesser extent, revenue-raising capacity. Nonetheless, they also highlight the following five shared local governance deficits, namely, lack of democratic accountability, weak institutionalization of local council structures and restricted de facto powers, lack of technical capacities, community disengagement with ad hoc or sporadic horizontal decentralization initiatives, and uneven decentralization on the administrative, fiscal and political fronts.

Chapter I of this study provides an overview of the debate surrounding decentralization from the scholarly and policy perspectives. It critically situates arguments in support of reforms against empirical findings from recent studies on their developmental and democratizing effects. Chapter II presents an analysis of the varieties and dimensions of decentralization. Chapter III briefly lays out the main contours of the country's official local administration system as a background to the bulk of empirical analysis presented in chapter IV on mapping local governance across five case studies. Finally, the study takes stock of findings from the baseline mapping analysis to highlight prevailing local governance deficits.

I

DEBATING DECENTRALIZATION
Theory, Policy and Practice

$\mathcal{D}$ecentralization, or the "downward transfer of resources, responsibilities or authority from national to subnational governments"[8] has emerged as one of the most significant areas of reform over the last four decades due to the number of countries affected and the potentially deep implications on the nature and quality of governance. Reforms in this area have rapidly diffused since the 1980s, such that by the new millennium estimates indicated that at least 80 per cent of the world's countries had already experimented with one form of decentralization or another.[9] Observers highlight that the reform trend encompasses all of the world's regions and includes nations rich and poor, large and small, and with very different colonial histories.

In its early formulations, decentralization was seen as brining about a "shift of authority towards local governments and away from central governments, with total government authority over society and economy imagined as fixed".[10] However, critics have recently cast doubt on static conceptualizations highlighting that the reform process does not simply entail a clean transfer of fixed authority or resources from higher to lower levels, or from the State to civil society groups and/or private-sector actors. Rather, it results in a more complex form of governance, one that entails the "organic and intertwined transfer of political, fiscal and policy autonomy".[11] This is because decentralization initiatives ambitiously "aim to reconstitute government from a hierarchical, bureaucratic mechanism of top-down management to a system of nested self- governments characterized by participation and cooperation, where transparency is high and accountability to the governed acts as a binding constraint on public servants' behaviour".[12] In other words, the process itself is increasingly recognized as essentially political involving restructuring relations among State, society and the market.

As reforms picked momentum over time, development agencies and donors increasingly adopted broad definitions of decentralization. For instance, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) explicitly links decentralization to democratization efforts by defining the former as "the transfer of powers and responsibilities from the central government level to elected authorities at the subnational level (regional governments, municipalities, etc.) and that have some degree of autonomy".[13] World Bank documents go a step further linking decentralization to market-oriented reforms as well, whereby decentralization is understood as the "transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to intermediate and local governments or quasi-independent government organizations and/or the private sector".[14] This is echoed in other definitions advocated by the United Nations, such as by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), which views decentralization as encompassing collaboration with local civil society and market actors.[15] Operationally, UNDP advocates the concept of local governance to highlight linkages among democratic governance practices, civic values and human development.[16] In other words, reforms should extend beyond decentralization of power within State institutions to include engagement of civil society and private-sector actors in policymaking and policy implementation. In recent years, decentralization has been highlighted not just as an essential component of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, but also as essential for localization of SDGs, "or the process of taking into account sub-national contexts in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, from the setting of goals and targets, to determining the means of implementation and using indicators to measure and monitor progress".[17] In fact, mapping development goals based on local needs and contexts, taking into account the interlinkages and trade-offs, necessitate vertical coordination across governance tiers, and an active role by local governments close to the ground in collaboration with the private sector and civil society organizations.[18]

Notwithstanding variations in nuance and conceptualizations, both policy reformers and the scholarly literature make strong arguments in support of decentralization. The former often inject a normative dimension into the process of decentralization as part and parcel of good governance. For instance, the process is presumed to facilitate sustainable peace and new norms of citizenship based on greater inclusion of minorities and marginalized groups. Hence, decentralization is typically considered one of the so-called sign post institutional transformations that post-conflict societies undergo.[19] Colombia's decentralization was designed as an explicit response to violence, while in South Africa reforms were an essential component of its transition from apartheid to democracy. Reforms of local government structures are viewed as a vehicle for gradually "expanding participation and inclusiveness, reducing inequalities, creating accountability, combating corruption and introducing contestability (elections)".[20] Further, shifting the balance of power from the central to subnational levels during the reconstruction phase is often practically linked to the reconstitution of State legitimacy. Post-conflict elites, who develop broad networks distributing power and patronage at the local

level, are less likely to face challenges to their rule during stabilization missions and can go on to build broad-based political coalitions.[21] Carefully crafted decentralization can support peacebuilding both by mediating differences as well as opening spaces for the integration of communities on the dual bases of citizenship and participation.[22]

Along parallel lines, from the scholarly perspective, economists and political scientists adopt a variety of normative positions, in support of empowering subnational governments through decentralization. Public choice theory, for instance, posits that "mobility in a decentralized, multijurisdictional context can facilitate better matching of citizen preferences and government policy through "sorting" and can lead to smaller, more efficient, less corrupt government and under some conditions more secure markets and faster growth".[23] Other normative arguments in favour of decentralization range from improving accountability and responsiveness of government, to reducing abuses of power by transferring certain central government functions and resources to the lower levels, to improving political stability by giving aggrieved minorities control over subnational governments with limited power over issues that affect them directly, and increasing political competition by creating many
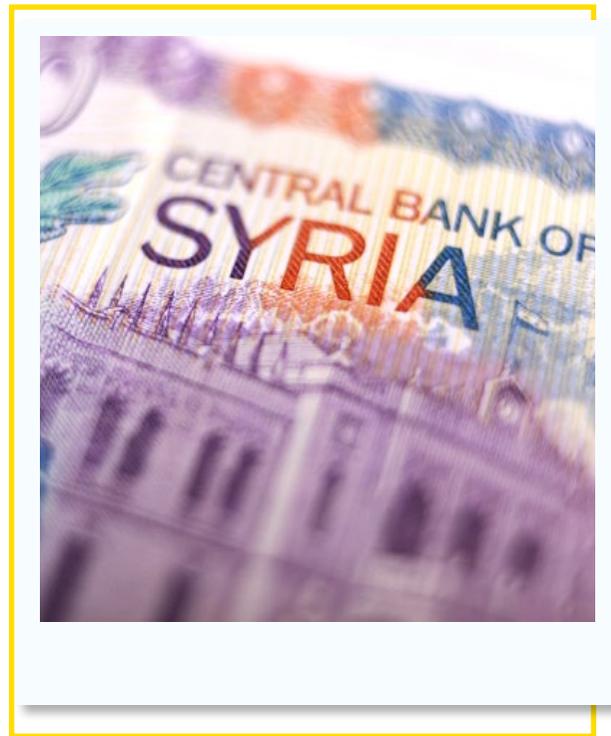
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> **While the pursuit of decentralization in fragile post-conflict countries may pacify warring groups, it can come at the cost of undermining national cohesion on the longer run**

smaller arenas that politicians vie to control.[24] In the area of public services delivery, several espoused advantages of decentralization reforms are often highlighted, including making citizen preferences easier to relay to decision makers in charge of designing public services, improving accountability since it is easier to link the performance of local services to local representatives, and better matching citizen and policy preference as decision-making moves to local jurisdiction.[25] In addition, by improving fiscal management of public services, decentralization is said to improve economic growth and market functioning.[26]

Despite the growing popularity of decentralization reforms, it is important to highlight that they are not uniformly

advocated in policy and scholarly circles. While the pursuit of decentralization in fragile post-conflict countries may pacify warring groups, it can come at the cost of undermining national cohesion on the longer run. In fact, the mixed record of local administrative councils in areas controlled by the opposition in the country illustrates the challenges of social inclusion and integration of minority groups post-conflict in local structures.[27] Because citizens may lack a sense of unity and ideological commitment to decentralized governance, the process can be politically destabilizing.[28]

Further, granting greater autonomy and voice for ethnic minorities can, in fact, even harden subnational identities and eventually lead to demands for full independence rather than plant the seeds of inclusive citizenship. The diffusion of power at the local level may even lead to "the intensification of forces for secession",[29] or reignite conflict since subnational legislations may potentially discriminate against regional minorities.[30, 31] Hence, skeptics allege that decentralization may at its worst 'un-make' nation-States, particularly in contexts in the developing world where the former are artificial constructs and by-products of colonial legacies. At its best, it can be a distraction from the core task of consolidating central government control, especially the urgent need to strengthen the police force and to get control of revenue collection, in order to jumpstart recovery and development.

Even looking strictly at the effects of reforms on public services quality, access and efficiency, critics argue that decentralization may result in significant deterioration. This is due to the loss of economies of scale available through central provision,[32] local authorities' lack of technical capacity,[33] and risks of elite capture and misallocation of resources.[34] As a result, the decentralization of services can, in fact, be linked to higher levels of perceived corruption, larger Government spending and, in some cases, even macroeconomic instability and slower growth.

In light of these debates, a new generation of specialists is embracing the complexity and diversity of decentralization stressing that different types of decentralization have distinctly different causes and effects. For instance, in his seminal study of decentralization in Latin America, Falleti contends that decentralization is path-dependent and evolves depending on what type of decentralization is implemented first and on the sequence adopted. Initial reform steps matter the most because they serve to constrain the opportunities and strategies available for actors later on in their negotiations over the intergovernmental balance of power. More specifically, according to him, "the effects of decentralization on the intergovernmental balance of power among national executives, governors, and mayors is dependent on the temporal sequencing of different types of decentralization policies (administrative, fiscal, or political in nature)".[35]

While decentralization may carry important implications for State-society relations, the nature of these effects are contingent on not just the actual design of reforms and the relative capability of actors to take advantage of reforms, but also pre-existing power structures that shape the process.[36] For instance, scholars of federalism traditionally stress that the internal structure of the political parties matters for the implementation of reforms. "If given certain electoral and nomination procedures, national legislators are more accountable to the national executive, they will tend to push for more centralization of authority in the design and bargaining over decentralization reforms."[37] More recently, analysts highlight that the successful decentralization of public services delivery hinges on a broader set of contextual factors that condition the process.[38] These include two main factors, namely the structure of political institutions, particularly the presence of viable accountability constraints on politicians, technical administrative capacity and institutional authority of local actors; and the Structure of civil society itself, including the degree of organization and mobilization of citizens.[39] With respect to post-conflict countries, the scholarship emphasizes that "decentralization succeeds best in situations where there is a strong central government (strong in terms of legitimacy and capacity) as well as an empowered population at local community level".[40] In other words, decentralization may consolidate peace as an instrument for social integration and reconciliation in post-conflict environments if pursued in a balanced fashion based on non-zero-sum politics.

Accordingly, this report starts with the assumption that the design and sequence of the decentralization reforms package matters, but that structural dynamics have major implications on outcomes. For the purposes of the following analysis, decentralization entails both vertical devolution of power, authority and resources from the central State to local government structures, and horizontal reforms aimed at the empowerment of grass-roots communities and non-State actors to enable them to participate, plan and co-implement socioeconomic development initiatives.[41] The subsidiarity principle, whereby revenue collection, expenditure and public policy decision-making are exercised at the lowest possible level of government,[42] is central to our approach to decentralization.

II

Varieties of
DECENTRALIZATION

*D*ecentralization has distinct but interrelated administrative, fiscal and political dimensions. Cross-national comparisons reveal that policymakers tend to pursue different combinations of reforms along these three dimensions. Administrative decentralization comprises a set of policies that transfer the dispensation of social services, such as education, health and housing, to subnational governments. If policies are designed to increase the revenues or fiscal authority of subnational governments, then we can speak of fiscal decentralization. As for political decentralization, it refers to "constitutional or electoral reforms designed to devolve political authority to subnational actors and to create or activate spaces for the political representation of subnational polities".[43]

Looking closely at the process of transferring from the central State apparatus reveals that reforms may follow different modalities. At one end of the spectrum is deconcentration, which involves subordinate lower-level units or subunits, such as regional, district or local offices of the central administration or service delivery organization. These units usually have delegated authority in policy, financial and administrative matters without any significant independent local inputs.[44] Deconcentrated State services remain a hierarchical part of the central government level. They lack autonomous status as legal entities or corporate bodies, and as such do not have political leadership, decision-making powers, or distinct budgets.[45]

Delegation is located at mid-point, whereby some decision-making and administrative authority for carefully spelled out tasks are transferred to institutions and organizations that are either under indirect Government control or semi-independent. Most typically, delegation is done by the central government to semi-autonomous State-owned enterprises and urban or regional development corporations, which remain accountable to the centre.[46]

Finally, devolution transfers maximum decision-making to autonomous lower-level units such as provincial, district and local authorities that are legally constituted as separate governance bodies. Through devolution, the central government relinquishes certain functions or creates new units of government that are outside its direct control.[47] Decentralization at this level requires "subnational governments to hold defined spheres of autonomous action, which typically means the use of subnational elections".[48]

> *Decentralization has distinct but interrelated administrative, fiscal and political dimensions. Cross-national comparisons reveal that policymakers tend to pursue different combinations of reforms along these three dimensions*

III

THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM
an Analysis

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*P*olicy debates on the future of the post-conflict Syrian State have often revolved around the gaps and contradictions in the current legal regulatory framework for local administration, or the controversial Law 107, the pitfalls of implementing decentralization in the context of prevailing fragile institutions, and potential proposals to overhaul its local governance. While the present study seeks to move beyond these debates by empirically mapping the realities of local governance in order to identify technical capacity gaps, policy priorities and urgent reform needs, this chapter briefly lays out the main contours of the country's official local administration system as set out in Law 107, and serves as background to the empirical analysis in the following sections of the present study.

