Minority Rights In Arab Levant: Between Extremism And The Envisioned Future Regional System

Leila Nicolas PhD
leila@leilanicolas.com

www.leilanicolasr.com
www.leilanicolas.com
App.: Dr.LeilaNicolas

Contents
Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 5
Research and Methodology ..................................................................................................................... 5
Part I- Historical background ................................................................................................................. 7
   A-Minorities during the Ottoman rule ................................................................................................. 7
   B- Creation of the Arab states ........................................................................................................... 9
   C- Military coups ................................................................................................................................ 9
   D- Occupation of Iraq 2003 .............................................................................................................. 10
   E- Arab uprisings: Minorities' Catastrophe ....................................................................................... 10
Part II- Status of minorities in each of the Five states ........................................................................... 11
   A- Iraq .................................................................................................................................................. 11
       a- Minorities' rights: legal framework ........................................................................................... 11
       b- Minorities' Status in Power ....................................................................................................... 12
       c- In Education .............................................................................................................................. 12
       d- Demography ............................................................................................................................. 12
   B-Syria ................................................................................................................................................. 14
       a- Minorities' rights: Legal Framework ......................................................................................... 14
       b- Minorities status in Power ......................................................................................................... 14
       c- In Education .............................................................................................................................. 14
       d- Demography ............................................................................................................................. 15
   C-Lebanon ........................................................................................................................................... 16
       a- Minorities' rights: legal framework ........................................................................................... 16
       b- Minorities in Power ..................................................................................................................... 16
       c- In Education .............................................................................................................................. 17
       d- Demography ............................................................................................................................. 17
   D-Jordan ............................................................................................................................................... 17
       a- Minorities rights: Legal framework .......................................................................................... 17
       b- Minorities in Power .................................................................................................................... 18
       c- In Education .............................................................................................................................. 18
       d- Demography ............................................................................................................................. 18
   E- Palestine .......................................................................................................................................... 18
Part III - Findings and Future Solutions .................................................................................................. 18
A- Survey Results and Analysis ................................................................................................................. 18

B- Future of minorities in the Arab Levant ................................................................................................. 23

Scenarios ......................................................................................................................................................... 23

1- Partition_ Balkanization ............................................................................................................................. 23

2- Islamic Caliphate ......................................................................................................................................... 25

3- Chaos / Anarchy ............................................................................................................................................. 26

4- Power - Sharing System ............................................................................................................................... 27

5- Democratic - Civil States ............................................................................................................................ 28

Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................................... 28

Selected Bibliography .................................................................................................................................. 29
Author’s Biography

Leila Nicolas PhD serves as both a scholar and practitioner. She is a Professor of International Affairs and MENA politics in the Lebanese University in Beirut. Her research and teaching interests include the UN system, R2P, transitional Justice, peacebuilding, International criminal tribunals, and MENA politics. She is the author of 4 Arabic published Books in addition to more than 80 (Arabic and English) refereed journal articles, book chapters, working papers and conference lectures. She has been granted by The International Center of Human Sciences (CISH) - UNESCO, for achieving a field study research about transitions in Arab world. The UNESCO study "Transitional Justice in Arab World: Lessons from Morocco and Iraq" (Lebanon: CISH- UNESCO, 2014).

She is also a political analyst and commentator for a number of media outlets about MENA regional issues, and international Affairs. She is a co- founder of "Lebanese for Democracy and Good governance", member of the Academic Council of the UN System (ACUNS), and a board member at many MENA Regional NGOs.

She is the author of "International Criminal tribunals: Achievements and Failures" (2013), and "the developing norms of sovereignty and intervention" (2011).

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to the Lebanese University students for their contribution in conducting and analyzing the survey. I would like to thank Anthony Ghobeira, Khalil Hajal, Marian Mubarak and Rima Dagher from Lebanon, Mayssa Shelel from Syria, And Dadne Roubai’ee from Iraq, for doing all the needed efforts to interview, call and email people from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine to conduct this survey.

Opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect views of the Lebanese University.

© Copyright 2016, Dr. Leila Nicolas
Introduction
Till now, there is no internationally agreed definition as to which groups constitute minorities. The “United Nations Minorities Declaration” refers to minorities as groups based on national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity, and confirms that States should protect their existence.

Minorities in Arab Levant, like in all regions of the world "continue to face serious threats, discrimination and racism, and are frequently excluded from taking part fully in the economic, political, social and cultural life available to the majorities in the countries or societies where they live.”

Minorities in Arab world are not only religious; there are ethnic, linguistic, tribal minorities forming a mosaic of ethnic, national and religious communities in each state. The fate of minorities in the Arab region is one of the important problems that face Arab states since the Arab Uprisings which led to civil wars and rise of extremism and terrorism. However, this problem is not new; minorities have been subjected to injustice, discrimination and forced displacements for more than four or five centuries ago.

Nearly a century after they rose on the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, Arab Levant states have failed to unite their communities and form nations with common goals and aspirations. Through all their history, those societies have been torn by ceaseless internal and external troubles, political and economic discrimination, revolts, civil wars and military coups.

Research and Methodology
This research seeks to fill the research gap that exists regarding the perceptions of the minorities towards what has been recalled as solutions for their crisis after the rise of extremism. Most of the publications about minorities in the Middle East or the Arab world in general try to tell about the hard conditions they are living, their status; as well as their exodus after the massacres done by Jihadists like Al Qaeda, ISIS, Al-Nusra front and others. Little - if any - tried to seek how people belonging to minority groups see their future, what are their aspirations, and which type of political systems they prefer. No one has ever asked them about their perceptions towards what has been published or leaked as solutions for the states' crisis in the region.

Who are the minorities in the Arab Levant? How can we define their collective history? How did their conditions change with the continuous developments in the region? What are their rights and status in power, constitutions and education in each of the countries that constitute the Arab Levant? How do they see their future in the region? And what are their perceptions towards diverse scenarios and projects, being suggested by global and regional powers in the region?

Trying to bridge the gap and answer these questions, this study utilizes secondary sources about minorities in the Middle East, and relies on surveys and interviews - conducted by group of researchers - with persons belonging to minority groups living in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine.

In this research, I argue that:

1. The future of minorities in the Arab Levant is affected by the balance of powers between global and regional players in the Middle East. Global (USA, Russia) and regional powers' (Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia) policies or what can be called the "Clash of Titans" in the Middle East will shape the future of the whole region and the fate of minorities.

---

2. Syria’s geostrategic importance makes it the dominating changer of the Middle East. It means that the future of Syria shall determine the future of the region. The Syrian crisis could spill over to Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan. On the contrary, the geographic position of Iraq (surrounded by powerful states, and by desert on the Syrian - Iraqi border) lessens the ability of the Iraqi dynamics from spreading to the neighborhood.

3. In each Scenario drawing the future systems, minorities' rights and future will depend on the ability of the regional and global powers to prevent worst scenarios and promote good ones. It is power politics that will shape the minorities' future and rights in the region.

4. Minorities in Syria and Lebanon have learned from the experiences of minorities in Iraq, so they have taken a decision to defend themselves and their existence. Therefore, the attempts to persecute and displace them will fail, and they will not leave their homelands even persecuted. Uprooting will fail exactly as the previous attempts by Turkish Ottomans to sweep out minorities at the beginning of the twentieth century, through Genocides.

Minority rights' in the Arab Levant will be discussed in this paper. In the first part, we will give a brief historical background of the minority presence and status in the political and social systems since the ottoman rule till the Arab uprisings. In the second part, we will draw a sketch of the minorities' status at the legal, power and demographic levels in each of the countries that constitute the Arab Levant: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine; emphasizing on the first three states due to their security issues and turbulence. The third part will reveal the findings of our survey that was conducted with 550 people belonging to minority groups in these countries. Finally, we conclude trying to predict the future of minorities in this region, based on each of the scenarios that have been evoked lately.
Part I- Historical background

Arab Levant states share many characteristics; they were subjected to Ottoman rule, and all - except Lebanon- have a wide Muslim majority, with diverse communities and minorities.

Politically, Palestine suffers of occupation, Jordan is a kingdom that has extensive Palestinian refugee population, and Lebanon has its unique - style power sharing system based on religious and sectarian balance. Before 2011, Syria was ruled by Alawites' minority much resented by the Sunni majority. Syria is now witnessing a bloody civil war, which caused 250,000 deaths and leading over 3 million to flee to Syria’s immediate neighbors Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, plus 6.5 million are internally displaced within Syria3.

