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Syria's Neighbors Want Assad to Step Down, But No Appetite for Aid to Rebels

Many Fear Extremists Could Take Control of Syria

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

Bruce Stokes, Director, Global Economic Program

Russ Oates, Communications Manager

202.419.4372

www.pewresearch.org

About the Report

This report assesses the views of Syria's neighbors about the ongoing turmoil in that country, including their fear that extremist groups may take control of Syria, support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad stepping down and opposition to both Western and Arab aid to anti-government forces in Syria. It is based on 7,001 face-to-face interviews with adults 18 and older, between April 10, 2014, and May 16, 2014 in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Tunisia and Turkey. For more details, see survey methods and topline results.

The report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

Bruce Stokes, *Director, Global Economic Program*

Richard Wike, *Director, Global Attitudes Research*

James Bell, *Director, International Survey Research*

Danielle Cuddington, *Research Assistant*

Kat Devlin, *Research Assistant*

Jacob Poushter, *Research Associate*

Katie Simmons, *Senior Researcher*

Jill Carle, *Research Associate*

Claudia Deane, *Director, Research Practice*

Bruce Drake, *Senior Editor*

Steve Schwarzzer, *Visiting Research Methodologist*

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Andrew Kohut, *Founding Director*

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Syria's Neighbors Want Assad to Step Down, But No Appetite for Aid to Rebels

Many Fear Extremists Could Take Control of Syria

After three years of civil war, Syria's neighbors fear that al Qaeda or other extremist groups could take control of that war-torn land, according to a new survey by the Pew Research Center. Regional publics widely disapprove of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and they want him to step down. Nevertheless, there is mounting opposition in the Middle East to the West or Arab nations supplying arms and military supplies to anti-government groups in Syria.

Strong majorities in most of Syria's neighboring countries, especially in Lebanon and Israel, fear an extremist takeover in Damascus.¹ The least concern is in Turkey, despite a number of terrorist incidents on the Turkish-Syrian border.

Half or more of the publics in the nations surveyed also voice unfavorable views of Assad and want him out of office, including strong majorities in Egypt and Jordan.

Yet half or more of the same publics also oppose outsiders getting involved in the conflict, with the greatest resistance being toward Western aid. Notably, Jordanians, who in 2013 backed foreign arms for the rebels, are now against both Western and Arab assistance to the insurgents.

These are some of the findings of a Pew Research Center survey of 7,001 people in seven Middle Eastern nations conducted April 10 to May 16, 2014.

Few Want to Aid Syrian Rebels Despite Regional Desire for Assad to Go

	Assad should step down	Oppose Western military aid	Oppose Arab military aid
	%	%	%
Egypt	91	67	60
Jordan	86	66	52
Palest. ter.	72	68	61
West Bank	68	65	60
Gaza Strip	79	74	63
Turkey	70	73	73
Tunisia	65	77	73
Israel	64	50	51
Jewish	66	44	46
Arab	53	82	79
Lebanon	52	78	56
Sunni	81	67	36
Christian	62	74	48
Shia	7	93	89

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q112, Q114 & Q115.

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¹ The survey was conducted prior to the recent takeover of Mosul and other areas of Iraq by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Fear of Extremism

Concern that extremist groups could take control of Syria is pervasive. Nearly seven-in-ten or more Egyptians (69%), Jordanians (76%), Israelis (82%) and Lebanese (86%) are *somewhat* or *very* concerned. Fully 58% of Lebanese and roughly four-in-ten Tunisians (42%), Jordanians (41%) and Israelis (41%) are very concerned.

In Lebanon, Christians are the most worried about extremism next door. Roughly two-thirds of Lebanese Christians (65%) but only about half of Sunnis (51%) and Shias (50%) are *very* concerned about al Qaeda or similar groups gaining control in Syria.

The Lebanese are more concerned about the potential for sectarian strife closer to home. Nine-in-ten Christians (93%) and Shias (90%) and more than eight-in-ten Sunnis (85%) voice concern that tensions between Sunnis and Shias in Lebanon are a *very* big problem in their country.

In Israel, as might be expected, Jews are somewhat more worried about extremists in Syria than are Arabs (84% to 75%). Nevertheless, the three-in-four Israeli Arabs who voice concern about an al Qaeda-type takeover in Syria point to a greater unease than that expressed by Turks, Palestinians or Egyptians.