The local administration system in the Syrian Arab Republic was traditionally composed of fourteen governorates (*muhafazat*), subdivided into 107 districts (*manatiq*), and 2,480 subdistricts (*nawahi*). Law 107 adopted a different territorial division legally designating broad mandates for cities, towns and townships as new governance tiers below the previously dominant governorates. Each governance tier now officially has an elected local council and an executive office. According to the Syria Report, the number of administrative units in the country has nearly doubled with the passing of a decree in 2011; 26 new cities, 242 new towns and 428 new townships were created.[49] As a result of this process of administrative layering, small villages have been aggregated into townships while new urban spaces have been carved out of rural areas. The country became officially subdivided into 157 cities, 502 towns and 682 townships. The basis on which administrative boundaries have been redrawn, however, is unclear. Formally, these newly introduced subdivisions endowed local actors with budgets and decision-making powers. It is unclear the extent to which they will effectively pave the way for new avenues of patronage by the central government. Consecutive local elections, reveal a relatively modest ratio of candidates of just above 40,000 contesting the elections for the total of 18,478 seats in 2018 and 43,000 competing for 17,629 seats in 2011.[50] Indeed, an estimated 15 per cent of the councils remained unfilled in 2011.[51] Furthermore, the low voter turnout has marred the elections even in areas of government stronghold.

Administratively, the legislation officially transfers oversight of public service delivery from the central ministries to local actors across six sectors, including health, education, higher education, transport, roads, and solid waste management. The text formulates the responsibilities of local authorities to encompass studying and implementing public services projects, including improving facilities, in addition to coordinating with central agencies the implementation of public policies in the localities. However, it is unclear to what extent the actual delegation of powers and authorities to municipal actors or even the governorates has in fact occurred, a process that entails significant capacity-building at both the central and local levels and extensive restructuring of operational and legal-regulatory procedures.

In fact, there is a significant degree of overlapping powers across local-level councils, executive offices and central-level actors, thereby rendering accountability relations poorly defined. For instance, Article 33 of Law 107 empowers a governorate council to "undertake all decisions and measures necessary to exercise the competencies of the Ministry or administration or central institution whose competencies have been transferred to the Local Authority in accordance with the National Decentralization plan."[52] However, the Law does not specify who has the power to dismiss directors generals administering decentralized public services, with Article 46 only referring to the need of central ministries to consult governors on the appointment and transfer of director generals. Adding to the confusion, the legal text does not clearly demarcate functions, roles and responsibilities across central and subnational tiers, a situation which not only creates reform inertia but may also potentially open the door for struggles within the State. De facto, the conflation of administrative roles on the ground is such that managers at the district and subdistrict levels have continued to supervise the implementation of laws, regulations and decisions, which technically also fall under the domains of both elected councils and executive offices.

Indeed, the powers of municipalities remained seriously curtailed both vertically through direct interventions by appointed governors, and horizontally from competing local structures. The Baath party's local branches seem to influence decision-making processes at the subnational level, according to critics who stress the hegemony of the party over the State. While security actors have traditionally influenced local administrative structures, the militarization of the conflict has further increased their influence while the power of official administrative entities has been undermined. Security actors have been able to use various formal and informal mechanisms to secure their interests and power over local administrations,[53] among which is the Security Committee (SC).

Further compounding the picture is the lack of systematic efforts at cementing horizontal decentralization at the local level. Channels for social accountability require access to information, a minimum level of trust in the authorities, collaborative civil servants, and guarantees of civil and political rights. Although Law 107 officially stipulates a few mechanisms involving citizens in decision-making, including petitioning service centres and attending townhall meetings, and there have been some pilot efforts to encourage participatory approaches to urban rehabilitation, reforms have yet to formally institutionalize channels for community participation. Collaborative principles of planning, policymaking and implementation, anchored on continuously engaging with community members and non-State actors, are not incorporated into the local administration system.

As regards public finance, the country's local administration system allows for subnational actors to have separate budgets and for governorates to not just exercise significant expenditure powers, but also to develop public-private partnerships as envisioned in Decree 15/2012 for the purposes of revenue generation. Nonetheless, analysts are careful to highlight that, in fact, very few fiscal decentralization steps have been taken on the ground since Law 107 was enacted, in part due to regulatory contradictions with the main public finance law Decree 42/2006. Given the lack of both financial and human resources at the subnational level, where there is an estimated shortage of 100,000 technical staff,[54] decentralization has been uneven and not fully implemented. Indeed, access, availability and efficiency of public services have become rallying cries for ordinary Syrians, who also raise concerns about corruption of newly empowered local authorities. Furthermore, persistent concerns regarding relative territorial deprivation and inequitable distribution of resources, particularly revenues from oil, also highlight the need for transparent formulas for public allocations by the central government.

Politically, uneven electoral representation and devolution of powers create gaps and contradictions. While governors continue to be appointed by the president and serve as representatives of the central government, they preside over elected local executive offices, a situation that seems to marginalize the elected heads of governorate councils. This contrasts with lower tiers of governance at the city and town levels, however, where heads of elected councils lead the respective executive offices. Yet, elected city and town councils seem to have lesser formal powers relative to their counterparts at the governorate level, with their planning powers restricted to coordination and voicing opinions on governorate-led plans. This is perhaps most problematic in light of the country's rapidly expanding number of urban centres. Critics also highlight the precarious position of elected bodies, which can be dissolved by the prime minister or the president.[55]

Aside from gaps and contradictions in the law, the country's incoherent decentralization agenda reflects the absence of viable institutional reform arrangements. The High Council, headed by the prime minister and the minister of local administration as its vice-president, is supposed to lead the decentralization process, with its membership drawn from ministers, governors and heads

> **There is a significant degree of overlapping powers across local-level councils, executive offices and central-level actors, thereby rendering accountability relations poorly defined",**

of councils concerned. Because all elected local councils are required to report to this entity and seek its approval, it is likely to wield power over the evolution of the country's local administration system.[56] The envisioned decision-making apparatus of the High Council, however, remains unclear. Noticeably absent from its composition are representatives of municipalities, the civil society, the private sector, and independent experts. Its lack of autonomy from the central government may serve to pull the brakes on bottom-up decentralization initiatives and renders it less capable of adjudicating centre-periphery disputes. Thus far, the Government formally established the Council, but without designating adequate resources for large-scale capacity-building at the central and local levels; hence, it is not likely to effectively steer the decentralization process.

As a result, the promulgation of a systematic strategy for decentralization in the country remains overdue. Given the ambitious scope of envisioned reforms, delays in developing a nuanced approach based on sequencing priorities and capacity-building needs have added ambiguity to the reform agenda. Indeed, the decision to restructure the local administration system, in the absence of larger fully fledged political reforms, raises questions about the goals of reform steps and their limits. With

significant shortages in resources and violent conflict ensuing, new modalities of local governance have not fully crystalized. Newly established elected structures currently seem to sit as additional institutional layers, with overlapping mandates and responsibilities. Acutely missing is a realistic phased implementation plan for Law 107, which was initially envisioned to take place within five years. Such a plan needs to incorporate not only amending legal regulatory frameworks, but also capacity-building at the local and central levels. In addition, systematic awareness-raising both within the State and among the general public will be essential in order to create buy-in and avoid zero-sum bureaucratic politics that can threaten to derail the reform process.

Source: Istockphoto, photo credit: Joel Carillet

IV

MAPPING LOCAL GOVERNANCE
on the Ground

$\mathcal{T}$his chapter presents an empirical analysis of the main gaps in institutional, financial and administrative capacities at the subnational level through a detailed mapping of the prevailing local governance modalities across five local sites in various parts of the country. The selected sites capture variations across areas controlled by the Government of Syria (GoS), the Kurdish self-administration, the Turkish Government and HTS. Emphasis is on the following five dimensions: (a) analysing the dynamics among local administration, local councils and armed militias or security agencies; (b) links between local councils, on the one hand, and executive authorities in charge of services provision at the national, subnational and local levels, on the other hand; (c) dynamics between central line ministries and local executive offices; (d) participatory and accountability credentials of governance structures at the local level; and (e) effective fiscal decentralization capacities, including the ability to impose levies, raise taxes, maintain budget transparency, and adopt clear streamlined financial reporting.

A. GOVERNMENT OF SYRIA MODEL

1. CASE STUDY ONE: AL-TAL

The city of Al-Tal, located some ten kilometers north of central Damascus, is administratively part of the Rif Dimashq Governorate. Following months of demonstrations against GoS, non-State armed opposition groups took control of the city in the middle of 2012. Shortly after, locals began to establish civic administration bodies to address community needs, including a local council under nominal supervision by the opposition-led Syrian Interim Government (SIG). Soon after GoS began to enforce a severe siege on Al-Tal that lasted until mid-2014. Recognizing the need to communicate with GoS, a reconciliation committee (*lijnat al-musalaha*) was established in Al-Tal*, whose members, often technocrats, included family members of former local government intermediaries.[57] The reconciliation committee acted as the primary intermediary between GoS and opposition forces, while the Russians acted as the guarantor that, as long as the negotiations were underway, GoS would refrain from bombing the locality. A deal was reached at the end of 2016, following which GoS ended the siege in return for the armed opposition groups leaving Al-Tal for Idlib Province.[58] Following a security clearance process, the security services sent a list of names to the committee identifying the people (fighters and civilians) obligated to leave the city. As part of this process, GoS dismantled the opposition networks and institutions that had been established since 2012 and replaced them with State institutions. As a result, external support for Al-Tal was terminated, leaving the city completely dependent on Damascus to govern it and provide services.[59]

01 | Local administration: formation and structure

In the recent 2018 local elections, the Baath-led National Unity list for Al-Tal nominated 16 members (the majority) leaving nine seats to be filled by other candidates.[60] The seats were filled by individuals who had remained loyal to GoS during the course of the conflict and apolitical figures, while excluding opposition activists.[61] Critics allege that all key positions at the city council, namely its head, deputy, amanuensis, and the members of the executive office, were in fact selected in advance by the Baath,[62] leaving only one of the six executive offices seats vacant.[63]

In principle, the city council is considered the highest authority in Al-Tal and, thus, responsible for regulating and overseeing the work of the executive bodies and other entities providing services inside its administrative unit. Officially, the Al-Tal council should organize its work through permanent and temporary committees. Specialized permanent committees were officially established but are, in fact, not active.[64] Al-Tal's executive office is chaired by the council's head, and its six members, including the deputy, are assigned to specific sectors. Each member is responsible for overseeing and reporting on the work of all executive entities operating inside its respective sectors.[65]

In practice, the balance of power between the city council and the executive office favours the latter. Research highlights that most of the authorities, and decisions, are concentrated in the hands of the executive office, while the role of the council is largely nominal. The executive office is reportedly using its influence to pressure the council members to approve its proposals without proper examination or discussion. Likewise, the office seems to be systematically blocking the council from required access to information in order to monitor the executive office's work or to ensure that the relevant regulations are fully implemented.[66]

Formally, the city council's structure includes neighbourhood committees, which are technically responsible for overseeing the planning and implementation of the executive office's activities at the

local level.[67] It is unclear to which extent these committees function as autonomous grass-roots entities that can create space for democratic empowerment. In April 2019, the executive office created top-down a total of eleven neighbourhood committees in Al-Tal and selected their members in coordination with both the Baath and the respective security agencies.[68] In order to incorporate the committees' identified needs, assessments and proposals into city plans, council members are also assigned to supervise their work.[69] While neighbourhood committees in Al-Tal are quite active, there are signs that the local branch of the Baath continued to perform functions that the committees are mandated with, such as distributing cooking gas and reporting on local needs.[70]

Nonetheless, an important vehicle for grass-roots empowerment in Al-Tal has emerged in the form of the Committee for Development Affairs. This committee was created in Al-Tal based on a decree by the governor of Rural Damascus consisting of 13 members, five of whom are from the city council while the rest were selected in a public meeting in July 2018. The main aim of the committee is to crowdfund donations for the projects that the council is unable to finance. Towards that end, the committee seems to include some local figures with the aim of mobilizing their networks and connection with local businessmen and those abroad to raise funding for the city. Although the committee is headed by the council's head and a deputy, it seems to function autonomously in order to appease concerns among community members regarding corruption. Indeed, the committee has an independent bank account,[71] and it selects fund-raising projects based on negotiations with the council and the wider community that will contribute to funding it.[72]

02 |Power dynamics: local versus central

There have been no real changes to the existing hierarchical power structure, which allows the centre to control all aspects of administration in Al-Tal. This authority is largely exercised through the governor and line ministries, as opposed to the elected city council. Although the executive office still submits its annual plans to the council for approval, GoS has, de facto, placed the decision-making powers (approvals) in the hands of the governor and the central government. The latter makes its decisions based on respective priorities and preferences rather than on local needs and choices.[73]