In Iraq, the Sunni minority which ruled until the fall of Saddam Hussein was not ready to concede power to the Shia majority which emerged after US occupation on 2003, leading to a civil sectarian strife between 2006- 2008, then to resurgence of Islamic extremist groups like Al-Qaeda and Islamic state of Iraq. Persecutions of Iraqi Christians started on 2003; lead to their exodus and seeking refuge in Syria and Lebanon.

A-Minorities during the Ottoman rule

The minorities’ issue in the Arab world started eventually during the rule of Ottoman Empire that created the "Millet system" starting in 1454, right after the conquest of Istanbul by Sultan Mehmet II. The first Millet to be constituted was the Orthodox Millet, followed by the Armenian Millet in 1461 and by the Jewish Millet at the end of the 15th century4. However, Millet System was not a “uniformly adopted system” but, on the contrary, was a “series of ad hoc arrangements made over the years, which gave each of the major religious communities a degree of legal autonomy and authority with the acquiescence of the Ottoman state.”5

It was based on "separation of the main religious communities from each other and on the recognition of each denomination as legal entity with specific communal ‘segmental’- rights and privileges”6. That system classified minority groups into two categories:

a- The followers of monotheistic religions or "people of the Book"- (Ahl Zimma) which were Christians, Jews and Sabean- had the right to profess their religion, provided that they recognized the primacy of Islam and their inferior role vis-à-vis the Muslim population.7 This status granted Zimmis the right of residence in return for taxes, and regarded the non- Muslims’ residents in the territory of Islam as second-class citizens8. Those were prohibited from holding public religious ceremonies, raising their voices loudly when praying and even from ringing their church bells loud. It was not allowed to build new churches, synagogues, convent, hermitage or cell in towns or cities of Dar al- Islam (Muslim lands). When these injunctions were disobeyed, Muslim leaders were authorized to treat the offenders as dwellers in Dar al-Harb (non-Muslim lands/lands of war) and not as Ahl Zimma in Dar al-Salam (Muslim lands/ lands of peace).

b- Polytheists and idolaters were on the contrary recognized as inferior and as such condemned to annexation to Islam or to slavery. Shia Muslims were considered apostates, so they were persecuted most of the times, and had to choose between three choices: convert to Sunni Islam, convert to Christianity to be treated as Zimmis, or being killed as apostates. In 1513 on the orders of Sultan Selim I, 40,000 Shiaa were massacred throughout Eastern Anatolia on suspicion of being Safavid spies or potential traitors9.

4 Recep Bozttemur, Historical Foundations of Multiculturalism in the Ottoman Empire, in "Challenges of Multiculturalism in Eastern and Central Europe", 2004, pp. 6-7.
5 Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society, Holmes and Meier Publisher, London, 1982.
7 Recep Bozttemur, op.cit,p.2.
9 Dilip Hiro, Neighbors, Not Friends: Iraq and Iran After the Gulf Wars, Routledge, USA, 2001, p. 2
The Protection system
From the late eighteenth century onward, discrimination and persecution of minorities lead to chaos and calls for more justice. Western powers used this to declare their protection of minorities.

At its origin, this protection was limited to Ottoman Christians and Jews, locally recruited for service of the foreigner states. The individual so employed was given a warrant, issued by the Ottoman government at the request of and through a foreign consulate called 'berat', whose terms resembled diplomatic immunity, including some privileges like exemption from Ottoman criminal jurisdiction, as well as reduced customs levies and other commercial privileges.\(^\text{10}\)

Later on, this protection developed and Russians declared protection on the Orthodox (Rum), France protected the Maronites (in Mount Lebanon) and Catholics, Britain protected Druze in Lebanon and Prussia competed with Britain for the protection of the small Protestant communities and occasionally extended it to the numerically more important Jews.

In order to forestall more drastic intervention, the Ottoman government issued the Reform Decree of 1856, which proclaimed the equality of all—Muslim and non-Muslim alike, but it was just a utopia. At that time, the Millet system changed. The 'Gülhane' or 'Tanzimat' Charter proclaimed on November 3, 1839 announced the equality between all citizens. It was regarded the opening period of reforms, which stretched until 1860s.\(^\text{11}\)

Young Turk era:
When the Ottoman state failed to defend its territory and sovereignty, the Young Turk Committee of Union and Progress, the revolutionary rulers who gained power in a coup, adapted a program of national homogenization i.e. Turkification. As a result of this policy, the Young Turk government launched a series of initiatives which marginalized, isolated, incarcerated, altered borders, deported, forcefully assimilated, exchanged populations, massacred and conducted genocide against its non-Turkish minority populations.\(^\text{12}\)

A - Turkification:
The new ottoman rule, used Islam and Ottoman Turkish language as cornerstones in - what they called - 'defending and homogenization of the empire territories'.

Arab Levant minorities resisted Turkification. Arabs in the Arab land continued to speak Arabic. Lebanese Christians defied Turkification by initiating and hiding prints in their monasteries. Coptic and Syriac were retained in liturgy alone. To a much greater degree than any other region, these lands were linguistically unified. Greek Orthodox, Armenians, and many Syrian Christians, along with the Jews, wrote in a large variety of different languages in their respective liturgical scripts.

b - Genocides
From 1900 to 1923, various Turkish regimes killed from 3,500,000 to over 4,300,000 Armenians, Greeks, Nestorians, and other Christians.\(^\text{13}\) Suffering deportations, famine, exposure, war, genocide, and massacres, millions of minorities in the Levant; Armenians, Assyrians, and other Christians died.

- Armenians:
In their highest councils, Turkish leaders decided to exterminate every Armenian in the country, whether a front-line soldier or pregnant woman, famous professor or high bishop, important businessman or ardent patriot; All 2,000,000 of them\(^\text{14}\). This lead to the Armenian Genocide.

- Assyrians:
Between 1914 and 1920, the Assyrian civilian population was forcibly relocated and massacred by the Ottoman army, together with other armed and allied Muslim peoples, including Kurds, Chechens and Circassia's forces.

\(^\text{10}\)Benjamin Braude, the Ottoman Empire: The Abridged Edition, Lynne Rienner Publishers, USA, 2014.
\(^\text{12}\) Ugur Umit Ungor, "Geographies of Nationalism and Violence: Rethinking Young Turk 'Social Engineering'”, in European Journal of Turkish Studies (7), 2008.
\(^\text{13}\) Rudolph. J. Rummel, Statistics Of Democide, Center for National Security Law, School of Law, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, 1997.
\(^\text{14}\) Ibid.
Estimates on the overall death toll have varied. Providing detailed statistics of the various estimates of the Churches' population after the genocide, David Gaunt accepts the figure of 275,000 deaths as reported by the Assyrian delegation at the Treaty of Lausanne and ventures that the death toll would be around 300,000 because of uncounted Assyrian-inhabited areas.\(^{15}\)

**B- Creation of the Arab states**

After World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Arabs failed to build modern states, with a separate national civil identity, and to develop political-social-economic policies that would ensure reasonable equality for all citizens, economic growth, and prosperity.

The 1920 Treaty of Sevres, which ended up the war between the Ottomans and the Allies, granted immediate independence to the Hejaz (the Saudi peninsula), Armenia, as well as eventual statehood to Kurdistan. These arrangements collapsed three years later, however, when Turkish forces defeated the Allies. A renegotiated settlement, the Treaty of Lausanne, ended the dreams of a Greater Kurdistan and Greater Armenia, setting the borders of modern Turkey.\(^{16}\)

Immediately after the creation of the Arab states, even before they attained full independence, two visions competed concerning state-building and the identity of their citizens: the Islamic vision and the secular-national vision:

- The Islamic vision posits a state based on religion, its governance and social structure determined by Sharia.
- Secular-Arab-national visualized a state based on Arab nationality.

Christian thinkers and elites strongly supported the second one. They pioneered Arab nationalism, as they regarded it the best choice for Arab non-Muslim minorities to be citizens with full rights regardless of their ethnic or religious origins, and in its main goal and objective to put the Christians, who were scattered throughout the Arab states and for the most part saw themselves as Arabs, within the majority community.

Except for Lebanon, that emphasized a consensus formula of the power-sharing between religions, the new Arab states - upon their establishment - didn't make an effort to tackle the problem of different cultural identities.