Widespread Concern Extremists Will Prevail in Syria

— *al Qaeda or other extremist groups could take control of Syria*

	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Not too concerned	Not at all concerned	Don't know
	%	%	%	%	%
Lebanon	58	28	7	5	2
Christian	65	23	6	3	2
Sunnis	51	30	9	8	2
Shias	50	37	6	6	2
Tunisia	42	15	7	28	7
Israel	41	41	8	7	3
Jewish	42	42	7	7	2
Arab	39	36	10	8	7
Jordan	41	35	18	5	1
Egypt	37	32	21	8	2
Palest. ter.	34	28	15	11	12
Gaza Strip	46	29	14	5	6
West Bank	27	27	15	15	16
Turkey	21	28	22	13	17

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey, Q115b.

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Opposition to Aiding Syrian Rebels

In last year's survey, there was little public support for aid to anti-government forces battling the Damascus regime, and there is even less backing in 2014.

More than seven-in-ten Lebanese (78%), Tunisians (77%) and Turks (73%) are against Western nations sending arms and military supplies to the insurgents. And about two-thirds of Palestinians (68%), Egyptians (67%) and Jordanians (66%) agree.

Even half of Israelis do not want the West to get involved. But these national survey findings mask ethnic and generational divides within

Israeli society. Roughly eight-in-ten Israeli Arabs oppose aid to the rebels, but only 44% of Israeli Jews are against Western help. And in terms of the generation gap, more than half (53%) of Israelis 50 years of age and older oppose Western assistance to anti-government groups in Syria, compared with 43% of Israelis age 18 to 29.

There is only slightly less regional opposition to Arab nations aiding the anti-government forces. Nearly three-quarters of the public in Turkey (73%) and in Tunisia (73%) disagree with such help, as do roughly six-in-ten in the Palestinian territories (61%) and Egypt (60%). About half or more in Lebanon (56%), Jordan (52%) and Israel (51%) also are against such aid.

Opposition to supplying the Syrian insurgents with arms and supplies is on the rise throughout the region. Jordanian opposition to both the West and other Arab states providing military assistance is up 22 percentage points since 2013. Tunisian disapproval of Arab aid is up 18 points and of

Mounting Regional Opposition to Aiding Syrian Rebels

Oppose Western/Arab countries sending arms and military supplies to anti-government groups in Syria

	Oppose Western aid			Oppose Arab aid		
	2013	2014	Change	2013	2014	Change
	%	%		%	%	
Jordan	44	66	+22	30	52	+22
Tunisia	60	77	+17	55	73	+18
Egypt	59	67	+8	57	60	+3
Turkey	68	73	+5	66	73	+7
Palest. ter.	63	68	+5	53	61	+8
Gaza Strip	62	74	+12	50	63	+13
West Bank	64	65	+1	55	60	+5
Lebanon	80	78	-2	60	56	-4
Sunni	66	67	+1	35	36	+1
Christian	78	74	-4	56	48	-8
Shia	98	93	-5	97	89	-8
Israel	--	50	--	--	51	--
Arab	--	82	--	--	79	--
Jewish	--	44	--	--	46	--

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey, Q114 & Q115.

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Western aid is up 17 points.

Assisting the Syrian opposition is a particularly divisive issue in Lebanon, splitting the public along sectarian lines. Fully 89% of Lebanese Shias are against other Arab nations sending arms and military supplies to the rebels (many of whom are Sunni). Over half of Lebanese Sunnis (55%) back aid to the insurgents. Christians are divided on such assistance.

Lebanese Shias (93%), Christians (74%) and Sunnis (67%) oppose Western nations helping anti-government groups. But the 26 percentage point Shia-Sunni difference on this issue highlights the deep sectarian differences over the Syrian civil war.

Assad Widely Opposed

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has little support in the region. Strong majorities in all neighboring countries have an unfavorable opinion of him. In most countries such sentiment is fairly intense and growing. Fully 78% of Jordanians say they have a *very* unfavorable attitude toward Assad, a rise of 11 percentage points since 2012. Similarly, 71% of Turks hold a very unfavorable view of the Syrian president, an increase of 17 percentage points in negative sentiment since 2012. And nearly two-thirds of Egyptians (66%) see Assad in a very negative light, up 18 points in the last three years. Only in Tunisia has public sentiment toward Assad mellowed a bit.

Strong majorities in most of Syria's neighboring countries would also prefer Assad to step down, including roughly nine-in-ten Egyptians and more than eight-in-ten Jordanians. About seven-in-ten Palestinians (72%) and Turks (70%) also want Assad to leave. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of Tunisians would like to see Assad go, but that is down from 88% who held that view in 2012. Notably, more than half of Israeli Arabs (53%) voice a desire for Assad to

Assad: Increasingly Out of Favor with Neighbors

Very unfavorable opinion of Bashar al-Assad

	2012	2013	2014	12-14 Change
	%	%	%	
Egypt	48	61	66	+18
Turkey	54	48	71	+17
Jordan	67	68	78	+11
Lebanon	46	50	50	+4
<i>Christian</i>	50	55	62	+12
<i>Shia</i>	2	8	11	+9
<i>Sunni</i>	77	75	74	-3
Tunisia	76	75	61	-15
Palest. ter.	--	66	65	--
<i>West Bank</i>	--	60	58	--
<i>Gaza Strip</i>	--	77	76	--
Israel	--	64	61	--
<i>Arab</i>	--	31	30	--
<i>Jewish</i>	--	70	67	--

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q45b.