On the ground, the council does not seem to have much administrative authority over the executive office and service provision directorates. In fact, the council does not even have the mandate to contact those entities directly. Instead, all communications have to be sent to the governor of Rural Damascus who, if approved, transfers them to the respective directorate.[74] This was evident in an official memorandum sent to the governor of Rural Damascus explaining the council's inability to provide transportation between Damascus and Al-Tal and asking him to notify the respective authorities to assign public transportation buses for that purpose. After approving the request, the governor addressed the head of the public transportation directorate asking him to provide the needed assistance when possible.[75] Similar memos from other cities in the province show the same pattern, with the governor being considered the only channel to contact the education directorate to open schools,[76] the electricity directorate to install metres,[77] head of police to open civil registry,[78] the health directorate to open a primary health clinic,[79] and the service directorate to repair streets.[80] Likewise, Al-Tal council does not seem to have the authority to contact other councils directly. Instead, this has to be done through the governor who, in turn, delivers the memo, if approved, to the respective councils.[81]

The relationship is similar between the service provision entities operating in Al-Tal and their line ministries. The work of those offices is limited to assessing the needs in their areas and then submitting proposals on what they think should be done. However, the final decision on what gets implemented is taken by the respective line ministries, who determine the final budget and, thus, allocate what is spent where. Those policies and decisions are then implemented by the local offices of those directorates/ministries. More precisely, the ability of local entities to influence the decisions of their respective central directorates/line ministries is limited to providing suggestions which either get selected or ignored, instead of being looked at as decisions that need nominal approval.[82]

In terms of the recruiting process, line ministries, the governorate council and security agencies seem to influence the hiring process of top-level employees in the city. Indeed, the respective ministries and general directorates typically approve the budgets needed for those positions, and they have the ability to make key decisions concerning the number of employees and positions.[83] Nonetheless, the local city council and executive bodies in Al-Tal seem to have more authority over the hiring process when positions are financed externally by humanitarian or development organizations. The hiring process in such cases is usually followed in collaboration between the council/local executive bodies and the respective donors involved.[84]

03 | Autonomy of civilian-led local administration

There are signs that the local authorities in Al-Tal have limited autonomy. The local branch of the political intelligence agency, which is in charge of local security affairs, exercises considerable influence over the executive office. In addition, it seems to screen the local council's decisions and activities, blocking city council's decisions and projects if they do not serve the personal interests of high-ranked officers or the figures affiliated with them. Research shows that, when planning to construct a street or a facility, it is typical for locals to try to use their connections with the agency in charge to move the street or facility closer to or further away from their properties. Likewise, the council does not have the authority to hire people or work with them in a voluntary capacity, such as the neighbourhood committees, without prior security clearance from the agency. Such decisions are typically made based on the perceived loyalty of the relevant individuals rather than on merit. In fact, the need for security clearance restricts the city council's power to authorize work by local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or private companies.[85] Research indicates that the militarization of the conflict has led to the emergence of new influential actors, such as the Republican Guard, which is technically responsible for manning the checkpoints around the city, yet imposes taxes on the entry of construction materials into the city.[86]

04 | Local participation, transparency and accountability

Officially, accountability relations in Al-Tal are predominantly top-down. While the executive office should be monitored by the city council, in reality, the latter lacks the ability to regularly monitor local decision-making by the executive office. Rather, monitoring is done by the governorate executive office, namely the governor, who, in turn, is monitored by the ministry of local administration and environment. Indeed, the council does not seem to share information about its strategies and policies with the neighbourhood committees or local residents. As such, people have no power to monitor the council's work or hold it accountable.[87] Similarly, people in Al-Tal do not seem to engage with the local council to influence its decisions. Key informants pointed out the following reasons:[88]

- *People are scared of the consequences of criticizing Government entities, especially since they might be accused of being disloyal due to the history of Al-Tal in resisting GoS;*

- *People do not believe that they can actually influence policies, especially strategic ones;*

- *Due to a lack of transparency, people typically find out about decisions only after they have been issued;*

- *Most residents are still unaware of mechanisms to engage with the local council.*

That said, the formation of a committee for development affairs has opened space for community members to collaborate with the local council. This means that the committee can prioritize the implementation of projects based on local needs and monitor their implementation and financing through crowdsourcing. This mechanism has the potential to enhance the transparency and accountability of local governance.

> **The formation of a committee for development affairs has opened space for community members to collaborate with the local council**

05 | Funding and fiscal decentralization

The city council in Al-Tal depends on transfers from the central government through the ministry of local administration and environment.[89] Locally generated revenues from taxes and revenues are limited due to the large-scale damage the city has witnessed, the large number of displaced residents and lack of reliable services. Aside from crowdfunding through the above-mentioned committee of development affairs, the city council enforces local taxes and fees. People often feel obliged to pay fees out of fear of legal consequences, the council's ability to terminate its services if utilities are not paid, and the interlink between all government processes, meaning that people cannot complete their paperwork until all their pending payments for GoS are settled.[90]

However, research indicates that the council is facing difficulties collecting taxes and revenues retroactively covering the period the city was outside the control of GoS. This is due to the following reasons:[91]

- *Large amounts of fees and taxes are overdue, which people are unable to pay;*

- *Residents are refusing to pay fees as GoS did not provide the corresponding services during that period or because people were displaced during that time;*

- *Pending payments are being dealt with separately, meaning that they have not been linked to current charges;*

- *The council has not been using legal means to prosecute those who are not paying.*

2. CASE STUDY TWO: TAFAS

The city of Tafas, located some 11 kilometers north of Daraa city, is administratively part of the Daraa Governorate. Shortly after locals took to the streets, GoS deployed security and military forces, including tanks, in Tafas and imposed strict security measures for over two years.[92] Following fierce clashes, armed opposition groups took control of the city in October 2013.[93] Faced with a governance void, a local council was formed to provide basic services and to enforce law and order. Despite frequent airstrikes and skirmishes, the area remained relatively stable, which allowed local and international NGOs to provide services and complement the work of the local council.[94] In June 2018, GoS launched a military campaign to restore territorial control over the Daraa province. The scale and intensity of the attack forced armed opposition leaders to the negotiating table. Tafas was officially recaptured by GoS in July 2018 through a direct surrender deal brokered with Russia.[95] Negotiations reportedly discussed the possibility of preserving the existence of opposition-run local councils by merging them with State institutions. However, while GoS allowed former opposition forces to keep their light weapons, it insisted on dismantling all non-State structures and institutions.[96] As a result, the city now depends on the services provided through Damascus.

01 |Local administration: formation and structure

Unlike Al-Tal, no local elections were held in Tafas because of the fragile security situation on the ground. The National Unity list, which nominated enough candidates to form a full council, ran unopposed and won by default (*tazkieh*). Most of those individuals were previous members of the formal city council that was operating in Tafas before GoS lost control over the city.[97] Others were known for their support for GoS and only returned to the city after it was recaptured by the latter.[98] Research indicates that the council has been playing a marginal role, with decision-making dominated by the executive office, whose members were handpicked by the Baath party and security agencies.

Existing power dynamics in Tafas have further limited the formal authority of the city council. In fact, the reconciliation agreement gave the city a special status

allowing the opposition to exercise de facto authority on the ground. Aside from maintaining local security, the leaders of non-State armed groups and the Tafas negotiation committee gradually assumed a key role in overseeing the work of the city council and facilitating the distribution of public services.[99] While the role of negotiation committees elsewhere across the country has progressively declined, the Tafas committee remains active through ongoing talks with GoS and the Russians on the implementation of the conditions of the deal.[100]

Initially, the negotiation committee, which is composed of local armed leaders and community figures, did not intervene in the city council's day-to-day business. However, that changed when local residents started mobilizing against the council amidst allegations of politicized services provision in favour of its members and people loyal to the Government at the expense of the remaining residents.[101]

In response, local negotiation leaders started playing a more proactive role in monitoring the council's work and even managed the distribution of key services. A new loosely structured community initiative was launched whereby members of the negotiation committee and the disbanded local council engaged in monitoring and coordinating services provided by the Government.[102]Unlike the disbanded council, this new initiative simply known as *al-lajna*, or commission, does not seem to have a formal structure. Instead, it uses an ad hoc approach to carry out short-term tasks, whenever needed.[103]

02 |Power dynamics: local versus central

There appears to be a delicate balance of power between the city council and the above-described commission affiliated with the negotiation committee. On the one hand, the council has the capacity, access to public funding and support of Government institutions. On the other hand, the commission has the backing and authority from de facto authorities on the ground, which renders it capable of blocking any activities it does not approve of. The two entities seem to have no choice but to cooperate in order to run the city as smoothly as possible. Similarly, since both entities draw on support from local residents, they have mutual interest in facilitating service provision in the city.[104]

Officially, the council and the executive entities affiliated with it are responsible for administering basic services such as water, electricity, bakeries, rubbish collection, and education. However, as discussed in chapter III, decentralization in the country has resulted in convoluted roles and weak differentiation of functions, with central

actors dominating local decision-making. De facto, the commission wields significant power serving as a watch dog monitoring the delivery of services and intervening whenever problems arise with regards to access or quality.[105] In particular, the commission seems to focus on preventing the politicization of the distribution of basic commodities, such as cooking gas, which are secured and allocated through the council. Thus, it oversees the lists of recipients and delivery operations. Likewise, it reportedly oversees relief operations, which are distributed by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC),[106] by monitoring criteria for the selection of beneficiaries, ensuring that distribution is transparent according to agreed lists and that the qualities and quantities match the official reports. In addition, the commission seems to be heavily involved in overseeing the production and allocation of bread.[107]

When differences emerge between council and commission, the latter seems to have the upper hand as it is the one with the power on the ground. Furthermore, the commission seems to be able to communicate some of its demands concerning services through channels higher than the council. This is typically done through the negotiation committee's regular meetings with representatives of security agencies or Russian officials. In fact, these channels allow the commission to use the hierarchal power structure of GoS to get some of its demands fulfilled or to step in and pressure the council.[108]

03 | Autonomy of civilian-led local administration

The local governance authorities of Tafas lack autonomy from armed actors, which exercise considerable influence over decision-making. These actors include militia formerly affiliated with the opposition, security agencies and the Russian military police. The Tafas local reconciliation deal allowed the leader of the former opposition militia Mahmoud Murshid al-Bardan (the leader of *Jaysh al-Mu'taz b'Allah*) to maintain the organizational structure and hierarchy of his group, although titles and allegiances have changed overtime, while monopolizing armed presence inside the city.[109] Al-Bardan exerts his authority over the city council through the negotiation committee as discussed above. In addition, he is able to use regular meetings with both the Russian police and the security agencies to influence the decisions of the council and line ministries. For example, when Tafas suffered from severe bread shortage, the commission unsuccessfully pressured the council to increase the capacity of the bakeries. It was Al-Bardan, through his connections and negotiation with the Russian police, who persuaded GoS to increase the quantities of flour allocated for Tafas.[110] On other occasions, Al-Bardan reportedly used his channels with the military intelligence agency to improve access to services or their quality.[111]

04 | Local participation, transparency and accountability

Tafas has continued to experience recurrent waves of protests by residents. Widespread dissatisfaction with the way the local council was formed [112] and continued dominance of central directorates/line ministries, have rendered formal local accountability mechanisms particularly weak. However, local initiatives such as the commission have opened channels to influence some of the policies of GoS towards Tafas. For example, dozens of Government employees in Tafas were fired from their jobs due to failure to report for work during the conflict,[113] but were reinstated after the negotiation committee insisted on their return to their pre-conflict posts during discussions with GoS.[114]

> **" *Local residents seem to be depending on ==unofficial mechanisms== to communicate their demands* "**

Local residents seem to be depending on unofficial mechanisms to communicate their demands. This typically occurs through meetings with the negotiation committee, which then follows up on those issues with the relevant authorities. The commission has also been used by locals as an indirect channel to monitor the work of the council and prevent misconducts to the extent possible. In addition, locals have been meeting with the Russian military patrols during their missions to Tafas to demand better access to services. For example, the aforementioned flour shortage issue was brought up by civilians during their meetings with the Russian military police.[115]

05 | Funding and fiscal decentralization

The city council in Tafas, similar to other areas under the control by the Syrian Government, is heavily dependent on transfers from the central government. Indeed, the amount generated by the council from taxes and revenues is limited due to the large-scale damage the city witnessed and the lack of reliable services. Control by the former opposition faction over the internal security in the city has further limited the ability of the council to collect taxes as revenues. While the negotiation committee seems to have been able to raise funding for services, the overall impact remains limited.[116]

B. HTS-LED SALVATION GOVERNMENT MODEL

CASE STUDY THREE: ATARIB

Atarib city, located some 25 kilometres west of the city of Aleppo, is administratively part of Aleppo Governorate. Following the withdrawal of GoS from Atarib in July 2012, youth activists organized a predominantly civilian-led local administrative council (LAC) in order to provide basic services, perform administrative functions and restore order. LAC in Atarib assumed a leading role in coordinating public functions and cooperated with other local and international organizations. Initially, it officially operated under the supervision of SIG, which was established by the Syrian National Coalition.[117] This governance structure ceased to exist in Atarib when HTS captured the city, among other areas in the north-west, in January 2019. To avoid bloodshed, Atarib's notables signed a surrender deal allowing HTS and its affiliates, namely the Salvation Government, to run the city.[118] The formal surrender of the city gave way to a de facto split administrative structure, with some public services and policy domains still falling under the authority of SIG while others are controlled by HTS as further discussed below. This duality in the administration reflects the reluctance of donors to directly collaborate with HTS, which has been formally designated as a terrorist organization.