The first constitutions formulated in Syria and Iraq in the 1920s and 1930s, for example, and under the influence of Britain and France, were relatively liberal and granted equality to citizens without connection to their religion, ostensibly. Besides, all the aforementioned constitutions affirmed that each state was part of the Arab world and worked for its unity, and that Islam was the religion of the state.

**C- Military coups**

Reaching the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century, and with the growing anger over the inability of the active and powerful Arab countries to prevent the formation of the State of Israel, added to bad socio-economic conditions and increase in corruption etc., military coups purported in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Sudan trying to remedy the problems of Arab societies.

The new military regimes, in Syria and Iraq, promised to restore dignity of their peoples in the Arab Israeli conflict, to step into modernization, economic and social reforms, and public education. Yet, within a short time, it turned out they could not fulfill their promises; instead their states further deteriorated into cruel dictatorships marked by corruption, which is still endemic in the Arab states and by domestic oppression and conflicts with neighbors.

---


Despite their secular discourse, and the emphasis on Arab nationality, they were unable to come up with a narrative that could unify the whole mosaic of ethnic, national, and religious groups. It is worth to note that, while professing secularism; military regimes did not deny Islam. On the contrary, they boosted Islamic education as a way of distracting the masses from their military and economic failures. With most of the public clinging to religion in the face of failed economic development and ongoing poverty, Islam's influence grew in the seventies and the eighties of the twentieth century.

D- Occupation of Iraq 2003

After the US invasion of Iraq, the Iraqi civilian population has been subjected to horrific levels of violence and terror. Iraq’s minority communities were caught between the warring factions and their crisis was particularly acute. The very existence of some of these groups in their ancient homeland was under threat.

Some of these groups have lived in Iraq for two millennia or more. A huge exodus took place. Minorities were specifically eradicated because of their faith and ethnicity. Christians were at risk because of their faith. Islamist groups have dubbed the Yezidi religion ‘impure’ and called for their destruction. For Sabeans- Mandaeans, carrying weapons is a direct violation of their religious laws, thus making it difficult for them to defend themselves. All of Iraq’s minority communities have suffered mass murder, abduction, ransoming, murder of religious and civic leaders and individuals including children, in addition to forced conversion to Islam using tactics such as: death threats, rape and forced marriage.¹⁷

Even before Arab uprisings and the rise of ISIS, minorities in Iraq were facing difficulties in all spheres of religious and public life, and many members of minorities in Iraq find themselves effectively in ghettos as they are excluded from whole areas of public life, and more than 4,000 Iraqi Christian families were forced to leave their home town immediately, seeking refuge in other parts of Iraq or in foreign countries, a report (2011) by Minority Rights Group International revealed.¹⁸

E- Arab uprisings: Minorities' Catastrophe

As the revolution started in Syria, Christians and Alawites feared a similar situation of Christians in Iraq where hundreds of thousands have either left or fled to the northern part of the country due to violence linked to Islamic extremism.

Very early in Syria, demonstrators against Assad regime chanted “Christians to Beirut, Alawites to 'tabout' (coffin)”¹⁹. This chant in addition to many other incidents against civilians belonging to minority groups alluded to what many Syrian minorities fear might happen if the Baath regime comes to an end.

As the war continued its 5th year in Syria and still on, and the capture of three Iraqi provinces by Islamic extremists (summer 2014); minorities continue to pay a heavy price in respect to their rights; especially their right to life, their existence and exercise of their beliefs. Entire minority communities, including Armenian Christians, Chaldo-Assyrians, Sabean Mandaeans, Shabak, Turkmen and Yezidi, have been uprooted from areas where they have been living for thousands of years. Women have been the targets of particularly horrific forms of sexual and gender based violence, including kidnapping, rape, forced marriage, sexual slavery and trafficking.

Hundreds of Christian families, Yezidi and other minorities joined the exodus of civilians leaving Mosul, with the UN estimating that 500,000 people fled in the first week following the entry of ISIS into the city. The remaining Christian families received an ultimatum to either convert to Islam, pay jizya (a tribute levied on non-Muslims) or be killed.


¹⁹Check it on many websites, for example: http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/syria-bashar-al-assad-alawite-opposition-religion; and http://www.turkishnews.com/en/content/2011/05/30/should-syrian-christians-be-afraid/ [accessed May 16, 2016].
Extremists; like ISIS, al - Nusra front and other Al Qaeda affiliated militias in Syria, imposed new rules on the inhabitants of their captured territories, marked by the imposition of strict interpretations of Sharia law, the silencing of all forms of opposition and the destruction of any traces of minority culture and heritage.

In Mosul, Deir zour and al Raqqa, ISIS issued orders mandating women to wear the veil and instructing them not to leave the house unless accompanied by a man. Residents of all occupied areas have been tried in self-styled Sharia courts for violating or opposing the group’s ideology, with many sentenced to public executions and other punishments.

In either Syria and Iraq, Alawites, Kurds, Shia and Sunnis have developed their own armed groups and recalled support from foreign troops, however marginalized minorities have found themselves with little effective protection in that deteriorating security environment.

Arab uprisings and rise of extremism and terrorism reopened the file of the minorities in Arab world again. In this context, members of smaller minorities have been particularly targeted for a variety of reasons:

1. For ideological reasons; fundamentalist groups aiming to bring an end to Iraq’s and Syria's religious diversity and to establish a Sunni caliphate in the region.

2. Political reasons; minorities in Syria have been seen as supporters of Assad regime, and both Christians and Yezidi in Iraq were associated with the West and attacked as a result.

3. Militarily; minorities often constitute ‘easy targets’, as they do not have their own militias.

4. Minority groups are concentrated in strategic areas or oil-rich regions; like Baghdad, Kirkuk and Ninewa etc. in Iraq, and Lattikia, Homs and Deir zour in Syria.

5. Rebel groups attack civilian targets to increase sectarian hatred, mobilize jihadists, and undermine the governments’ abilities to maintain basic security in both Syria and Iraq.

Fortunately, Lebanon, as it was during the Ottoman rule, still seen as haven for minorities in the Middle East. The refuge of minorities from Ottoman persecution, constructed the Lebanese diverse religious population, and today; it is still seen as the safest place for religious freedom and protection of minorities.

Part II- Status of minorities in each of the Five states \(^{20}\)

A- Iraq

The ancient nation of Iraq was a home to dozens of ethnic and religious minorities, who were severely affected after the US- led invasion in 2003, the civil war (2006-2008), then after the advance of ISIS fighters into large parts of Ninewa, Mosul and other provinces.

a- Minorities' rights: legal framework

Article 2 of the Iraqi constitution drafted and approved on 15 October 2005, recognizes Islam as the official religion, mandates it to be a source of legislation, and states that no law may be enacted contradicting the established provisions of Islam.

\(^{20}\) It is important to note that reliable and accurate sources for status of minorities are rare. The problem that faced this study is the contradicting information and statistics about the number of followers of minority groups, emigrations, death tolls, freedoms and minority rights. Each party, state, or NGO used numbers to propagate political agendas and / or cause. Most of the data in this part (II) has been taken from US department of state reports which were the most detailed and comprehensive reports found, and because they were - mostly- based on official statistics and estimations.
As for the religious minorities’ rights; the constitution guarantees the full rights and freedom of religious belief and practice of all individuals such as Christians, Yezidi, and Mandean Sabeans (Art.2).

b- Minorities’ Status in Power

Minorities have a quota of the 328 seats in the Council of Representatives; the electoral law reserves just 8 seats for members of minority groups: five for Christian candidates; one for Yezidi; one for Sabean -Mandaeans; and one for Shabak. The Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament reserves 11 seats for minorities: five for Christians, five for Turkmen, and one for Armenian.

In the 2014 national parliamentary elections, six minority candidates won parliamentary seats outside of the quota allocation, bringing total minority representation to 14 seats.

c- In Education

The government requires Islamic religious instruction in public schools, but non-Muslim students are not required to participate. Ministry of Education approved the inclusion of Syriac and Christian religious education in the curricula of 152 public schools in Baghdad, Ninewa, and Kirkuk. Private religious schools operate in the country, but must obtain a license from the director general of private and public schools and pay annual fees.