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step down.

Only in Lebanon, where Syrian refugees now make up almost a quarter of Lebanon's population, is the public divided over Assad. While half have a *very unfavorable* view of the Syrian leader, three-in-ten hold a *very favorable* opinion. These overall numbers reflect a deep sectarian division of opinion within Lebanese society about the Syrian leader. Almost three-quarters (74%) of the Sunni population voice a very negative view of Assad, as do 62% of the Christian community. But 76% of Shias have a very favorable opinion of the Syrian leader, who is a member of the Alawite sect of Shia Islam. Similarly, 81% of Lebanese Sunnis want Assad to step down, while 92% of Shias would prefer for him to stay.

People Throughout the Region Want Assad to Step Down

Should Syrian President Bashar al-Assad step down?

	Yes, should step down	No, should not step down	Don't know
	%	%	%
Egypt	91	7	2
Jordan	86	5	9
Palest. ter.	72	18	10
<i>West Bank</i>	68	20	13
<i>Gaza Strip</i>	79	17	4
Turkey	70	20	10
Tunisia	65	23	11
Israel	64	26	10
<i>Jewish</i>	66	24	9
<i>Arab</i>	53	35	12
Lebanon	52	44	5
<i>Sunni</i>	81	14	6
<i>Christian</i>	62	32	6
<i>Shia</i>	7	92	1

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q112.

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Methods in Detail

About the 2014 Spring Pew Global Attitudes Survey

Results for the survey are based on face-to-face interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. Survey results are based on national samples. For further details on sample designs, see below.

The descriptions below show the margin of sampling error based on all interviews conducted in that country. For results based on the full sample in a given country, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus the margin of error. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Country: **Egypt**
 Sample design: Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by governorates and urbanity
 Mode: Face-to-face adults 18 plus
 Languages: Arabic
 Fieldwork dates: April 10 – April 29, 2014
 Sample size: 1,000
 Margin of Error: ± 4.3 percentage points
 Representative: Adult population (excluding frontier governorates, or about 2% of the population)

Country: **Israel**
 Sample design: Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by district, urbanity, and socioeconomic status, with an oversample of Arabs
 Mode: Face-to-face adults 18 plus
 Languages: Hebrew, Arabic
 Fieldwork dates: April 24 – May 11, 2014
 Sample size: 1,000 (597 Jews, 388 Arabs, 15 others)
 Margin of Error: ± 4.3 percentage points
 Representative: Adult population (The data were weighted to reflect the actual distribution of Jews, Arabs and others in Israel.)

Country:	Jordan
Sample design:	Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by governorate and urbanity
Mode:	Face-to-face adults 18 plus
Languages:	Arabic
Fieldwork dates:	April 11 – April 29, 2014
Sample size:	1,000
Margin of Error:	±4.5 percentage points
Representative:	Adult population
Country:	Lebanon
Sample design:	Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by region and urbanity
Mode:	Face-to-face adults 18 plus
Languages:	Arabic
Fieldwork dates:	April 11 – May 2, 2014
Sample size:	1,000
Margin of Error:	±4.1 percentage points
Representative:	Adult population (excluding a small area in Beirut controlled by a militia group and a few villages in the south of Lebanon, which border Israel and are inaccessible to outsiders, or about 2% of the population)
Country:	Palestinian territories
Sample design:	Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by region and urban/rural/refugee camp population
Mode:	Face-to-face adults 18 plus
Languages:	Arabic
Fieldwork dates:	April 15 – April 22, 2014
Sample size:	1,000
Margin of Error:	±4.4 percentage points
Representative:	Adult population (excluding Bedouins who regularly change residence and some communities near Israeli settlements where military restrictions make access difficult, or roughly 5% of the population)

Country: **Tunisia**
Sample design: Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by governorate and urbanity
Mode: Face-to-face adults 18 plus
Languages: Tunisian Arabic
Fieldwork dates: April 19 – May 9, 2014
Sample size: 1,000
Margin of Error: ±4.0 percentage points
Representative: Adult population

Country: **Turkey**
Sample design: Multi-stage cluster sample stratified by region, urbanity and settlement size
Mode: Face-to-face adults 18 plus
Languages: Turkish
Fieldwork dates: April 11 – May 16, 2014
Sample size: 1,001
Margin of Error: ±4.5 percentage points
Representative: Adult population

Topline Results

**Pew Research Center
Spring 2014 survey
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Methodological notes:

- Survey results are based on national samples. For further details on sample designs, see Survey Methods section.
- Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%. The topline “total” columns show 100%, because they are based on unrounded numbers.
- Not all questions included in the Spring 2014 survey are presented in this topline. Omitted questions have either been previously released or will be released in future reports.

