

RECONSTRUCTING THE HERITAGE OF ALEPPO

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY FINDINGS

This project was funded by the Australian Research Council (DP200101468).

This project was conducted by researchers from the Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University and the College of Arts and Sciences, the University of Pennsylvania in partnership with the Arab Barometer, Princeton University and the Beirut-based Statistics Lebanon.

Published by Deakin University

© 2024 Deakin University and the University of Pennsylvania

ISBN: 978-0-7300-0245-1

Suggested citation: Isakhan, B. & Meskell, L. (2024). Reconstructing the Heritage of Aleppo: Public Opinion Survey Findings. Melbourne: Deakin University.

Design and layout by Eleanor Childs.

Arabic Translation by Shatha Bataineh.

All photos supplied by iStock and Shutterstock are covered by Standard and Editorial license agreements and all photos supplied by Unsplash are for free use. Credits for each photo are provided for the photographer and platform.

Front Cover: Aerial view of Aleppo after the Syrian Civil War (Ziquan Ying/iStock). Back Cover: The Syrian flag flying at the Citadel of Aleppo, marked by bullet holes (Joel Carillet/iStock).

CONTACT

Prof. Benjamin Isakhan benjamin.isakhan@deakin.edu.au

Table of Contents

CONTENTS

03.	Executive Summary
05.	Background
09.	Project Summary
10.	Methodology
11.	Key Demographics
14.	Survey Findings
25.	Recommendations
30.	Conclusion
33.	Endnotes
34.	References
35.	Acknowledgments

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In addition to the mass human suffering it has unleashed, Syria's brutal civil war has also seen the destruction of many significant heritage sites across the country, including major cities like Aleppo. In response, the international community has undertaken a number of large-scale projects to reconstruct heritage sites in Aleppo with the idea that doing so will help support sustainable development and social cohesion.

However, foreign actors often lack understanding of how local populations engage with heritage or experience heritage destruction, as well as whether they see rebuilding sites as a priority and to what extent external reconstruction efforts are supported.

This report summarises the survey responses of 1600 Aleppo residents who were asked about their attitudes towards heritage.

The results indicate that although Aleppines view their rich heritage as a source of pride, they have concerns about externally-led reconstruction efforts across the city. The survey data thus suggests four key recommendations for current and future heritage projects in Aleppo being undertaken by foreign actors.

1) HERITAGE RECONSTRUCTION IS NOT THE MAIN PRIORITY

Heritage reconstruction should not be privileged over more urgent priorities including security, development, unemployment, and peace.

2) DON'T DISMISS LOCAL AND/OR RELIGIOUS HERITAGE SITES

Local religious sites should take precedence over grandiose reconstruction projects on iconic sites that are rarely visited and lack the same level of significance for communities.

3) LESS 'AUTHENTICITY' AND MORE MODERN FACILITIES

All major reconstruction works should aim to transform sites into new and more modern facilities that would benefit communities.

4) GRANT SYRIANS AGENCY OVER THE FUTURE OF THEIR HERITAGE

Local agency should be guaranteed by foreign actors to ensure that communities have control over decisions regarding the future of their heritage.

BACKGROUND

In July 2012, Aleppo became embroiled in civil war. Over the next four years, the city was the site of intensely violent clashes between Islamists, rebel forces, and the regime.

By 2016, both the people of Aleppo and the city itself had endured devastation on an immense scale. In addition to hundreds of thousands of citizens displaced, a still unknown number of civilians were injured and killed as a result of airstrikes, explosions, chemical weapons, community violence, urban warfare, and executions.

The assaults on Aleppo also severely impacted its unique and treasured cultural heritage. As the fighting worsened and the security situation deteriorated, historic sites were met with waves of destruction that left many in ruins. These included World Heritage sites, such as the Old City of Aleppo, which was home to numerous notable mosques, churches, and souqs.

Within the Old City alone, missile strikes, fires, and bombardments devastated the Citadel entrance, the minaret of the Great Umayyad Mosque, artefacts and archives held at the National Museum, and hundreds of stalls in the Souq al-Madina (UNESCO, 2012). Approximately 60% of the Old City was critically damaged and an estimated 30% was destroyed entirely (UNESCO, 2017).

The catastrophic state of Aleppo and its rich heritage prompted several foreign states, INGOs, and multilateral agencies to embark on heritage preservation and reconstruction initiatives throughout the city.