The constitution establishes Arabic and Kurdish as official state languages but guarantees the right to educate minority children in their own languages, and makes Turkmen and Syriac official languages in “the administrative units in which they constitute density populations.”

d- Demography

There is no accurate data about religious demography in Iraq due to violence, terrorism, collective migrations, and governmental tracking capability. Following ISIS incursions in 2014, 1.8 million people were displaced; the exact number of religious minorities among those displaced remains unknown. ISIS abuses disproportionately affected religious minorities, with between 100,000 and 200,000 Christians, an estimated 300,000 Yezidi, and several thousand Kakai’s displaced throughout the country. In the wake of this displacement, high concentrations of those minorities now reside in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

According to 2010 government statistics, the most recent official statistics available, 97% of the 32 million population are Muslims; the majority are Shia Muslims constituting 60 to 65 % of the population predominantly Arabs but including Turkmen, Shabak, Faili (Shia) Kurds, and others. Sunni Muslims make up 31 to 37 % of the population, with 18 to 20 % representing Sunni Kurds, 12 to 16 % Sunni Arabs, and the remaining 1 to 2 % Sunni Turkmen. Minorities constitute approximately 3 % of the population, composed of Christians, Yezidi, Sabean-Mandaeans, Bahais, Kakai’s, and a very small number of Jews.

Christians

Christian identity is not as homogeneous as some of the other Iraqi minority identities. Many Christians not only consider themselves a religion, but also as part of one of four distinct ethnicities as well; Chaldean, Assyrian, Armenian, or Syriac.

Twenty years ago, there were approximately 1.4 million Christians in Iraq. After 2003, more than 50% of them left the country. Before June 2014 and the ISIS take of Ninewa and Mosul, only around 350,000 Christians were still based in Iraq, mostly in Baghdad, Mosul and the Ninewa plain, Kirkuk, Basra as well as the three governorates in the Iraqi Kurdish Region.


\[24\] Miriam Puttick, From Crisis to Catastrophe: The Situation of Minorities in Iraq, MRG and Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, London, October 2014, p. 5.
Turkmen
Turkmen are a distinct ethnic group; range of between 500,000 and 600,000. Approximately 60% of them are Sunni, just around 39% are Shia and the remainder are Christians (around 30,000). Turkmen, as well as Kurds and Assyrians, were forcibly displaced from their homes during Saddam Hussein rule, where the government launched "Arabization" and "correction" campaigns and brought in Arab settlers to replace them.

Approximately 85% of Turkmen Iraqi population lived in the regions around Mosul, Kirkuk, Erbil and Tel Afar; the rest are in Baghdad and smaller villages, such as Tuz Khurmatu25, with the largest concentration based in Kirkuk, and south as far as Wasit governorate, south-east of Baghdad.26

Before ISIS incursions in 2014, Turkmen were intimidated by Kurdish and central government authorities, as well as by extra-judicial militias, on religious and ethnic grounds as well as for their presence in the disputed territories.27 Shia Turkmen have been executed by ISIS fighters.28

Yezidi
Those are an ethno-religious group indigenous to northern Mesopotamia. Yezidis is an ancient religion present in the Middle East since approximately 4000 BC, based mainly in northern Iraq, though some are also based in neighboring Syria and Turkey.

Even though they are ethnically Kurdish, Yezidi are a distinct and independent religious community with their own unique culture.29 This reportedly created conflict within the community and pressure from Kurdish officials and Kurdish-identifying community members, as well as death threats.30

Because of the violence from extremist groups, there have been no Yezidi left in Mosul since 2007.31 Due to a misinterpretation of their religion, Islamic militants regard Yezidi as heretical, and "devil worshippers" so they have been regularly targeted with violence as a result.32 Unlike Christians, or the "People of the Book" who can pay a tax to stay in their homes, the Yezidi can only choose between conversion, expulsion, or execution.33 Prior to June 2014, the 2005 population of 700,000 had reportedly fallen to approximately 500,000, with thousands of families having fled to Syria, Jordan and other states.34

Other Minorities
Like other groups; Mandean -Sabeans, Shabak, Baha'is, Faili Kurds, and Kakai's (Yaresan) have been targeted because of their ethnic or religious identity and forced to leave their homes as majority communities try to create religious and ethnically homogeneous enclaves.

Mandeans-Sabeans estimated 70,000 worldwide and most lived in Iraq before the 2003 war; less than 5,000 were still there before ISIS incursions.35 Like all other minorities, Sabeans do not intermarry and their beliefs are considered heretical by the extremist groups who target them. However, it was not only extremists who targeted them; they have a reputation as being wealthier than ordinary Iraqis because many formerly traded in alcohol,

32 Puttick, op. cit., p. 5.
33 Lamani, op.cit., p.7.
jewelry and other profitable businesses. This has made them the target of criminal gangs conducting kidnappings for ransom.\textsuperscript{36}

Kaka’i, also known as Ahl-e Haq or Yarsan, estimated between 110,000 and 200,000 in Iraq, mainly south-east of Kirkuk and in the Ninewa plain near Daqqu and Hamdaniya, with others also based in Diyala, Erbil and Suleimaniya.\textsuperscript{37} The Shabak, with a population of 200,000–500,000 (2010 estimates) residing mainly in Mosul, have been targeted by Radical Islamists, Al-Qaeda (2006–2008) and ISIS (2014– ). The Baha’i religion is still not recognized by the majority of Middle East governments and they have no right to express their identity.

\section*{B-Syria}

The brutal and destructive nature of the conflict has caused severe catastrophe for all civilians, majority and minority communities alike. Alawites are among the groups most in danger of violent persecution by armed opposition groups due to their perceived association with the Assad regime, although in general minority political allegiances are divided between support and opposition.\textsuperscript{38}

\subsection*{a- Minorities' rights: Legal Framework}

Syria is considered a secular state although the constitution requires the president be Muslim and stipulates that Islamic jurisprudence is a major source of legislation. The 2012 constitution confirms that "the State respects all religions" and provides "freedom to exercise of all religions". The constitution grants freedom of faith and religious practice (Article 35) provided that religious rites “do not disturb the public order” (article 3). There is no official legal punishment under Syrian law for apostasy of Islam, or any other religion.

The constitution also ensures “the civil status of the religious communities is protected and respected,” and “the citizens are equal in rights and duties, without discrimination as to religion or confession” (article 33).

The Syrian penal code prohibits “causing tension between religious communities.” Religion is not mentioned on identity cards or passports. For issues of personal status, the government requires citizens to be affiliated nominally with Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. Shari’a is applied in matters related to personal status (including inheritance, marriage, divorce, and child custody) for Muslims only, while religious minorities apply their own laws.\textsuperscript{39}

\subsection*{b- Minorities status in Power}

Recognized religious minority groups are represented in the parliament, the government, and administration and among the senior officer bodies of the Syrian military.

\subsection*{c- In Education}

Public schools are officially government-run and nonsectarian, although in practice the Christian and Druze communities operate some public schools. There is mandatory religious instruction in public schools for all students, with regime-approved teachers and curricula. Religious instruction is provided for Islam and Christianity only, and courses are divided into separate classes for Muslim and Christian students. Members of religious minority groups can choose to attend public schools with Muslim or Christian instruction, or attend private schools that follow either secular or religious curricula. Groups participating in Islamic courses include only Sunnis, Shia, Alawites, Ismailis, Yezidi, and Druze.\textsuperscript{40}

\bibliography{references}
On 21 July 2010, the government ordered the banning of face-covering niqab in public and private universities amid fears of increasing Islamic extremism among young Muslim students; with hundreds of teachers wearing niqab were transferred out of Syrian schools and universities and reassigned to administrative jobs, where they would not come into contact with students.41

Although Arabic is the official language in public schools, the government permits the teaching of Armenian, Hebrew, Syriac (Aramaic), and Chaldean in some schools on the premise that they are “liturgical languages.” The government permitted the use of religious language in public, including banners bearing religious slogans at prominent public landmarks during religious holidays. The display of nativity scenes and other symbols associated with Christmas is common.42

d- Demography

By July 2014, Syrian population was estimated at 17,951,639 with approximately 18,900 Israeli settlers live in the Golan Heights (2012). Syrian religious demography can be classified as: Muslims 87% (official; includes Sunni 74% (Arabs and Kurds) - Alawite, Ismailis, and Shia 13%), Christian 10% (includes Orthodox, Catholics, and Nestorian), Druze 3%, Jewish (few remaining in Damascus and Aleppo)43

- Christians
The Syrian Christian community makes up approximately 10 % of the population, but its size has been declining since the March 2011 uprising due to displacement and emigration. Like other minorities, many Christians feel they have to support Assad because they fear what may happen if the rebels win; they may face the same tragedy as Christians in Iraq.