		Q21o Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: o. tensions between Sunnis and Shia				
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	Total
Lebanon	Spring, 2014	90	10	0	0	100

		Q45b Now I'd like to ask your views about some additional political leaders. Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of: b. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad					
		Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable	DK/Refused	Total
Turkey	Spring, 2014	4	7	11	71	7	100
	Spring, 2013	3	5	24	48	20	100
	Spring, 2012	2	8	19	54	16	100
Egypt	Spring, 2014	1	2	25	66	6	100
	Spring, 2013	3	8	20	61	8	100
	Spring, 2012	5	6	36	48	5	100
Jordan	Spring, 2014	1	2	10	78	9	100
	Spring, 2013	3	5	22	68	2	100
	Spring, 2012	2	6	23	67	2	100
Lebanon	Spring, 2014	30	12	8	50	1	100
	Spring, 2013	29	11	9	50	1	100
	Spring, 2012	28	14	13	46	0	100
Palest. ter.	Spring, 2014	4	8	18	65	7	100
	Spring, 2013	1	7	21	66	4	100
Tunisia	Spring, 2014	9	9	10	61	10	100
	Spring, 2013	4	5	6	75	10	100
	Spring, 2012	3	5	8	76	9	100
Israel	Spring, 2014	2	5	31	61	1	100
	Spring, 2013	1	6	27	64	2	100

		Q112 Do you think Syrian President Bashar al-Assad should step down or not?			
		Yes, should step down	No, should not step ...	DK/Refused	Total
Turkey	Spring, 2014	70	20	10	100
	Spring, 2012	67	14	19	100
Egypt	Spring, 2014	91	7	2	100
	Spring, 2012	89	10	1	100
Jordan	Spring, 2014	86	5	9	100
	Spring, 2012	89	9	2	100
Lebanon	Spring, 2014	52	44	5	100
	Spring, 2012	53	44	2	100
Palest. ter.	Spring, 2014	72	18	10	100
Tunisia	Spring, 2014	65	23	11	100
	Spring, 2012	88	7	5	100
Israel	Spring, 2014	64	26	10	100

		Q114 Do you support or oppose Western countries sending arms and military supplies to anti-government groups in Syria?			
		Support	Oppose	DK/Refused	Total
Turkey	Spring, 2014	18	73	9	100
	Spring, 2013	22	68	10	100
Egypt	Spring, 2014	27	67	6	100
	Spring, 2013	33	59	7	100
Jordan	Spring, 2014	28	66	5	100
	Spring, 2013	53	44	3	100
Lebanon	Spring, 2014	19	78	3	100
	Spring, 2013	18	80	2	100
Palest. ter.	Spring, 2014	20	68	12	100
	Spring, 2013	31	63	6	100
Tunisia	Spring, 2014	15	77	8	100
	Spring, 2013	32	60	9	100
Israel	Spring, 2014	45	50	6	100

		Q115 Do you support or oppose Arab countries sending arms and military supplies to anti-government groups in Syria?			
		Support	Oppose	DK/Refused	Total
Turkey	Spring, 2014	17	73	10	100
	Spring, 2013	24	66	10	100
Egypt	Spring, 2014	35	60	5	100
	Spring, 2013	38	57	5	100
Jordan	Spring, 2014	39	52	9	100
	Spring, 2013	65	30	5	100
Lebanon	Spring, 2014	37	56	7	100
	Spring, 2013	37	60	4	100
Palest. ter.	Spring, 2014	27	61	12	100
	Spring, 2013	42	53	6	100
Tunisia	Spring, 2014	19	73	8	100
	Spring, 2013	37	55	9	100
Israel	Spring, 2014	39	51	10	100

		Q115b How concerned are you, if at all, that al Qaeda or other extremist groups could take control of Syria?					
		Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Not too concerned	Not at all concerned	DK/Refused	Total
Turkey	Spring, 2014	21	28	22	13	17	100
Egypt	Spring, 2014	37	32	21	8	2	100
Jordan	Spring, 2014	41	35	18	5	1	100
Lebanon	Spring, 2014	58	28	7	5	2	100
Palest. ter.	Spring, 2014	34	28	15	11	12	100
Tunisia	Spring, 2014	42	15	7	28	7	100
Israel	Spring, 2014	41	41	8	7	3	100