01 |Local administration: formation and structure

In protest against HTS and the Salvation Government, LAC in Atarib disbanded itself in a public statement and announced the resignation of all its members.[119] In response, the Salvation Government, through its ministry of local administration and services (MLAS), announced on January 16, 2019 the appointment of a temporary LAC to run the city until a new body would be formed.[120] Subsequently, the Aleppo branch of MLAS established its administrative structure inside the city. Atarib was divided into four districts headed by four *mukhtars*, who were entrusted with the task of forming neighbourhood district committees (*lijan ahyaa*) in consultation with local residents. Once formed, members of the district committees, namely, five notables from each area, and the *mukhtars* were entrusted with selecting fifteen members of the new local council from a total of thirty-six

candidates.[121] The composition of the new council, however, became a source of controversy since not all the major families, commonly known as *tawaef* in the area, were represented.

The current structure of LAC consists of a director, a deputy director and the following offices: relief, finance, legal affairs, services, archive (*diwan*), media, agriculture, projects and proposals, urban planning, education, and health. Most of these offices consist of one staff apart from the services and archive which have two staff each. In terms of hierarchy, LAC in Atarib is under the supervision of the Aleppo branch of MLAS, the Salvation Government.[122] Unlike the official structure of both GoS and SIG, which have provincial councils between the central government and the city council, the Salvation Government does not have this mid-level tier of governance.
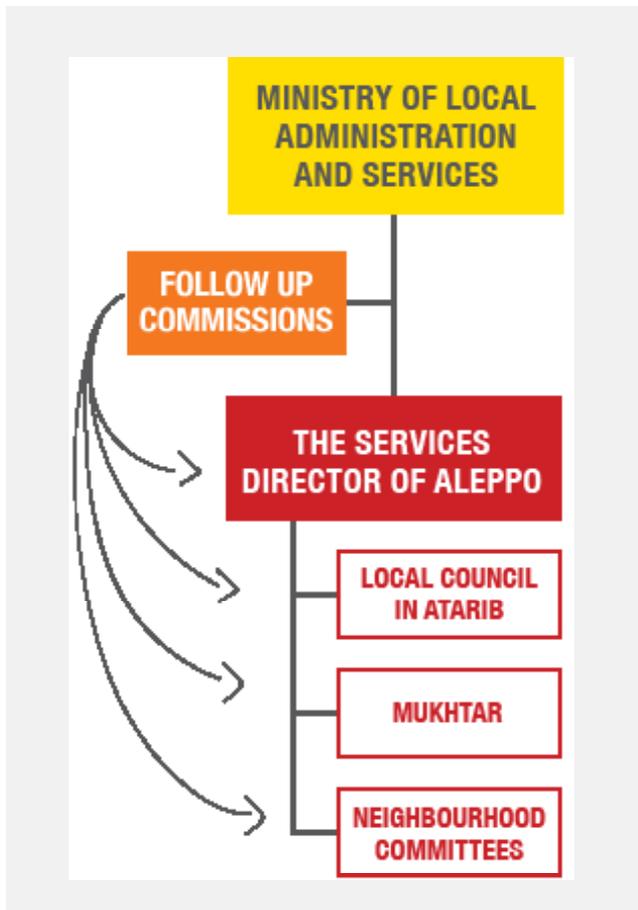
| **Figure 1.** | Structure of the local administrative council in Atarib |
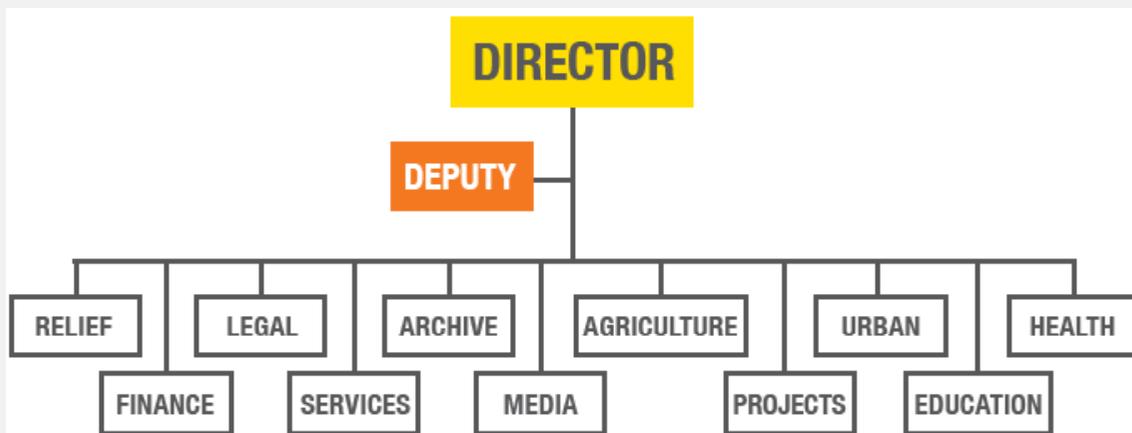
Source: ESCWA, the National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) Programme.

LAC operates through a number of specialized committees (figure 1). Each committee consists of two or three members and is in charge of overseeing a sector or functional area. Unlike the GoS governance model, the council is not mandated to adopt city plans, make proposals based on residents' preferences, or nominally serve as a watchdog on local policy implementation. Rather, its responsibilities are limited to coordinating the work of executive offices. Oversight of LAC is delegated to follow-

up committees [*lijan al-mutaba'a*], which, as shown in figure 2, technically should be created at various levels, such as city level or town level) in order to monitor the work of various institutions.[123] However, in reality, these monitoring structures did not always materialize,[124] and research indicates that local community leaders are unaware of the existence and work modalities of follow-up committees.[125]

Figure 2. Structure of the ministry of local administration and services

Source: ESCWA, the National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) Programme.

02 | Power dynamics: local versus central

While LAC officially coordinates local services, its influence over local executive authorities in charge of providing services remains largely limited. This is partially due to the affiliation of some of those entities to a rival entity, SIG, which is still in charge of funding and administering three key directorates in Atarib, namely, health, education and agriculture. Consequently, LAC is only entitled to coordinating with those entities which function independently. The Salvation Government and the council seem to tolerate this arrangement, as SIG and the central directorates affiliated with it are the only

entities who have the expertise and fundraising capacity to keep those services afloat.[126] Despite this firewall between the directorates and the Salvation Government, many western donors have terminated their funding for those entities due to their operations in areas controlled by HTS.[127]

> *The governance model of the Salvation Government heavily concentrates* **decision-making powers at the central level**

The governance model of the Salvation Government heavily concentrates decision- making powers at the central level. Consequently, the service directorates are merely implementers of the policies and programmes designed by their respective line ministries. For instance, directorates are still able to provide proposals for their localities, such as proposing the establishment or maintenance of a water station, but the final decision on whether such a recommendation will be implemented or not is determined by the central authority.[128] Similarly, the council of Atarib does not have much influence over the local branches of the executive directorates. Since the latter only receives its commands from their respective central authority, the role of the local council is limited to direct coordination with those local entities. If needed, communication with the central executive authorities and their line ministries should only happen through the official channels, namely, through the service directorate and MLAS, which, in turn, communicates with the relevant line ministry. Since the Atarib council does not have the required authority to supervise the work of local service providers, it uses the official upwards channels in order to communicate any issues that require inspection or improvement.[129]

Even when it comes to its own programmes and policies, LAC in Atarib can only implement its plans following prior approval from MLAS. As shown above, MLAS seems to have strong hiring and firing powers over the positions that are, theoretically, occupied by representatives of

local communities, namely, members of the local council, follow-up commissions, neighbourhood committees, *mukhtars*, and others.[130] However, the hiring of technocrats to occupy administrative positions in service directorates seems to be done directly by the relevant bodies through public calls.[131] In the case of local service directorates linked to SIG, LAC in Atarib has no authority over their operation.[132]

03 | Autonomy of civilian-led local administration

HTS is the main armed entity in charge of Atarib, as other groups were either ousted (*Nour Eddin al-Zinki*) or completely submitted under HTS authority (the National Front's subfactions).[133] According to the head of the local council, non-State armed groups in the city (whether HTS or the National Front) do not have any authority over the council's work. While some concurred with his position, research indicates that the security apparatus of HTS (*katibeh amnieh*) has intervened in the council's work in some cases detaining or investigating members of the council who are considered threats to the group and its influence. The group, however, does not seem to be directly involved in providing public services, imposing fees or controlling local resources, although it may influence general policies through its connection to the Salvation Government.

04 | Local participation, transparency and accountability

The local administrative structure of the Salvation Government officially creates multiple channels for local participation. The first official channel is indirect through its representatives inside the council members. The second channel is direct through locally embedded structures including the neighbourhood committees, *mukhtars* and follow-up committees. Formally, the committees and *mukhtars* meet with the council every two weeks to discuss the needs of their constituencies. The council and its offices receive official complaints and organize public meetings in common areas, namely, the main city mosque or its culture centre.[134]

However, research indicates that these channels are widely perceived as illegitimate or ineffective. Many people view the council as a proxy for HTS which seized Atarib by force and imposed its will on people, and are unwilling to engage with its governance structures. The lack of responsiveness to concerns regarding access or quality of such services as water, electricity, roads, relief, and education, often due to shortages in resources and expertise, have undermined residents' willingness to participate. Likewise, there seems to be a lack of horizontal

decentralization mechanisms enabling local residents to discuss draft decrees and policies. Instead, people only find out about decisions and regulations post facto.[135]

In terms of accountability, the council is mainly monitored by the following top-down mechanisms: MLAS officially oversees the follow-up committees, which, in turn, supervise the work of the services directorate of Aleppo through monthly reports and meetings. These two entities are in charge of monitoring the work of LAC in Atarib through similar means. The extent to which these arrangements effectively allow for a degree of transparency or responsiveness is unknown.[136]

05 | Fiscal decentralization

The council in Atarib has three main sources of income, including renting out premises owned by the council, namely, shops in the city's market, an industrial scale and a football stadium; fees on basic services, namely, water, cleaning, and others, and taxes; and central transfers from MLAS or other ministries/service directorates.

Revenues locally generated by the council remain low, amounting to less than 40 per cent of the budget, according to the council's director. This is due to the lack of quality services and the bad financial situation of locals, the majority of whom depend on humanitarian aid to survive.[137] For example, access to water is not widely available, and the majority of residents are not paying charges to the council either because they cannot afford to or because they are unsatisfied with the quality of the service. Nonetheless, some directorates have successfully raised revenues by imposing one-time fees such as registration taxes on all vehicles in the city. Initially, these additional revenues were channeled back to line ministries, however, following the objection of Atarib's LAC, a degree of decentralization was introduced, and these resources are now designated for local expenditure in coordination with MLAS.[138]

C. THE TURKISH-BACKED EUPHRATES SHIELD MODEL

CASE STUDY FOUR: JARABLUS

The city of Jarablus, located some 125 kilometers northeast of Aleppo, has been governed by various actors throughout the Syrian conflict. The Turkish-backed civil administration represents the final stage in the brief, but fraught, history of local governance in the city. Prior to that, Jarablus was under the control of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), which seized it after defeating local factions of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which had captured the territory from GoS. The current administration came to power in August 2017 following a Turkish-led coalition, supported by FSA groups, to fight ISIS along its border. Building on its military achievements, Turkey has channeled resources and humanitarian assistance to Jarablus presenting it as a successful example of its project in the country. While the city has been administratively linked to Gaziantep, the nearest major Turkish municipality, a distinct local governance system was introduced.[139]

01 | Local administration: formation and structure

The governance structure in Jarablus is anchored on LAC, which was established to run or monitor the district and provide public services such as humanitarian aid, infrastructure renovation, health care, sanitation, and education.[140] The current council in Jarablus was formed on March 5, 2017 by representatives of non-State armed groups, tribes and SIG (preparatory committee).[141] The number of key figures involved in those consultations reached around 50 people; however, only ten of them, mainly armed faction and tribal leaders, were the ones who selected the members of the council. Once formed, the 20 individuals who were appointed held internal elections for the positions of director, deputy director, and amanuensis, in addition to the composition of the council's key offices. However, the internal elections did not run smoothly as four appointed members resigned from the council in protest of its outcome.[142]

Officially, the council represents the highest authority in Jarablus as its mandate includes both legislative (represented by the council in its entirety) and executive powers (represented by the executive office also known as the permanent committee). The latter consists of seven Members, namely, the presidency of the council, including the director, deputy and amanuensis, which occupies the same position inside the executive office, and four additional council members who are consensually chosen. This office, which meets twice a week on average, is responsible for taking swift procedural and executive decisions by a majority vote, namely, five out of seven). The council, which meets once every two weeks, is in charge of issuing strategic and policy decisions, also by a majority vote.[143]