- Alawites
Alawites comprise about 10 % of the population. The Alawites, a Muslim minority in Syria were also a subjugated people until the arrival of the Alawite Assad family to the presidency in 1971. Many Sunni Muslims (who make up the majority of the Syrian population) see the Alawites, who do study the Quran and recognize the five pillars of Islam but who differ in some fundamental religious beliefs from mainstream Islam, as heretics.

- Druze
They constitute 3% of Syria's population. Druze, who refer to themselves as al-Muwahhideen, or "believers in one God," are concentrated in the rural, mountainous areas known officially as Jabal al-Arab or Jabal al-Druze.

They have generally avoided taking sides in the conflict. The majority of Druze tried to stay neutral between the regime and the militants. This couldn't save them, for the Druze faith is considered heretical by jihadists, so Dozens of Druze living Sowaida were murdered, and Druze living in Idlib have been subjected to religious persecution by "al-Nusra Front" with several hundred forced to convert to Sunni Islam. The militants also were accused of desecrating graves and damaging Druze shrines.

- Kurds
They represent about 10 % of the Syrian population. According to Law 93 of 1962, Kurds who could not prove their residence in Syria from 1945 onwards were denied Syrian nationality. It was till 2011 that President Bashar Assad issued a decree to grant citizenship to the 300,000 Kurds living in Hasaka.

During Syrian war, Kurds fought the Islamic radical groups Like Al Nusra Front and ISIS. They could win most of the battles and expel ISIS jihadists from the regions in northern Syria, which allowed them to declare autonomy for the Kurdish-controlled areas.

---

42 US department of state, op. cit.
Shia Muslims also faced difficulties and massacres since the uprising. Shia villages have been besieged by the opposition fighters, and many others were displaced because they were seen as supporters of the regime.

Yezidi population was approximately 80,000 before the war, media reports indicate that it has grown due to Iraqi Yezidi fleeing across the border into Syria. Yezidi live in fear and desperation following the ISIS’s brutal campaign against their community members in Iraq. ISIS has smuggled unknown numbers of abducted Yezidi women and girls from Sinjar into Syria, where they have been sold as commodities, enslaved, raped and forcibly married to ISIS fighters.

Turkmen comprise 1.2% of the Syrian population, making them "one of the smallest minority groups in the country", according to historian C. H. Bleaney. During the War, they have been involved in military actions against Syrian government forces and they were backed, funded and militarized by Turkish army and intelligence.

The Ismailis of Syria are about 1% percent of the population, they are mostly found in Al Silmiya near Hama. At the onset of the “Syrian revolution,” al-Silmiya witnessed some unique demonstrations with protesters proudly drinking alcohol and raising a glass to the civil revolution, but when the conflict turned into a battle between the Syrian Army and the jihadists, the Ismailis looked for the government for protection like other minorities.

Jews numerically are less 100 in Syria (2014). Before the war, Jews had separate primary schools for religious instruction on Judaism and were allowed to teach Hebrew in some schools. Jews and Kurds were the only minorities not allowed to participate in the political system and Jews did not have military service obligations.

C-Lebanon

a- Minorities' rights: legal framework

Religious freedom is protected by both constitution and laws. The constitution stipulates that "There shall be absolute freedom of conscience” (Article 9), the State respects all religions and creeds and guarantees, under its protection the free exercise of all religious rites provided that public order is not disturbed. It also guarantees that the personal status and religious interests of the population, to whatever religious sect they belong, shall be respected.

Religion is not encoded on national identity cards or on passports, but just noted on “ikhraaj qaid” (official registry) documents. Citizens have the right to remove their religion or change the religion on their identity cards and official registry documents. Government documents refer to Jewish Lebanese citizens as Israelis, although they are not Israeli citizens.

The law gives religious groups the right to administer their personal status' laws freely. There are no procedures for civil marriage; however, the government recognizes civil marriage ceremonies performed outside the country, irrespective of the religious affiliation of each individual.

Unrecognized groups are permitted to perform their religious rites and assemble for worship without government interference. An individual may change religions if the change is approved by the head of the religious group the person wishes to join. The Lebanese penal code prohibits "causing tension between religious communities."

b- Minorities in Power

The constitution assures the balance of power among the major religious groups. Christians and Muslims are represented equally (and proportionally among the 18 officially-recognized religious groups) in parliament, the cabinet, administration, and high-level civil service positions.


ISIS threatens the Ismaili capital of Syria, al- akhbar English, Mar 06 2015.

Jews in Islamic Countries: Syria. (Updated February 2016)
http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/syrianjews.html#9
The President of the Republic is Christian, and the total number of Christians' seats in Parliament is 64. Total number of Muslim seats in the Parliament is also 64; Sunnis have 27 seats and 27 seats are for Shia, the speaker of the parliament is Shiite, and the prime minister is Sunni. Druze has 8 seats in the parliament. Alawites have 2 seats in the parliament.

The government does not officially recognize some religious groups such as Bahais, Buddhists, Hindus, and unregistered Protestant groups. Although members of these groups do not qualify for certain government positions, but there are many of them who have been in government and administrative positions. Government records list some members of unregistered religious groups as belonging to recognized religious groups.

**c- In Education**

The government permits the publication of religious materials of every religious group in different languages. The constitution confirms that education shall be free insofar as it is not contrary to public order and morals and does not affect the dignity of any of the religions or sects. The State gives religious communities a right to have their own schools.

**d- Demography**

Lebanon can be considered as a pot of minorities, where all the religions and sects are regarded as minorities. The population is approximately 4.3 million, with 18 officially recognized religious groups include 4 Muslim groups, 12 Christian groups, Druze, and Judaism.

Many persons fleeing religious mistreatment and discrimination in neighboring states are immigrants in the country, including Kurds, Shia, and Chaldeans from Iraq, as well as Coptic Christians from Egypt and Sudan.

There are no official records or estimations, however a study conducted by Statistics Lebanon, a Beirut-based private research firm, cited by the United States Department of State, found that Lebanon's population constitute of approximately 4.3 million; Muslims around 54% (27% Sunni Muslim, 27% Shia Muslim). Christians declined to 41% (21% are Maronites, 8% Greek Orthodox, 5% Greek Catholic, 6.5% belonging to smaller Christian groups). Druze estimate around 5.6%. Alawites count 40,000 to 120,000 in Lebanon.

**Jews:** Unlike other Arab countries, where Jews were declared "personae non gratae" following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, Lebanon did not expel its' Jewish citizens. There are no official estimates as to the size of Lebanon’s remaining Jewish community today. According to the President of the Lebanese Jewish Community Council, Mr. Isaac Arazi; there are more than 2,000 Lebanese Jews still living in Lebanon.

**D-Jordan**

**a- Minorities rights: Legal framework**

The Jordanian constitution stipulates the freedom to practice the rites of one’s religion in accordance with the customs that are observed in the country, unless the government deems they violate morality or public order. It assures that there shall be no discrimination in the rights and duties of citizens on grounds of religion, but also notes that the state religion is Islam and the king must be a Muslim.

Religious affiliation is required on national identification cards and legal documentation, including on marriage and birth certificates, but not on travel documents. National identification cards and legal documentation identify individuals as either Christian or Muslim but do not specify their sects. Atheists and agnostics must associate themselves with a recognized religion for purposes of official identification. Employment application forms for government positions occasionally contain questions about an applicant’s religion.

---

47 US department of state, Lebanon, op.cit.
48 http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper
The constitution mandates that matters concerning personal status are under the exclusive jurisdiction of religious courts. The constitution and law do not explicitly ban Muslims from converting to another faith, and there are no penalties under civil law for doing so. Nonetheless, by according primacy to sharia, Muslims who convert can be prosecuted by the State Security Court under the penal code’s provisions against “inciting sectarian conflict” or “harming the national unity.” Non-Muslims may convert to Islam or from one recognized non-Islamic faith to another.

b- Minorities in Power

Christians regularly serve as cabinet ministers. According to the law, Christians are allotted nine seats out of 150 seats in parliament. They are also eligible to compete for the 27 seats reserved for national list candidates. Christians may not run for the remaining 114 seats. No seats are reserved for adherents of other minority religious groups. The government classification of Druze as Muslims permits them to hold office. The government traditionally reserves some positions in the upper levels of the military for Christians, anecdotally estimated to be approximately 4%.

c- In Education

Public schools provide Islamic religious instruction as part of the basic national curriculum, although non-Muslim students are allowed to opt out. In several cities, Christian denominations operate private schools, and are able to conduct classes on Christianity. The schools are open to adherents of all religions.49

d- Demography

The official Jordanian government estimates - cited by the US department of State - the population is 7.9 million (July 2014), 97.2 % of which is Sunni Muslim. Christians are 2.2 % of the population, and groups that together constitute less than 1 % of the population include Shia Muslims, Bahais, and Druze. Shia and Baha'i count not more than 1000. There are also about 20,000 to 32,000 Druze living mostly in the north of Jordan.

