

## THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD PREPARES FOR A COMEBACK IN SYRIA

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The Muslim Brotherhood is the most powerful group in Syria's exiled political opposition network. It is also emerging as a significant presence in rebel-held territory in northern Syria, where it is rebuilding its grassroots movement after thirty years in exile. But the Brotherhood's success in the next stage of the Syrian revolution depends on its ability to address several significant challenges.

### Key Themes

- The Brotherhood is Syria's best organized opposition group. Its political strategy rests on building a network of alliances with various ideological and religious forces, even if they seem inconsistent.
- It can count on a network of committed activists inside and outside the country and on powerful fundraising capacities.
- The Brotherhood is dominated by an old guard. But a younger generation of Brothers is dynamic, innovative, more liberal, and increasingly impatient to exercise more influence. The youth are poised to play a powerful role in the Brotherhood's reconstruction efforts.
- Many Syrians mistrust the Brotherhood because of the years it spent in exile and its deeply entrenched culture of secrecy and hierarchical rigidity.
- As a Sunni organization, the Brotherhood is in the majority, but the country's ethnic and religious minorities are a significant force, making up 30 percent of the population.
- Non-Sunni communities inside Syria are particularly wary of a Muslim Brotherhood comeback despite the group's self-described centrist message.

### Challenges Ahead

**Winning the hearts and minds of Syrian society.** The Brotherhood will have to embrace greater transparency and address the mistakes it has made if it hopes to solidify its position.

**Attracting and engaging the younger generation.** To avoid losing relevance, the organization needs to provide opportunities for younger conservative politicians. The youth offer the Brotherhood a golden opportunity to renew its membership pool, galvanize its troops, and refresh its image.

**Building local ties with the country's *ulama*—especially in Damascus.** The endorsement of the *ulama*, Syria's many sheikhs and religious leaders, could boost the Islamist organization's legitimacy and provide it with an already constituted social base wherever it crucially lacks one.

**Acting as a counterweight to Syria's jihadists.** The Brotherhood will be the center of gravity of any broad Islamist coalition, and its rising profile inside the country is shifting the Islamic spectrum back to the center. The organization could be the ideological, political, and military platform that confronts radical jihadist groups.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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