The council's elaborate structure officially consists of a presidency office with a director, deputy director and amanuensis, and the following 11 offices: health, which oversees the health directorate; education, which oversees the education directorate; finance and treasury; *awqaf*, which oversees the *awqaf* directorate; control and inspection, which oversees the inspection directorate; public relations; social services and relief; legal and statistics, which oversees the civil registry, land registry and statistics; services, which oversees the water directorate, electricity directorate and the municipality; agriculture, which oversees the agriculture directorate; and the subdistrict of Ghandoura. Most of those offices are run by one or two people. Beside these offices, the council has a number of specialized committees working in the fields of monitoring and inspection, NGOs, human resources, and finance. Each of these committees is staffed by an average of three council members, who are consensually chosen.[144] Decisions are usually made at the committee level without getting back to the rest of the council. However, on sensitive questions, the committee makes its decision in consultation with the executive office.[145]

It remains unclear when the term of office of the four non-presidency positions ends, as the same committee members have been carrying out their roles for several years and new elections have not been held.[146] The same applies to other council's committees, whose members, or at least most of them, have been occupying their positions since they were established. According to the head of the council, the members of those bodies should, in theory, be elected/agreed upon more or less every year. In practice, however, they will remain in power as long as there are no problems or scandals.[147] As a legislative entity, the council's decisions formally apply to everyone living and operating in Jarablus. This includes military, police, civilians, and other entities operating in the city. But as an executive entity, its authority only applies to the entities working directly under its umbrella.[148]
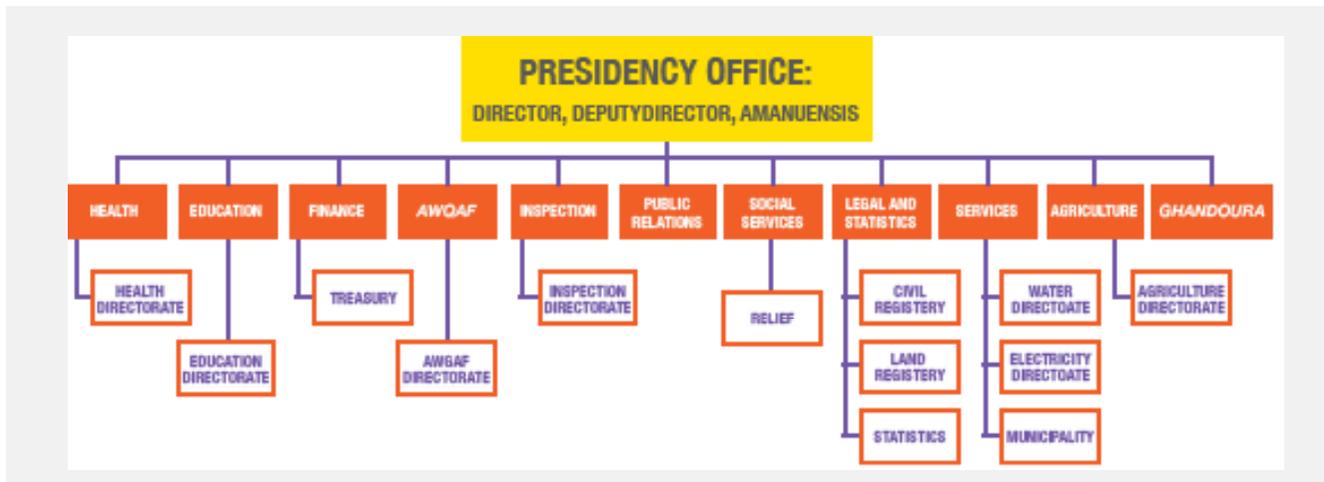
Source: ESCWA, the National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) Programme.

02 |Power dynamics: local versus central

Officially, the council of Jarablus should be operating under the supervision of Aleppo's provincial council, which, in turn, falls under the umbrella of the SIG's ministry of local administration. However, aside from cases of minor coordination, SIG does not have any real administrative authority over the council of Jarablus. Rather, the council represents the highest executive authority in the city and enjoys substantial authority over the executive offices operating there.[149] The independence of the council's operations, however, should be kept in perspective as it heavily relies on technocratic knowledge and financing from the Turkish Government, as will be discussed below.

The relationship between the council and the public services directorates operating in the city is stronger than is the case with its counterparts in Atarib. This is largely due to direct administrative and financial links between the two sides. As shown in figure 3, the service provision directorates directly fall under the authority of their respective offices within the council. As such, the council, through its respective offices, is the main entity in charge of determining the policies and programmes of those directorates, seemingly in consultation with the directorates though. For instance, technocrats in directorate offices often propose draft regulations to be approved by the council.[150]

Since the council is relatively new and has no existing legal or procedural sources to draw on, it is still working on an ad-hoc basis, meaning that it only issues regulations when needed, instead of having clear and comprehensive bi-laws and policies.[151] Hiring is usually done locally after securing approval and funding for the proposed posts. Following a recruitment call at the respective level, a committee is typically formed to go through the applications and consensually identify the accepted candidate.[152]

Officially, the relationship between the council and the Turkish Government is limited to financial and technical support. Turkey has put significant effort into providing local government resources and humanitarian assistance. These include digging new wells, providing generators for water pumps, supplying electricity, building hospitals, reconstructing highways, paying salaries, and repairing schools and bakeries. Due to Turkey's direct and heavy involvement on the ground, it has been able to exert a significant degree of influence over decision-making processes inside the council. To manage this relationship effectively, coordination tends to take place at the local level between the Gaziantep province, with the vice-governor and municipality, on the one hand and the city' council on the other, which means that there is no direct communication with the central Turkish Government in Ankara.[153] Coordination has been manifested in services such as the civil registry, education and health, the provision of public utilities, and the regulation of religious endowments or *awqaf*. Aside from direct communication channels between these entities, Gaziantep has deployed delegates or advisors to Jarablus to work on the ground in parallel to the council and its offices. Those Turkish advisors are Government-appointed technocrats from different backgrounds, including health, education, finance, police, agriculture, and others. They are typically assigned to the relevant offices inside the council and work directly with the heads of those offices. The advisors, who are typically based in the country and rotate at an average of every three months, are involved

in the day-to-day activities of their assigned offices, including planning and supervision.[154] Research shows that advisors are heavily involved in the local decision-making process and hold sway over policy direction, although in rare occasions, deadlocks with members of the city council have occurred.[155] Financial reporting by the Jarablus local governance structures is channeled to the Turkish authority through locally embedded advisors.

03 | Autonomy of civilian-led local administration

Since the defeat of ISIS, the Turkish-backed armed factions have played an important role in shaping the council of Jarablus. These groups, whose role was meant to be limited to fighting ISIS, have played a crucial part in selecting members of the local administration. As mentioned above, representatives of the main armed blocs were the main actors in charge of forming the constituent committee, which, in turn. had the final call on the composition of the councils. Their heavy involvement was confirmed by members of the council, and the handwritten statement declaring the establishment of the council which bore the signatures of three militia factions.[156] Indeed, these same factions are the ones that disbanded the first council of Jarablus on February 11, 2017, following demonstrations against its decision to ban female teachers from wearing the *niqab*, a full-face veil, in schools.[157] According to multiple sources, including council members, armed militias do not usually meddle in the work of the city council. This has been attributed to a delicate balance among tribal powers, which are represented in the council membership. If one armed faction attempts to use its leverage to control the council, tribal figures who do not belong to that same faction will show resistance.[158]

04 | Local participation, transparency and accountability

The Jarablus council and its executive entities officially follow a monitoring hierarchy, whereby council members, including those of the executive office, are responsible for supervising the lower tiers of the local administration. Technically, specialized offices exercise supervision over public services, which are extended by directorates.[159] Mechanisms to ensure that this monitoring process is done systematically have not been institutionalized. Submitting regular progress reports does not seem to be a requirement for the offices and subentities of the council.[160] Thus, the monitoring process is ad hoc and largely reactive in solving problems. In terms of transparency, the council generally publishes news on the basic services, including water, electricity, health, education, aid, and

others. Nonetheless, it does not publicly share any data on its strategies, programmes and budgets.[161]

There are no clear avenues to allow, or encourage, local residents to participate in the decision- making process, monitor the local governance structures or hold them accountable.[162] In the absence of general meetings with the council or executive agencies, people can only communicate their concerns individually by directly contacting administrators, or members of the council.[163] However, this neither allows for collective deliberation nor mobilization on behalf of the community, thereby limiting the space for bottom-up pressure for policy changes. Likewise, there has been a systematic lack of transparency regarding the council's projects and finances. Community members do not seem to engage with local governance structures due to a lack of trust and limited access to information on local programmes and services.[164] That said, the tribal nature of Jarablus seems to have filled this void, by allowing community members to air their concerns to tribal leaders who, in turn, can use their influence to communicate with the council.[165] While this may resolve individual concerns, reliance on the influence of local tribesmen hinders collective mobilization around larger community needs or deficits in local governance, such as composition of the council, equal distribution of jobs and services.[166]

05 | Funding and fiscal decentralization

The council in Jarablus draws on three main sources of financing. The first and primary source are revenues from the Jarablus border crossing with Turkey. In fact, control of the crossing was recently transferred from the city's local council to SIG. However, the volume and distribution of this important source of revenue across the actors involved are unclear, as there is no publicly available data.[167]

> *There are no clear avenues to allow, or encourage, local residents to participate in the decision-making process, monitor the local governance structures or hold them accountable*

The second source of financing comes in the form of transfers from the Government of Turkey, which pays the salaries of council employees and other executive bodies, such as teachers and medical staff. It also provides financial support for military and police forces. In addition, Ankara funds major public utilities and infrastructure projects such as electricity, hospitals, renovating schools, and reconstructing highways. Such projects, which usually fall under the responsibility of the council, are mostly proposed and implemented under the supervision of Turkish advisors.[168]

Finally, the third source of local funding are fees, levies and taxes. While the council has tried to impose various types of taxes including income tax, it seems that the only fees it is able to collect are from water utilities (SYP 2,500 every two months) and cleaning fees (SYP 700-1,000 every month). The latter, however, are limited to shop owners. The Jarablus council, in addition, seem to raise significant revenues from taxation on makeshift oil refineries and stone quarries.

D. KURDISH-LED SELF-ADMINISTRATION MODE

CASE STUDY FIVE: DEIR EZ-ZOR

Following the withdrawal of Syrian Government presence from the Kurdish-majority territories in the northern part of the country in July 2012, those areas were dominated by the Kurdish movement associated with the Democratic Union Party (PYD), as well as its armed wing, the People's Protection Unit (YPG). Subsequently, YPG undertook the gradual establishment of an autonomous administration in the north-east. When the initial fight of Kurdish forces against ISIS expanded in September 2014, with the support of the United States, a new YPG-led force was created, namely, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF,) to lead the fight in that region. Following the capture of sizable territories from ISIS, SDF established largely similar governance structures. One of the seized key areas is Deir ez-Zor, which is naturally divided into two parts: the Jazeera region to the north and east of the river, which is currently under SDF control; and the Shammiya plains south and west of the river, which are largely controlled by GoS and its allies. This section focuses on studying the governance model in the SDF-held part of Deir ez-Zor.[169]

01 | Local administration: formation and structure

DZCC has relocated, expanded and restructured since it was established by SDF in September 2017. It was initially set up in the town of Jazaret in rural Deir ez-Zor following a founding conference attended by local prominent figures, such as tribal and community leaders, businessmen, technocrats, and others. Some of those representatives were chosen from among those who had stayed in Deir ez-Zor, such as the tribal leaders, while others were selected from among those who had fled to areas controlled by the Kurdish following the capture of the province by ISIS. In a final communique, the attendees selected the DZCC members and established 15 committees to temporarily

run the former ISIS territories in Deir ez-Zor. Admitting that the council does not have a proper representative function, the officials involved in establishing DZCC pledged that the council will be expanded and its members will be elected following the elimination of ISIS.[170]

The capture of the vast majority of ISIS-held territories in the Jazeera region in the following several months influenced the DZCC's decision to restructure itself to include towns and villages that had recently been seized. According to members involved in the restructuring, DZCC conducted dozens of community meetings throughout areas controlled by SDF in Deir ez-Zor to invite representatives from local communities to participate in the second founding conference of DZCC, which took place on February 1, 2018. The restructuring meeting was reportedly attended by nearly 350 people representing various tribes and towns, in addition to technocrats, civil society and businessmen.[171] Details on how those local notables were selected remain unclear. Research shows that locals, to a large extent, did not perceive the preparatory committee as truly representative of the community. In particular, female members of the Deir ez-Zor administration were often considered as lesser known personalities, though this is not entirely surprising given the conservative nature of the area.[172]

At this point, the original DZCC was theoretically considered dissolved pending the formation of the new council. After explaining the new council's structure, consisting of a legislative and an executive council, attendees who wanted to join the legislative council nominated themselves. The 350 attendees then voted for the candidates, and the 151 individuals who won the most votes became members of the legislative council, which is the equivalent of a parliament. After electing its bureau of presidency, including co-presidents and three deputies, the latter assigned one

male and one female co-president to form the executive council within one month. Consequently, the proposed formation of the executive council was presented to the legislative council, which approved it by March 1, 2018.[173]

The legislative council includes 151 members, most of whom are tribal leaders and prominent figures from various towns and villages, such as doctors, lawyers and community leaders. The legislative council is in charge of issuing and approving rules and procedures governing the work of all councils under the umbrella of the Democratic Civil Administration of Deir Ez-Zor (DCADZ). The legislative council works through committees/commissions to propose and study draft laws before presenting them to the rest of the council for approval. So far, 12 committees have been established covering the following areas: education, public services and municipalities, health, economy, internal security, defense, organizations and humanitarian affairs, finance, social justice, women affairs, families of

martyrs, and public relations. In addition to those relatively permanent committees, the legislative council also creates temporary committees to draft laws and regulations, when needed. Laws and regulations are typically issued by a majority vote.[174]