E- Palestine

West Bank: Muslim population is around 85.0% (predominantly Sunni), the Jewish settlers estimates 12%, and Christians consist 1.0 - 2.5% (mainly Greek Orthodox), while in Gaza Strip: Muslims 98.0 - 99.0% (predominantly Sunni), Christian 1.0%.

An estimated 50,000 Christians live among 3.9 million Muslims in the Palestinian territories, most in the West Bank, notably in Bethlehem, and East Jerusalem. Some 3,000 are in the Gaza Strip.50

The Palestinian Authority says the Christian population in the West Bank has shrunk over the last three decades due to emigration, mainly to Australia, Canada and the United States, but lacks accurate figures. The rise of Islamic radicalism, protracted Palestinian - Israeli conflict, blockade and better living standards are the main reasons for Christian emigration.

Part III - Findings and Future Solutions

A- Survey Results and Analysis

Our survey was conducted on March - April, 2016 by a group of researchers residing in Lebanon, through direct interaction with the respondents, and via email and/or phone with the minorities living in other Arab Levant countries.

49 - See more at: http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper
The respondents were mainly: Christians, Kurds, Druze, Turkmen, Alawites, and Yezidi. We couldn't reach Ismailis due to security concerns in Syria. Jews couldn't be reached due to their no-show in Arab societies.

According to the definition given by United Nations Human Rights- Office of the High commissioner, the existence of a minority is a question of fact and any definition must include both objective factors (such as the existence of a shared ethnicity, language or religion) and subjective factors (including that individuals must identify themselves as members of a minority). Therefore, Shia and Sunnis were excluded from our survey despite the fact that first are considered a minority in Syria, and the latter constitute a minority in Iraq because they don't define themselves as minorities in the region. Kurds in Iraq are also excluded from our survey because they don't consider themselves as a minority, they are in a dominant position in Iraqi Kurdistan, and they don't have the same concerns, fears and aspirations like other minorities in the Levant.

According to the given estimations of minorities in the Arab Levant, the survey sample is classified as follows:

- Christians 47%
- Alawites 19%
- Kurds 13%
- Druze 8%
- Yezidi 6%
- Turkmen 4%
- other 2%

The no. of respondents is 550, categorized as follows:

**Nationalities:**
- 47% Lebanese
- 42% Syrians
- 7% Iraqis
- 3% Jordanians
- 1% Palestinians

**Age:**
- 20% of them are above 50.
- 18% are between 38 and 50 years.
- 24% are between 28 and 37.
- 38% are between 18 and 27.

**Gender:**
- 53% of the respondents are males, and 47% are females.

The Questions and answers were as follows:

1. **With which of the following do you associate your belonging:**

   - Country 37%
   - Family 35%
   - Religion 28%

   The results show that minorities still have ambiguity in their sense of belonging. Their crisis of identity can be seen as those associate themselves with both family and religion constitute around 63%, while those affiliate themselves with national identity are just 37%. This shows that Arab Levant states - after decades of independence - couldn't develop a national identity for all citizens.

2. **Do you practice your own cultural, political and social rights in your country?**

   - 53% Yes
   - 32% No
   - 15% No Answer

---

The percentage of "no answer" in critical questions shows that minorities still have fear to express their opinions which can be seen as criticizing the authorities.

* If Not, why?

Those who said that they don't practice their rights in the previous question (32%), refer to the following reasons:

Absence of freedoms and democracy: 47 %
The corrupt political system: 31%
Religious intolerance and sectarian divide: 13%
Displacement: 9 %

Note that some Lebanese answered that they don't practice their political rights, referring to their right to vote for a new parliament as the deputies are continuously extending their own mandate in a severe breach to the constitution. However, this Lebanese issue can be seen as a national problem not a minority rights' one.

3. Do you have any preferences for your neighbors?

58% no preference     20% same nationality     20% same sect     2% no answer

Despite all the fears and rise of criminality due to war and displacement; the majority still feel that they can co-exist with other religions and nationalities at the same neighborhood.

Note that Iraqi respondents had the major concerns; they said that "most Iraqi Christians and Yezidi captives were handed to ISIS by their Sunni neighbors".

4 - Do you feel intimidated because you are a minority?

42% never     27% sometimes     16% always     15% rarely

43% of the respondents have some sort of fear due to the fact that they are minorities, while 42% have never had this feeling. Lebanese respondents were the most satisfied and non afraid ones.

5. before the rise of extremism, have you ever been exposed to persecution or injustice because of your religion?

65% No     30% Yes     5% no answer.  

*It means that a good majority of them were satisfied with their status and weren't subject to persecution of injustice due to their religious affiliations. It is important to note that injustice and persecution in Arab states -before the uprisings- affected all citizens regardless of their religious affiliation. Persecution and injustice - in most cases- were the result of dictatorship and has nothing to do with rights of minorities specifically. 

6. Which of the following statements define you?

48% I want to stay in my homeland.
24% I am thinking of immigration.
14% I am a refugee.
13% I am displaced.

Almost half of the respondents want to stay at their homelands, despite all challenges and fears.

---

52 On 31 May 2013, the Lebanese Parliament extended its mandate for 17 months, due to the deadlock over the electoral law. And, on 5 November 2014, the Parliament enacted another extension until 20 June 2017, referring it to security concerns.
7. Do you think that strict adherence to the religion is desirable today?

72% No       28% Yes

Why?

Those who said NO (72%) justified as follows:

- 48% it increases instability and hatred between communities.
- 38% intolerance leads to the absence of national unity.
- 4% intolerance is a mental illness.
- 10% no answer.

*The first two justifications mentioned in this question, and their high percentages reveal high level of awareness; and show that minorities still strive to societal coexistence and national unity (86%).*

Those who answered YES (28%) referred it to the following reasons:

- 64% intolerance is the right reaction towards intolerance.
- 18% for protection of the community.
- 14% to maintain our rights.
- 11% to counter foreign policies.

8. How do private religious institutions (economic, political, educational...) affect the development of the State?

- 31% they eliminate State loyalty and patriotism.
- 26% they help raise the capabilities of the state.
- 19% they contribute to sectarian loyalties.
- 16% they develop groups outside the framework of the State.
- 8% no answer.

*The above percentages show that that negative attitudes (66%) are far higher than positive one (26%). It means the majority prefer to get their rights from their states not through private religious institutions. High negative attitudes reveal that religious institutions are not accepted as a substitute of the State, or as intermediaries between the citizen and the State.*

9. Do you support the emergence of secular parties in your country?

- 63% Yes       18% No       19% no answer

63% of respondents are convinced that there is a need to establish secular parties. This is logical compared to answers in no.7, where 72% are against fanaticism. It means that there is a strong conviction among minorities that secular parties can be a way to get rid of intolerance and radicalism, and grant them equality.

10. Do you Support civil marriages?

- 58% yes       No 34%       8% no answer.

11. Would you (yourself) adapt a civil marriage or encourage your children to do so?

- 49% Yes       32% No       19% No Answer

12. Do you think that religious affiliation should be deleted from identity cards?
Those who refuse to delete religious affiliation from national identity cards, considered its presence as a sign of pride of their religions.

13. Which political system you think is best for the states that have minorities? (Open answers)

39% democratic System  36% secular system  20% decentralized System
3% power-sharing system 1% partition of the state  1% no answer.

14. Extremism is a result of:

28% foreign interventions.
9% foreign intelligence.
8% internal sectarian policies.
3% Media.
46% All of the above.
6% None of the above.

15. Do you think minorities will return to their homeland when the war ends?

43% Yes  55% No  2% No Answer

16. is there any future for minorities in the Arab Levant?

33% Yes  30% No  37% I do not know

The results of this question show the uncertainty the minorities have for their future in the Arab Levant.

17. What were your fears before the emergence of extremism? (Open Question)

32% tyranny of the majority,  46% dispossession of rights
20% absence of power-sharing  2% No answer

18. What are your major fears today? (Open Question)

34% uprooting  32% genocide  33% deprivation of civil and religious rights  1% no answer.

19. in your opinion, what is the best solution for minorities in the region? (Open Question)

42% changing the political system.
30% defending their homeland to reach Stability, peace, and security.
18% amending constitutions to protect "rights of minorities".
7% Immigration.
1% No solution
2% No answer.
B-Future of minorities in the Arab Levant

Minorities in Arab Levant, is a term that refer to groups that were found in the region before the independence and creation of the states. Through history, these groups fought each other (Druze vs. Maronites, Kurds participated in the Armenian genocide etc). Today, most of them live in fear, insecurity, and desperation and have no clear vision for tomorrow.

Minorities are not unified in their perceptions for their future in the region. So, if we want to figure out, how the new regional system would look like, we have to determine how minorities themselves see their future with respect to the scenarios and plans suggested by major powers.

Scenarios

Syria’s geostrategic importance makes it the strategic center of the Middle East. It is important to note that the future of Syria shall determine the future of the region; the Syrian conflict could spill over to Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan. On the contrary, the geographic position of Iraq (surrounded by powerful states, and by desert on the Syrian - Iraqi border) prevents the Iraqi dynamics from spreading to the neighborhood.

Therefore, what are the future Scenarios of Syria? and what is the fate of the minorities in each of these scenarios?

1- Partition_ Balkanization

This solution could get just 1 % in our survey. Lebanon defied previous attempts to partition during civil war (1975-1990). The Syrian regime and opposition both reject this solution. Iraq is still striving to unity, however hard to obtain.

In this Scenario, Middle Eastern countries will be Balkanized; i.e. separated and fragmented along sectarian lines. This would result in the creation of several weak landlocked religious micro-states.

Many maps were drawn for partition in the Middle East; we can mention the old Oded Yinon map, Bernard Lewis one, the US retired Colonel - Lieutenant Ralph Peters map which was published during the Bush administration call for a "New middle East", and the most recent map for the partition of the region was published by "New York Times" on September 28, 2013.

Partition calls to divide Syria into three, four or more states:

---

53 Oded Yinon plan was drawn up by Israel in 1982, he said: “Syria will fall apart, in accordance with its ethnic and religious structure, into several states such as in present day Lebanon, so that there will be a Shi’ite Alawi state along its coast, a Sunni state in the Aleppo area, another Sunni state in Damascus hostile to its northern neighbor, and the Druzes who will set up a state, maybe even in our Golan…” (Oded Yinon, “A strategy for Israel in the Nineteen Eighties”, Kivunum, translated by Israel Shahak, February 1982.)

54 the most prominent thinker who called for partition was Bernard Lewis in his famous article in Foreign Affairs “Rethinking the Middle East.” He advocates a policy for “Lebanonization” of the Middle East. The plan envisaged breaking Syria up into small fragments with the territories populated by the Druze and Alawites separated to become independent mini-states. Lewis wanted to establish new entities: a tiny state on the territory of Lebanon populated by Maronites, an independent Kurdistan comprising the Kurds-populated areas of Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran, an independent Shia state in Iraq…”; Bernard Lewis, Rethinking the Middle East, Fall 1992, available at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/1992-09-01/rethinking-middle-east


1. the Alawites' State that take the west of Syria along a corridor from the south through Damascus, Homs and Hama to the northern Mediterranean coast till it reach Alawites' province in Turkey.

2. The Sunni-dominated heartland can become a Sunni State that has links with the heartland of Iraq which will be a new Sunni state (Ironically, the borders of this Sunni state are exactly the same area dominated by ISIS).
   Some of the maps drew two Sunni states; one in Damascus and the second in Aleppo. Those two Sunni states will be hostile to each other; the Damascus state will have the moderate Sunni Islam, while the Aleppo state will contain the radicals.

3. Kurdish State: Kurds may have their own state that may extend to Kurdish parts of Turkey, and to Iraqi - Kurdistan.

4. Druze State can merge Druze of Syria with Druze of Lebanon, and - maybe- those living in Golan Heights.

Iraq will be partitioned to 3 states; the Shiite state in the south, the Sunni State in the heart, and a Kurdish State in the north.

Either it was in the form of partition or federalism, this can be regarded a very critical solution for minorities and for the whole region, for the following reasons:

1. the most dangerous aspect is the religious and sectarian factor in determining the borders of the states which may turn into sectarian battle lines. These new states will start protracted endless religious wars, especially between Sunni and Shia in the region.

2. The resources factor; some of the mini - states will get all the resources, and the rest will be left to starve. The Alawite state will have a substantial amount of Syria’s water, agriculture, oil and will be open to the Mediterranean. The Sunni majority will be deserted in a landlocked state, which leaves them without enough resources though having some oil.

3. Minorities will be forced to leave the ethnically and religiously heterogeneous regions, to live in their designated mini-states. For partition to be a reality; the new states should constitute sectarian homogeneous population and this will obviously lead to ethnic and religious cleansing in the region.

Either in the name of partition or federalism, this scenario will not be a road to peace in the Middle East. Iraq which adopted federalism in 2005 is still very far from peace. Except for Kurds, this scenario is catastrophic for most of the minorities in the region.

The partition Scenario is very hard to be obtained for it will present a threat to most of the major regional powers, so they will work against it.

Global Powers stances:

- Despite the Americans called for partition of Iraq, the Obama administration has called - together with the other powers- for a 'united Syria'. Russians are against partition; however, they have said that they may accept a "federal" solution, if it is the "Syrian people choice". Russians called for a federal - decentralized system in a
united Syrian state. Moreover, Russians fear that a huge radical Sunni state that includes the heart of Iraq and heart of Syria, may encourage North Caucasus' states for secession.

- **Regional powers positions:**

  **Turkey**, Iran and Saudi Arabia will fight against partition:

  **Turkey**: The partition of Syria and the establishment of a Kurdish state would threaten Turkey's national security, and will give an additional impetus to Turkey's Kurds aspirations to secession, noting that all the maps have called for merging Kurds of Syria, with Iraq and Turkey.

  **Saudi Arabia**: will not accept the division of Syria, because it is threatened by partition also. The "New York Times" map divided Saudi Arabia to five separate mini-states along sectarian and tribal lines.

  **Iran**: This option is even more dangerous for the Iranians than the fall of al-Assad in Syria, for many reasons:

  a. The separatist Kurds inside Iran may tempt to revolt and call for secession. It was the first found 'State of Republic of Kurdistan' in history in Mahabad in Iran in January 1946 and, although it survived for ten months, it greatly inspired Kurdish nationalists everywhere.

  b. Partition will interrupt the geographical contiguity between Iran, Syria and Lebanon, which affects their ability to support both Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Alawite state in Syria.

  c. More importantly, it prevents the initiation of the proposed natural gas pipeline running from the Iranian South Pars field towards Europe via Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

**2- Islamic Caliphate**

This Scenario happens in one case, i.e. a great victory for Islamists and Jihadists in the war, which is unlikely to happen.

*This is the worst Scenario for the whole region and for the minorities in the region.* Genocides shall be the absolute outcome. Islamic Caliphate laws authorize the use of terror and public brutality as a means of deterring sins, promoting righteousness, and for intimidating enemies. Under the caliphate, heretics, atheists and apostates, or those who have renounced Islam, are put to torture then death if they are men, however their women should be enslaved—mainly sexually.

Christians and Jews or the "People of the Book", by law, may be permitted to live as long as they are submissive to their Muslim masters, abide by Islamic Sharia, cover their heads, refrain from drinking and pay additional taxes for safety. Anyone found living outside the borders of Sharia law, should be lashed, tortured, jailed or killed. Shia and all other non - Sunni factions of Islam will be seen as apostates by the Jihadists, thus their absolute penalty is beheading.

**Global Powers' stances:**

Both USA and Russia will try to prevent the Islamic Caliphate state from emerging. They will not allow the establishment of the caliphate, i.e. it is a red line for both states.