The executive council is the highest administrative body in the autonomous Deir ez-Zor. It is responsible for the implementation of laws, resolutions and decrees that are issued by the legislative council and judicial institutions. The executive council is led by the bureau of the presidency, composed of two co-presidents and four deputies, which, in theory, has the authority of a prime minister. In addition, there are 12 technical committees, which operate similarly to ministries and cover the following areas: education, public services and municipalities, health, economy, internal security, defense, organizations and humanitarian affairs, finance, social justice, women affairs, families of martyrs, and public relations.[175]

Figure 4. **Organizational structure of the Deir ez-Zor Civil Council**
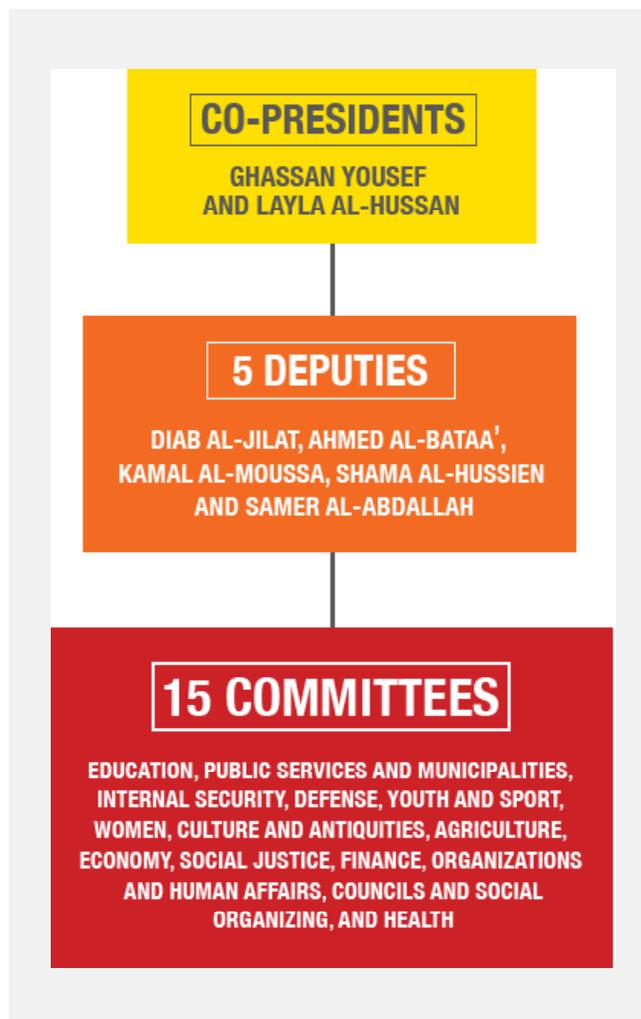
Source: ESCWA, the National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) Programme.

In addition to the council's 12 committees, there is one external committee, namely, the local administration committee), which is in charge of establishing councils at all levels (communes/villages, towns/municipalities, and cities/districts). The committee usually meets prominent local figures and works with them to establish representative councils. According to members of DCADZ, 34 subcouncils have been established in the areas held by SDF in Deir ez-Zor. Five of those councils are established at the town/city levels in Jazaret, Kasra, Al-Busayrah, Thiban, and Al-Suwar, which oversee the remaining 29 councils that were created at the commune/neighbourhood level. For example, the council of Jazaret oversees four subcouncils in Jazaret bou-Hmid, Jazaret Milaj, Jazaret bou-Shams, and Jazaret al-Shati.[176]

02 | Power dynamics: local versus central

DCADZ is officially the highest authority in the region. Nonetheless, it remains difficult for observers to ascertain where decision-making power and responsibility lie exactly. For instance, as per Article 54 of the Cantonal Social Contract, each region officially may establish and develop its own system of justice in a manner that is not inconsistent with the legislations of the self- administration.[177] To that end, the legislative council in Deir ez-Zor is responsible for suggesting, studying and approving all legislation within the canton. Draft laws are usually either proposed by the executive council's committees or by the legislative assembly's subcommittees. These drafts are then studied by a subcommittee designated by the legislative council before being presented to council members for voting.

However, the authority of the legislative council seems to be largely ceremonial. In reality, the executive council is stronger and works almost independently of the former. In many cases, the executive council has reportedly issued and implemented laws without obtaining approval from the legislative council. This is partially due to the following two reasons: the incompetence of the legislative council, which largely consists of people who were appointed in their positions without having any knowledge about their job or the capacity to conduct it; and the existence of a parallel informal power structure where strategic and policy decisions are largely made, which will be discussed in detail later.[178]

The executive council is officially the highest administrative body in Deir ez-Zor. Technically, the work of the council is organized through committees, which are formed and assigned by the presidency office. Each specialized committee is in charge of planning its own agenda and budget, subject to approval by the presidency office. The committees are responsible for implementing their programmes and report back to the executive council.

Officially, executive powers are decentralized across the various administrative tiers of governance from the governorate level council to the town or city councils and, finally, the village or neighbourhood councils.[179] Across the various tiers, councils are structured similarly to the executive council with co-presidents, deputies and a number of specialized committees. Unlike DCADZ, which is made up of 12 committees, the subcouncils only have the committees essential to their work, which typically include: education, services, health, economy (or its agriculture subcommittee), internal security, justice (or its reconciliation subcommittee), and women affairs. Although every council should be in charge of decisions concerning the locality it is responsible for, the system seems de facto heavily centralized, requiring that all decisions be approved by higher-level councils prior to implementation. For example, if an NGO wants to work in the town of Sour in rural Deir ez-Zor, it has to apply for a permit from the council of the town or city. After submitting the required information, the council of Sour defers the application to Deir ez-Zor, which, in turn, submits it to the central humanitarian office at the federal level, which takes a decision and sends it back through the same channels.[180]

Figure 5. Organizational structure of the Democratic Civil Administration of Deir ez-Zor


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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL              EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
   CO-PRESIDENTS                    CO-PRESIDENTS
   3 DEPUTIES                       3 DEPUTIES
   12 COMMITTEES                    12 COMMITTEES

              5 TOWN/CITY COUNCILS
              EACH ONE OF THEM HAS:
                 CO-PRESIDENTS
                 3 DEPUTIES
                 6-7 COMMITTEES

         29 VILLAGE/NEIGHBOURHOOD COUNCILS
              EACH ONE OF THEM HAS:
                 CO-PRESIDENTS
                 3 DEPUTIES
                 6-7 COMMITTEES
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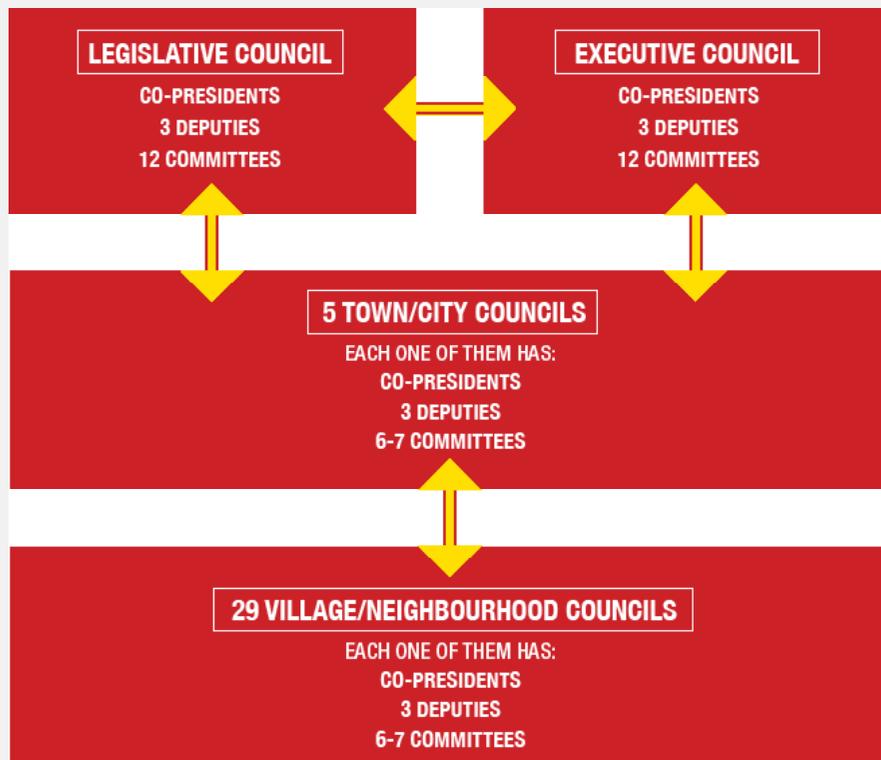
Source: ESCWA, the National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) Programme.

Multiple sources highlighted that behind the official governance structure of DCADZ, there is an informal or shadow structure made up of Kurdish individuals known as *kadros*, who have historically been part of the inner circle of PYD. The *kadros* played instrumental roles in setting up civilian councils in Deir-ez-Zor and reportedly make all key strategic and policy decisions while the official DCADZ members have limited authority, restricted mainly to routine, day-to-day issues and decisions. Likewise, while DCADZ has its official channels of coordination with the self-administration federal council, the informal network of *kadros*, which is connected across all areas and levels of the self-administration, seems to be where strategic decisions are discussed and made.[181]

The *kadros* should in theory act as specialized advisors to assist local councils establish themselves and provide them with technical support to improve their administrative capacity. To that end, one or two *kadros* are usually assigned to the various councils, their committees and executive bodies, as needed. Their responsibilities include assisting in the design and implementation of the council's projects and facilitate coordination with other councils and the autonomous administration. According to SDF officials, the role of the *kadros* is being phased out as the local communities are taking on increased responsibility for running their own affairs; however, research suggests that there are only few signs of this actually taking place. In practice, the *kadros* are using their unofficial positions to control key decisions inside DCADZ.[182]

As for the relationship between the services directorates and the executive council, the directorates fall under the authority of the council's respective committee and report directly to them. The services directorates and other executive offices have a certain degree of autonomy in the design of their own projects, which can only be implemented after being approved by the higher authorities inside the council. Nonetheless, the fact the council provides funding for those entities increases its authority over them. For example, to apply for funding, the water directorate organizes regular, biweekly or monthly, meetings with representatives of various municipalities, service centres and water stations. After discussing their operational needs and the maintenance or development projects they have identified in a specific area, the directorate selects a number of the projects it aims to fund and submits them to the services and municipalities committee, which discusses it and submits it to DCADZ, which in turn discusses it and refers it to the autonomous administration. The administration reviews the proposals and determines which projects will be funded, based on priorities and funds available, and how much money will

be allocated to them. The decision is communicated back to the directorate through the respective channels. This example clearly highlights that, while the directorate has the ability to design its projects and programmes on demand-driven bases, its ability to implement them is subject to approval and funding from higher entities.[183]

With regard to recruitment, senior civil servants and committee representatives at the regional level, such as DCADZ, are nominated by the executive council and approved by the legislative council. In practice, however, there is a general feeling among both local and external observers that all senior positions are chosen by local actors affiliated with PYD and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Similarly, while all administrative staff should be hired through public calls, according to local sources, it seems that the *kadros*, in addition to the higher councils, play a significant role in the hiring process.[184]

03 | Autonomy of civilian-led local administration

Apart from SDF, the Internal Security Forces (ISF), an umbrella policing and security structure, are the only local armed force operating in DCADZ. While SDF is the main actor at the front lines and in military zones, ISF patrols urban and intercity areas, sometimes acting as auxiliary troops for SDF covering second-line security posts in times of clashes. SDF and ISF hold regular field coordination meetings with the defense and internal security committees of the executive councils of DCADZ. According to members of DCADZ, there is a strong firewall that prevents armed forces from intervening in the work of the local councils.[185] Nonetheless, local sources indicate that military and armed forces have been able to dominate the strategic decisions of local councils through the unofficial network of *kadros*, many of whom occupy high profile positions inside those forces. The same sources also reported that individuals recruited into these armed institutions seem to have used their positions to guarantee better access to services either for themselves or their clientelistic networks. However, such practices do not seem to be systematic or sanctioned by their respective institutions.[186]

04 | Local participation, transparency and accountability

Building a bottom-up participatory decision-making process is one of the main founding principles of the self-administration. Officially the governance model celebrates grassroots empowerment and the right of citizens to participate in local decision-making processes. Elected councils at the commune level have been considered active

spaces for local participation. However, the democratic credentials of these entities have been called into question as members often seem to have been appointed, rather than elected. The heavy influence of the *kadros* over local decision-making casts shadows on the transparency and accountability of local governance structures. Public meetings have allowed a degree of societal consultations among local tribal figures or community notables, which facilitate the communication of needs to local power holders. However, these meetings mostly seem to be ad hoc efforts and do not actually offer a proper venue for inclusive deliberation or policy discussions.[187] In addition, council members by and large seem to lack administrative experience and technical know-how. Thus, they cannot effectively manage and monitor.