**Regional powers' positions:**

**Iran** will fight against the establishment of a Sunni Caliphate for its consequences on the Shia in the whole region.

---

Saudi Arabia fears the jihadists’ demands of the overthrow of Saudi regime, both ISIS and al-Qaeda loathe the Saudi royal family and have carried out major attacks inside the kingdom — including a sustained, bloody campaign by al-Qaeda in the mid-2000s to bring down the Saudi regime, which took years to defeat.  

Turkey will try to take advantage of the Caliphate and try to inaugurate a Muslim Brotherhood Caliph. Then, Turkey may propagate itself as a bridge between the Islamic Caliphate State and the West (Europe).

3- Chaos / Anarchy

This happens if the Syrian war turned to an endless protracted one, or if the religious mini- states (after partition) started to clash.

Two versions for anarchy in the region have been recalled since 2005; both are catastrophic for the region and for the minorities living here for more than a two millennia.

1- First call for a "Creative Chaos" was by the former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

The phrase “constructive anarchy” with its variant the creative chaos means that bringing a society to a state of anarchy can have some of the most varied forms; different dynamics from one situation to another, temporary or long perspective interests and/or different results in terms of scope, impact and consequences. From this point of view, the essence of the “creative chaos” was synthesized by Condoleezza Rice who, in an article hosted by “Washington Post” in April, 2005 stated that “the anarchy that involves reforms and democratic transformations in the Middle East is a constructive one to the extent that it can create a much better and more acceptable situation than the one existing today in this part of the world”.

Michael Ledeen, a prominent member of the American Enterprise, conceptualized the theory of “constructive anarchy” or “constructive destruction”, in its political acceptance. He explained it in the “Global Change in the Middle East” project in 2003. “Destruction or positive deconstruction”, the author writes, “is our highest virtue (American policy) … It's time for us to once again export the democratic revolution” and among the first “beneficiaries” of this export are Iran, Iraq and Syria. The idea was resumed in a political forum of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) held in Washington, where Michael Ledeen argued: “The time of diplomacy has ended. Now it's time to create a free Iran, a free Syria and free Lebanon”.

2- Al Qaeda: "Overwhelming violent Anarchy" strategy

In a publication by ‘Abdullah bin Mohammed, entitled "Valuable Collection for the Strategic Memorandum Series", bin Muhammad sought to give instructions how could Al Qaeda benefit from the Arab Spring to conquer and rule the whole region.

The author called for causing an "overwhelming violent anarchy"; which "will cause us to see emigrations such as what happened in Palestine, famines such as what happened in Somalia and massacres such as what happened in the Balkans", predicting that "the international community will be unable to deal with this historic magnitude of anarchy. Moreover, it is going to fail to contain the effect of it on itself."

---


Dumitru CHICAN, "Constructive Anarchy" In The Context Of The New Middle East, Supplement Geostrategic Pulse, Issue No.147, Thursday 20 June 2013.


He is one of the most important Al-Qaeda thinkers and strategists.

Abdullah bin Mohamed, Strategic Memorandum, al-Ma’sada Media, 2011, p. 7
He adds, "Continuous anarchy and sectarian and civil wars will begin to take effect. The effects of the wars will begin to appear such as migrations, massacres and destruction. Here the Psyche of these segments of society, who are the greater majority, will be ready to welcome any power capable of providing security and stability".67

The fate of minorities in this scenario is catastrophic:

Very clearly, Bin Muhammad urges to expel minorities from the region, claiming that "...The criminal record of these minorities in conspiring against Muslims, especially during the colonial era, where they were the best facilitators for the colonization against us, is the greatest evidence of that".

He emphasizes that "...This requires of us, based on the principle of securing the heart of the state that we work at deporting the religious minorities of that region and make Sham (Levant) the second area that is forbidden to non-Muslims after the Arab Peninsula. If the question of removing the idolaters from the Arab Peninsula was a necessity imposed by the provisions of Sharia, then the deportation of idolaters from Sham is a necessity imposed by the political, military and cultural reality. The great powers drew up and legislated this reality, whereby they made these minorities the key to entering the area and interfering with internal affairs on the pretext of protecting minorities, human rights and public freedoms"68.

This confirms that the Islamists will exploit chaos to expel minorities, force them to emigrate, which will - for sure-happen in a violent way; i.e. genocides.

Global and regional powers may not be able to control chaos. Everyone knows it's very harmful; however the ability to contain it or prevent the spill from one state to another is hard to obtain. And most of all, it may spread to Europe through the huge influx of refugees and the transnational waves of terrorism.

4- Power - Sharing System

Consociationalism as a power - sharing solution is one of the discussed solutions for the future of Syria, and it has been central in the leaked Syrian constitution draft on May 24, 2016.

It has been accepted just by 3% of the respondents. This type of solution can be one of the acceptable choices for protecting minorities in the Levant, despite its shortcomings and un-favorability among people, based on the Lebanese example and experiences.

Consociationalism is the state where the major divisions in a country ethnic, religious, or linguistic, are represented in the political system. It was academically discussed by the political scientist Arend Lijphart; who identified four key characteristics of consociational democracies69:

1- Grand coalition between the elites, as they recognize the dangers of non-cooperation.
2- Mutual veto which gives a balance of power between diverse communities.
3- Proportionality in representation in government, administration, police and in other national and civic segments of society.
4- Segmental autonomy which allows the application of different culturally-based community laws.

A confessional type of Consociationalism was applied in Lebanon, where the constitution requires distributing political, institutional and administrative powers equally between Christians and Muslims, and proportionally among religious sects. This system protects minorities’ rights and existence; however, critics of this type point out that such a system may actually deepen conflicts and sectarianism, decrease the sense of loyalty to the State, and prevent the development of national identity and citizenship. As it has been experienced in Lebanon, this system is unjust, where some of the

67 Ibid, p.8
68 Ibid, pp.43-44.
posts are reserved for certain sects, thus persons are mainly chosen to public offices based on their religious identity not on their merit and qualifications.

This solution was introduced in the leaked Russian Draft for a new Syrian constitution, which was denied by both Russians and Assad\textsuperscript{70}. Both Assad regime and opposition declared that any constitution shall be written by Syrians themselves.

5- Democratic - Civil States

This can be the best solution for all citizens in the region and for Syria for sure. Despite the fact the civil citizenship has been fractured by sectarian wars, this solution can be the best way to preserve the states, national identities and the rights of both majority and minorities in the Arab Levant.

Either it was called a secular system, or a civil state which is a more accepted term by Muslims, a democratic - civil State that abide by Rule of Law and apply good governance can lead to the development of the Arab Levant states, increase justice, reduce repression, and maintain fairness for all sects and confessions in the societies.

During their negotiations in Geneva (April 2016); Syrian regime and its allies called for a secular state, while the Saudi - Turkish backed opposition called for a democratic non- sectarian state.

This solution has been supported - publicly, at least- by USA, Russia and Iran in Vienna declaration, and UNSC resolution 2254. Turkish government fears that the re- creation of a "secular" state in Syria means that the AKP will be last Islamist party that governs Turkey.

Conclusion

A secular (or civil) political system in Syria and stability in Lebanon, will maintain the minorities presence in the Middle East. Without these conditions, minorities will face dull future in the region.

Christian Minorities diminished in Palestine and their presence in Jordan is relatively stable. The instability, terrorism and sectarianism in Iraq may not encourage minorities to return even after the liberation of Ninewa and the other Northern provinces. Balance of power in Lebanon prevents the exodus of minorities. Security and stability are all what is needed to protect Lebanese minorities and other minorities fleeing from the other neighboring countries and residing in Lebanon.

A negotiated settlement in Syria that lead to a secular or a civil State will help the minorities to rebuild their lives again in that country. Any other solution may have bad consequences on their existence, rights and dignity.

Selected Bibliography


Bin Mohamed Abdullah, Strategic Memorandum, al-Ma'sada Media, 2011.


Boztemur Recep, Historical Foundations of Multiculturalism in the Ottoman Empire, in "Challenges of Multiculturalism in Eastern and Central Europe", 2004.


CHICAN Dumitru, “Constructive Anarchy” In The Context Of The New Middle East, Supplement Geostrategic Pulse, Issue No.147, Thursday 20 June 2013.


Lamani Mukhtar, Minorities in Iraq: The Other Victims, CIGI Special Report, 2009.

Lewis Bernard, Rethinking the Middle East, Fall 1992, available at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/1992-09-01/rethinking-middle-east


Puttick Miriam, From Crisis to Catastrophe: The Situation of Minorities in Iraq, MRG and Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, London, October 2014.