Councils and executive bodies are monitored internally through official channels. This top-down approach starts at the level of the legislative council which is in charge of monitoring the work of the executive council and its affiliated committees and bodies through monthly meetings. The executive council, in turn, oversees the work of its committees and their service entities during biweekly or monthly meetings. Finally, the committees

> *Elected councils at the commune level have been considered active spaces for local participation. However, the democratic credentials of these entities have been called into question as members often seem to have been appointed, rather than elected*

are responsible for overseeing the work of their executive bodies during weekly or biweekly meetings. In addition to these mechanisms, there is a reportedly central committee for monitoring and inspection which seems to be focusing on mediating disputes and solving problems rather than holding entities accountable.[188] Civilians, in general, do not participate directly in monitoring the work of the council as they do not have access to such information. The same applies to local notables who, as mentioned above, are focusing on discussing services-related issues. More precisely, there is a significant lack of transparency in the work of the council, and its financial details are not shared with local populations.[189]

05 | Funding and fiscal decentralization

DCADZ depends on funding allocations received from the autonomous administration, which covers two categories of expenditures:[190] first, the running cost of the administration, which includes the salaries of the people hired by DCADZ, its committees, the subcouncils and other bodies affiliated with them; and, second, the cost of development projects including the construction and rehabilitation projects implemented by DCADZ, such as repairing roads, rehabilitating electricity and water stations, bakeries, and others. Budgeting for the second category is determined based on the changing needs of DCADZ and the financial resources and priorities of the autonomous administration. In other words, DCADZ usually submits a proposal of the projects urgently needed in the areas under its jurisdiction. The autonomous administration reviews the proposal and determines which projects will be funded and how much money will be allocated to them.

In addition, DCADZ generates revenue from direct and indirect local taxes, though this source of financing is limited because of the low quality of services provided, lack of job opportunities and widespread poverty, which render imposing taxes or collecting fees from local residents quite challenging.[191] That said, DCADZ seems to generate revenues from taxes imposed on big business and companies through registration fees. However, it seems that the money collected is centrally allocated by the autonomous administration. Although development grants from different humanitarian actors and States have been provided to rehabilitate sewage pipes and install sanitary units, water pumps and tanks, among others, none of the officials interviewed have received substantial funding from any donor, including the United Nations.[192] Revenues from Deir-ez-Zor's oil fields have been the subject of controversy because they are directly managed by the autonomous administration through the *kadro*s, who, in turn, allocate funds across the various federation regions and the councils running them.[193]

Source: Istockphoto, photo credit: Joel Carillet

V

KEY *Findings*

$\mathcal{F}$indings from this baseline mapping of local governance demonstrate obvious divergence in modalities of establishing the local councils, organizational structures of local authorities, prevailing centre-periphery dynamics, and revenue-raising capacities. The matrix in the annex provides a stylized comparison. More significantly, perhaps, the analysis surprisingly shows that there are emerging shared patterns in local governance modalities across the country. Most notably, there are signs of a growing distinction between local representative councils and executive offices, although the actual differentiation in roles, mandates and authorities remains inadequate and poorly institutionalized. Frequently, executive offices

> *Civilian local governance structures across the country lack autonomy from powerful parallel structures and armed actors, which have grown influential as a result of years of conflict*

together with governors dominate local decision-making. Lack of information sharing with the councils, their limited capacities and persistent vertical accountability of services directorates to line ministries tend to hinder the ability of locally elected officials to actually monitor the delivery of public services. Where there are attempts to create socially embedded governance structures, they are not fully activated and tend to function at the governorate level only. For instance, the neighbourhood committees seem to be merely sporadically active depending on the governor's will or the decision of the central government, and they are not actually linked to the local councils at the city level. The development affairs committee, similarly, while allowing for much needed horizontal decentralization, operates on an ad hoc basis at the governorate, rather than the municipal, level. While in the north-east, the communes have the potential to develop as locally embedded structures, they lack autonomous powers in a centralized governance system.

In the absence of viable mechanisms for citizen engagement at the local level, communities turned to

tribal figures, notable families, or remnants of the armed opposition for mediation, which has, in turn, narrowed the civic space for collective mobilization or community organizing. Across the country, public services suffer from poor quality, limited or politicized access, high costs, and the absence of feedback mechanisms. Lack of responsiveness by local authorities, which suffer from lack of resources and technical know-how, fed into community disengagement from local governance structures. Civilian local governance structures across the country lack autonomy from powerful parallel structures and armed actors, which have grown influential as a result of years of conflict. On the fiscal side, the analysis highlights a tendency for local authorities to heavily depend on central transfers or strategic sources of revenue, rather than levying of fees or taxes.

The baseline study identifies six major technical gaps in local governance across the country, which should guide future programming in this area. These six gaps are as follows:

A | Lack of democratic accountability as three of the five local councils examined were formed without any form of elections. In many cases, dominant political actors and armed groups select local council members top-down, in consultation with community leaders and representatives from notable families. Even if direct or indirect elections are held, candidates are screened based on their loyalty to the core interests. Research shows that the composition of councils often excludes women, minorities and impoverished groups.[194] This deficit in democratic local governance highlights the importance of holding free and fair local elections in the future in order to cement accountability ties between citizens and governance institutions at the subnational level. In order to adequately represent traditionally excluded groups, there is a need for quotas in local elections and administrative bodies;

B | Local councils are politically weak structures even though, in certain contexts, they are formally in charge of administering public services. Decisions regarding the design and delivery of public services are often centralized, with lower tiers of government often dependent on non-automatic or conditional transfers by the centre. Even when a greater margin of powers is relegated to local actors, it is the executive offices that tend to dominate local decision-making. Given the prevalence of powerful parallel structures, which are sometimes linked to armed actors, local councils are often relegated to exercising limited coordination functions. In light

of this power constellation, empowerment and autonomy of local councils needs to be prioritized in future programming;

C | Local governance structures lack the necessary technical capacities. Massive displacement and losses in human capital in the course of the conflict significantly undermined the ability of local institutions to perform their normal functions. The findings show that, currently, senior-level local officials are hired by the central authorities, and only in the cases of lower-level ranks or externally funded posts can local actors themselves participate in the hiring process. Weak capacities have not just reduced the effectiveness and efficiency of public services, but also the monitoring role of local councils. This, in turn, explains the significant influence of parallel structures which, to varying degrees, steer the exercise of authority by local actors. This situation demonstrates the need for the systematic building of capacities of local governance actors;

D | Weak links between the citizenry and local authorities is a pressing challenge. While a new generation of grassroots activism and nascent structures involving civil society and market actors in local governance across the country is slowly rising, such changes are not perceivable to the same extent across all case studies. Variations reflect differences in the willingness of power holders to engage with societal actors, the receptiveness of communities to engagement with local actors, the bargaining position of former opposition activists, and the juxtaposition of tribal actors versus civil society actors. It is also unclear to which extent emerging structures will be genuinely inclusive or enable bottom-up accountability, given the lack of transparency, limited access to information and the focus on activating these structures at the governorate, rather than local, levels. In fact, local governance institutions need to be socially embedded through horizontal decentralization and social accountability reforms, such as open and competitive procurement, performance budgeting, participatory planning and budgeting, civil society performance monitoring, social audits, and others.

E | Lifting legal, bureaucratic and security restrictions on civil society operations and NGOs is an essential step towards activating social accountability mechanisms, as is the strengthening of capacities of local-level civil society organizations and civic-based NGOs. This should include assessing their need for institutional capacity and establishing

platforms for knowledge exchange in the areas of participation and community engagement which can allow for eventually scaling up beyond localities. As concerns local authorities, new public management techniques for the delivery of public services can be incorporated to encourage and support sustained participation by the citizens beyond elections;

F | Powers have been decentralized unevenly. Formal attempts are being made to establish or activate local councils as spaces for political representation at the subnational level, although these entities lack important democratic credentials. Local actors are officially administering essential administrative services, while fiscal decentralization is lagging behind. In the absence of a significant capacity to raise revenues, local actors rely on strategic rents or transfers from the centre to cover their budgets, a situation that undermines their ability to administer services. Without fiscal authority, allowing them to move funds across budget lines or to retain income at the local level, the ability of newly created local entities to respond to evolving needs on the ground is hampered. In other words, while the conflict in the country has led to significant decentralization at the levels of administration and official representation, it has not necessarily empowered local institutions. Accordingly, future reform steps need to be carefully sequenced to balance fiscal, administrative and political decentralization in order for the reforms to yield results.

ANNEXES

LOCAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

	Government of Syria models		Salvation government model led by HTS	Turkish-backed model	Kurdish self- administration model
	Al-Tal	**Tafas**	**Atarib**	**Jarablus**	**Deir ez-Zor**
Local administration structure	City council Executive office Neighbourhood committees	City council Executive office	Local council Specialized committees	Local administrative council Permanent committee	Legislative council Executive council
Type of local council	City council	City council	Local council	Local administrative council	Democratic civil administration
Number of members in city council	25 members	13 members	15 members	20 members	Legislative council: 151 members
Mechanism of establishment	Elected in 2018	Formed in October 2019 (refer to tazkeyya)	Selected by community leaders and designated mukhtars in 2019	Selected by representatives from non-State armed groups, tribes and interim government in 2017	Elected by appointed constituent assembly of local notables
Selection of positions in the council	Baath party	Baath and security agencies	Hay'et Tahrir al Sham	Internal elections	Bureau of presidency
Executive body — **Name**	Executive office	Executive office	Local council	Permanent committee	Executive council
Executive body — **Responsibility**	Implementation of plans of the council	Administration of service delivery	Coordination	Executive decision	Implementation of laws, resolutions and decrees issued by the legislative
Executive body — **Members and structure**	6 members	Unknown	Unknown	7 members	Bureau of presidency + 12 technical committees
Parallel bodies	Committee for development affairs	Al-Lajna (The Commission)		Turkish advisers	Kadros
Dominant security actors	Political intelligence	Al-Bardan armed group	Katibeh Amnieh of Hay'et Tahrir al Sham	Turkish-backed factions	Syrian Democratic Forces and internal security forces

POWER DYNAMICS: LOCAL VERSUS CENTRAL

	Government of Syria models		Salvation government model led by HTS	Turkish-backed model	Kurdish self-administration model
	Al-Tal	**Tafas**	**Atarib**	**Jarablus**	**Deir ez-Zor**
Local relations	• Executive office influences the city council; • The committee for development affairs is allowing for community involvement.	• Balance of power between the official role of the city council and the de facto power of Al-Lajna; • Al-Lajna has the upper hand over the design, monitoring and delivery of public services.	The local council coordinates essential public services, but exercises limited powers over health, education and agriculture directorates.	The council exercises authority over local executive offices.	• The executive council works independently from the legislative council; • Local service directories follow and report to the executive council; • Local service directories only design their own projects; • Democratic Civil Administration of Deir ez-Zor approves decisions of subcouncils>
Relation with the centre	• The governor approves plans and decision; • Ministries approve budgets for proposals; • The governor approves the council's contact with directories or other local administrative units.	• Central actors steer decision-making within the city council; • Russia serves as mediator between al-Lajna and the centre.	• The central government approves projects for the local council and the local executive directories; • The local council communicates with the centre on gaps and needs in public services; • The council is supervised by follow-up committees and mukhtars reporting to the centre.	• Turkey provides financial and technical support; • Gaziantep advisers are heavily involved in local decision-making.	• Kadros de facto exercise decision-making; • Local councils manage daily tasks; • The autonomous administration approves selected projects for funding.
Recruitment	Senior positions are influenced by governorate council and security agencies. Local posts financed by donors are decided upon by the city council.	Unknown	• Senior positions are appointed by the ministry of local administration and services; • Technocrats are hired through local public calls.	Hiring is done locally after approval of funding.	• Senior positions are influenced by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK); • Administrative staff is influenced by Kadros.

LOCAL PARTICIPATION, TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

	Government of Syria models		Salvation government model led by HTS	Turkish-backed model	Kurdish self-administration model
	Al-Tal	**Tafas**	**Al-Atarib**	**Jarablus**	**Deir ez-Zor**
Vertical accountability	• Hierarchical accountability between local executive office, on the one hand, and governors, on the other hand; • Local public services directorates report to line ministries; • The centre has control over the city council.	• Hierarchical accountability between local executive office, on the one hand, and governors, on the other hand; • Local public services directorates report to line ministries; • The centre controls the city council.	Follow-up commissions and the services directorates of Aleppo monitor top-down local actors.	• Turkish advisers supervise daily work of local governance actors; • Local public services directorates report to the city council; • Financial reporting to the Government of Turkey.	• Top-down monitoring mechanisms of local governance actors by higher tiers; • Kadros monitor local decision-making and public services delivery.
Local council authority	• Limited exercise of authority by the city council; • Executive office dominates local decision- making and blocks the council's monitoring ability.	Restricted authority of city council due to dominance of executive office and power of Al- Lajna on the ground.	Restricted authority over public services under control of interim government (health, education and agriculture)	Council and permanent committee jointly monitor public services delivery.	• The legislative council monitors the executive council and affiliated committees in charge of public services delivery; • As specialized entity, the committee for monitoring and inspection focuses on mediating disputes.
Social accountability	Residents participate in decision-making over certain projects through the committee for development affairs, which is linked to the governor's office.	Residents use Al-Lajna to monitor the work of the council and public services delivery.	No mechanism for monitoring local council, residents individually rely on tawaef to mediate relations with local council.	No monitoring mechanism in place, residents individually rely on tribes to address needs.	No monitoring mechanism in place, residents individually rely on tribes and community notables to address needs.
Transparency	Lack of information sharing.	De facto information sharing with Al-Lajna.	Lack of trust and information sharing.	Lack of trust and information sharing.	No information sharing.

FISCAL DECENTRALIZATION					
Al-Tal		**Government of Syria models**		**Salvation government model led by HTS**	**Turkish-backed model**	**Kurdish self-administration model**
		Tafas	**Atarib**	**Jarablus**	**Deir ez-Zor**	
Sources of revenues	**Central**	Heavily dependent on transfers from ministry of local administration.	Heavily dependent on transfers from ministry of local administration.	Moderately dependent on transfers from the centre.	Heavily dependent on Jarablus border crossing with Turkey and transfers from Turkey for salaries and public utilities.	Heavily dependent on transfers from autonomous administration and donor funding for projects.
	Locally raised	• Limited local fees and taxes; • Crowdfunds through the committee of development affairs.	• Limited local fees and taxes; • The negotiation committee raises funds for services.	• Revenue from renting local facilities; • Local fees and taxes amount to less than 40% of budget; • One-time fees or registration taxes.	• Limited local fees and direct/ indirect taxes; • Revenues from taxation on makeshift oil refineries and stone quarries.	• Limited local fees and direct/ indirect taxes; • Fees on big businesses; • Revenues from oil fields.
	Tax-levying capacity	• Coercive imposition of taxes; • Difficulties in collecting back taxes.	Low capacity.	Moderate capacity.	Low capacity.	Low capacity.

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54.   Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (2019). Consultation Meeting on Local Governance for Recovery and Development in Post-Conflict Syria. National Agenda for the Future of Syria. Beirut.

55.   From March to July 2017, at least nine local councils in Hama, Latakia and Tartous were disbanded or saw their heads fired.

56.   Enab Baladi's Investigation Team (2018). "Decentralization" from Ba'ath Party's Viewpoint.

CHAPTER 4

57.   Interview with Ayman al Dassouky, Syrian analyst at Omran Centre, October 2019.

58.   Makieh, Kinda, Angus McDowall and Kevin Liffey (2016). Syrian rebels and families leave another town near Damascus. Reuters.

59.   Interview with Ghazi, local notable, October 2019.

60.   Interview with Ayman al Dassouky. The names of the council members are available at https://www.facebook.com/215122432269380/photos/pcb.537821149999505/537820989999521/?type=3&theater.

61.   See: https://www.facebook.com/215122432269380/photos/a.215210552260568/541387096309577/?type=3& tn =-R and interviews with locals.

62.   Notably, the author has not been able to find the list that the interviewees referred to online. However, he was able to find a similar list for another city, which can be found here https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=362864847788664&set=a.282162159192267&type=3&theater.

63.   Interview with Ghazi.

64.   Interview with Mohammed, member of Al-Tal council, October 2019.

65.   The Syrian Parliament, 2011.

66.   Interview with Ghazi.

67.   The Syrian Parliament, 2011.

68.   Interview with Rami, Syrian researcher, October 2019. Each committee consists of between seven and eleven neighbourhood residents, who, in turn, choose three members to lead it and follow up on its decisions with the executive office.

69.   See: https://www.facebook.com/215122432269380/photos/a.215210552260568/646436495804636/?type=3& tn =-R.

70.   Interview with Rami.

71.   Interview with Ayman al Dassouky.

72.   Interview with Ghazi.

73.   Interview with Rami.

74.   Interview with Mohammed, member of Al-Tal council.

75.   See: https://www.facebook.com/1119375378145342/photos/a.1136327106450169/2276880865728115/?type=3&theater.

76.   See: https://www.facebook.com/1119375378145342/photos/a.1136327106450169/2274977002585168/?type=3&theater.

77.   See: https://www.facebook.com/1119375378145342/photos/a.1136327106450169/2311845332231668/?type=3&theater.

78.   See: https://www.facebook.com/1119375378145342/photos/a.1136327106450169/2291099757639559/?type=3&theater.

79.   See: https://www.facebook.com/1119375378145342/photos/a.1136327106450169/2315503165199218/?type=3&theater.

80.   See: https://www.facebook.com/1119375378145342/photos/a.1136327106450169/2348813808534820/?type=3&theater.

81.   For example, Al-Tal council used to have vehicles, mainly a tractor and a bulldozer, but they were transferred to the city of Maaraba due to the fighting. The improved security situation in Al-Tal and the increased need for those vehicles gave the council enough justifications to ask for their return. But instead of contacting the Maaraba city council directly, the memo had to be sent to the governor, who, in turn, referred it to the final recipient and ordered their return (interview with Ayman al Dassouky).

82.   Interview with Rami.

83.   Interview with Ayman al Dassouky.

84.   Interview with Ghazi.

85.   Interview with Ghazi.

86.   Interview with Ayman al Dassouky.

87.   Interview with Ghazi.

88.   Interview with Ayman al Dassouky.

89.   Ibid.

90.   Interview with Mohammed, member of Al-Tal council.

91.   Interview with Ghazi.

92.   Porteous, Tom et al. (2011). "We've Never Seen Such Horror": Crimes against Humanity by Syrian Security Forces. Human Rights Watch.

93.   Ouaid, Mohamad (2013). The battle of 'Tawheed al-Soufouf' liberates Tafas and its surroundings, and calls for moving the prosecution for the killing of Al-A boud. Zaman Al-Wasl. 30 October.

94.   Interview with Walid al Nofal, Syrian journalist with Syria Direct, October 2019.

95.   Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) (2018). Syrian army enters Tafas City in Daraa countryside and hoists national flag over it.

96.   Interview with Mohammed, member of the negotiation committee, October 2019.

97.   Interview with Walid al Nofal.

98.   Interview with Ahmed, Syrian analyst, September 2019.

99.   Interview with Walid al Nofal.

100. These are incorporation of local armed groups into the Russian-led Fifth Corps reportedly allowing these groups a degree of local autonomy; release of all detainees from Tafas; return of all internally displaces persons (IDPs) to their homes; return of civil government institutions to provide essential services; settlement of the status of individuals including civilians and military defectors, deserters and draft dodgers through a reconciliation process, and return of dismissed government employees to their jobs.

101. Interview with Mohammed, member of the negotiation committee.

102. Nofal, Walid (2019a). One year after reconciliation, why are southern Syria's residents paying out of pocket for public services? Syria Direct. See: https://syriadirect.org/news/one-year-after-reconciliation-why-are-southern-syria%E2%80%99s-residents-paying-out-of-pocket-for-public-services/.

103. Interview with Walid al Nofal.

104. Interview with Mohammed, member of the negotiation committee.

105. Interview with Walid al Nofal.

106. Ibid.

107. Interview with Mohammed, member of the negotiation committee.

108. Interview with Walid al Nofal.

109. First, his group was co-opted by the Russian-backed Fifth Corps, which allowed him to work under the umbrella of the Syrian army but without joining it directly. This arrangement did not last long, however, due to Al-Bardan's refusal, or inability, to send forces to the north of the Syrian Arab Republic to fight against other opposition forces. Soon after, Al-Bardan brokered a similar deal that annexed his group to the military intelligence agency in exchange for running the city's internal affairs. The agreement also prevents the Syrian army and security agencies from entering the city without coordinating with Al-Bardan first (interview by the author via Skype with Hassan, a Syrian researcher, October 2019).

110. Interview with Walid al Nofal.
111. Interview with Mohammed, member of the negotiation committee.
112. Interview with Hassan, Syrian researcher, October 2019.
113. Haid, Haid (2019). Punishing Syrian public servants in former rebel areas will only bring more division. Middle East Eye, 24 October.
114. Interview with Hassan.
115. Interview with Ahmed, Syrian analyst.
116. Ibid.
117. Haid, Haid, (2017a). Local Community Resistance to Extremist Groups in Syria: Lessons from Atarib. Chatham House.
118. Eldorar Alshamia (2019). Agreement Reached between Notables of Atarib City and Tahrir al-Sham (Arabic).
119. Syria TV (2019). Local Council in Atarib Quits, after the Entry of the Syrian Salvation Government. (Arabic).
120. Baladi News (2019). "Salvation" announces the formation of a temporary local council for Atarib (Arabic).
121. Interview with Bashar, head of Atarib council, September 2019.
122. Ibid.
123. Ibid.
124. Interview with Ahmed, Syrian journalist, October 2019.
125. Interview with Muhannad, civil society activist, September 2019.
126. Interview with Samer, Syrian analyst, October 2019.
127. Haid, Haid, (2019). Cutting Aid to Syria's Idlib May Be the Easy Choice for Western Donors, But It's Not the Right One. Syndication Bureau.
128. Interview with Bashar.
129. Ibid.
130. Interview with Muhannad.
131. Interview with Bashar.
132. An example for this is the health directorate, which was created organically by local medical volunteers and, thus, remains largely independent from SIG (interview with Samer).
133. Interview with Ahmed, Syrian journalist.
134. Interview with Bashar.
135. Interview with Ahmed, Syrian journalist.
136. Interview with Bashar.
137. Ibid.
138. Ibid.
139. Haid, Haid (2017). Post-ISIS Governance in Jarablus: A Turkish-led Strategy. Chatham House. Haid, Haid (2017). Post-ISIS Governance in Jarablus: A Turkish-led Strategy. Chatham House.
140. Interview with Mohammed, Syrian analyst, October 2019.
141. Aks al Ser (2017). Forming the 'Local Council for the City of Jarablus' by agreement between the interim government and the military factions. (Arabic). Retrieved from: https://www.aksalser.com/news/.
142. Interview with Abd Khalil, head of Jarablus council, October 2019.
143. Ibid.
144. Ibid.
145. Ibid.
146. Eight council members were replaced by others due to undisclosed reasons by the preparatory committee.
147. Interview with Abd Khalil.
148. Ibid.
149. Interview with Mustafa, civil society activist, October 2019.
150. Interview with Abd Khalil.
151. Interview with Mohammed, Syrian analyst.
152. Interview with Abd Khalil.
153. Interview with Ibrahim Abdulhussein, senior programme manager at Baytna Syria, October 2019.
154. Interview with Abd Khalil.
155. Interview with Ibrahim Abdulhussein.
156. Three out of six signatures, displayed on the document, are reserved for the armed factions (Sultan Mourad, Jabha Shamieh, Filaq al-Sham). Eldorar Alshamia (2017). Forming a new local council in Jarablus after isolating its predecessor.
157. Ibid.
158. Interview with Ibrahim Abdulhussein.
159. Interview with Abd Khalil.
160. Interview with Mohammed, Syrian analyst.
161. Interview with Mustafa.
162. Interview with Ibrahim Abdulhussein.
163. Interview with Abd Khalil.
164. Interview with Mustafa.
165. Interview with Ibrahim Abdulhussein.
166. Interview with Mohammed, Syrian analyst.
167. Ibid.
168. Interview with Abd Khalil.
169. Interview with Mohammed, Syrian analyst.
170. Interview with Ilham, a local teacher in Deir ez-Zor, October 2019.
171. Interview with Ghassan Youssef, head of Deir ez-Zor council, April 2019.
172. Interview with Issam, civil society activist, October 2019.
173. Interview with Ghassan Youssef.
174. Ibid.
175. Ibid.
176. Ibid.
177. Ibid.
178. Interview with Issam.
179. Interview with Ghassan Youssef.
180. Interview with Issam.
181. Ibid.
182. Interview with Mohammed, Syrian analyst.
183. Ibid.
184. Interview with Ilham.
185. Interview with Ghassan Youssef.
186. Interview with Issam.
187. Ibid.
188. Interview with Ilham.
189. Interview with Issam.
190. Interview with Ghassan Youssef.
191. DZCC has been able to provide water in some areas for the fee of SYP 500. Nonetheless, such charges are only collected from a very small percentage of the population that can actually afford to pay such fees (interview with Ghassan Youssef).
192. Interview with Ilham.
193. Interview with Issam.

CHAPTER 5

194. El-Meehy, 2017.

An important policy debate over the reconfiguration of power relations within the post-conflict Syrian State has taken shape over the last nine years, with actors advocating the applicability of various models ranging from full-fledged federalism or quasi federalism to decentralized governance within a unitary State. Recently with the exception of some explicit Kurdish calls for local autonomy within a federal state, inter-Syrian dialogue seems to increasingly converge on democratic decentralization as a cornerstone of the country's future social contract and its post-conflict political order. Given that this debate around the future shape of the Syrian State has remained largely removed from local governance dynamics on the ground, this study provides a mapping exercise of the various local governance arrangements and mechanisms present on the Syrian territories.

In addition, this report serves as baseline for any future local governance assistance framework as part of stabilization programming following a political settlement based on UNSC resolution 2254. The analytical framework adopted for comparing local governance models focuses on the autonomy of civilian-led local administration; mandates, responsibilities and actual powers of local councils, and executive authorities in charge of services provision at the national, subnational and local levels; the degree of administrative decentralization; participatory and accountability credentials of governance structures at the local level; and effective fiscal decentralization. As an exploratory baseline for local governance, the study has benefited from analyses, dialogues and recommendations by Syrian stakeholders.