Although these endeavours garnered widespread international support, the complex political and security environment inside Syria has restricted access to sites, impeding progress on reconstruction.

UNESCO's 3-year 'Emergency Safeguarding of Syrian Cultural Heritage' project remains amongst the most prominent undertakings.



Aleppo's Souq al-Madina before it was ravaged by fire (Rosen Ivanov Iliev/Shutterstock, November 2007)

Commencing in 2014 and based out of Beirut, the project sought to monitor the status of heritage in Syria, raise awareness of its value, and deliver training to build the capacity of Syrian heritage professionals in documenting the damage done to sites (UNESCO, 2014).

UNESCO has received substantial funding from the EU, the governments of Austria and Bahrain, the regional government of Flanders (Belgium), and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Although UNESCO was able to generate a comprehensive assessment of heritage destruction in Aleppo in 2018, ongoing barriers have prevented the organisation from overseeing any significant heritage reconstruction initiatives in the city.

Other agencies, including the UN Development Programme (UNDP), have therefore begun rebuilding heritage sites under the umbrella of post-conflict development and economic recovery.

Four souqs (roughly 150-200 market stores) in Aleppo's Old City and the National Museum of Aleppo have been functionally repaired by the UNDP, with funding provided by the Government of Japan and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (UNDP, 2019a; 2019b).

Other notable foreign-led efforts include:

- the Aga Khan Trust for Culture's (AKTC) partial rebuilding and rehabilitation of the fire-damaged Souq al-Madina (enabling over 400 shops and stalls to resume trading);
- European-backed projects to restore historic churches in the Aleppo governorate, implemented by the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH) (ALIPH, n.d.)
- the American Society of Overseas Research's (ASOR) documentation of heritage destruction, funded by the US Department of State, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the World Monuments Fund (WMF) (US, 2014);
- training Syrian refugees in traditional stonemasonry skills, funded by the United Kingdom's (UK) Cultural Protection Fund (British Council, n.d.);
- the 'Syrian Heritage Archive Project' (SHAP), which developed a heritage registry for use across future reconstruction initiatives, funded by the German Foreign Office and the Gerda Henkel Stiftung;
- several projects funded by the Syrian Assad government and its key allies (such as Russia), including multiple restoration efforts inside the Old City and rehabilitating the damaged Great Umayyad Mosque (DGAM, 2021).

However, there is still very limited information on how Aleppines perceive the above undertakings. This means that the objectives of foreign experts are taking precedence over local needs and grievances in crucial decisions on the future of Aleppo's unique and rich heritage.

This project therefore sought to measure the extent to which local public opinion on heritage aligns with the significant projects undertaken by various actors to reconstruct the heritage of Aleppo.



PROJECT SUMMARY

This project captured local public opinion in the Syrian city of Aleppo. Aleppines were asked about their views on heritage, its destruction, and its reconstruction to examine how this aligned or conflicted with heritage projects being undertaken by multilateral agencies, INGOs, and state governments.

By surveying Aleppo residents, the project intended to determine: how individuals value and engage with their heritage, the ways in which they experience its destruction, their views on reconstruction projects, and the extent to which they support foreign-led restoration works.

The authors designed the survey in collaboration with scholars from the Arab Barometer. The survey was conducted in Arabic and administered via telephone by Statistics Lebanon, based in Beirut.

The survey took place in 2022, beginning on the 14th of April and concluding on the 25th of May, with a total of 1600 respondents.

It was designed to capture a cross-section of Aleppo's adult population, including all citizens over 18 years of age who were living in the city at the time that the survey was being conducted.

To respect the privacy and protect the safety of participants, they remain anonymous and non-identifiable. The survey was conducted and administered in accordance with the ethical standards of the Deakin University Research Ethics Committee, Australia.

Although the survey was designed to obtain responses from a large number of diverse participants hailing from Aleppo, the authors do not claim that the data collected equates to a generalisable or singular 'public opinion' that can be attributed to the entire cross-section of Aleppo's demographics.

METHODOLOGY

The survey entailed 60 different questions across six interrelated themes:

PART I: HERITAGE ENGAGEMENT (10 QUESTIONS)

Examining how respondents engage with their heritage, including how often they visited sites and how highly they valued different kinds of sites across varying locations.

PART II: HERITAGE DESTRUCTION (10 QUESTIONS)

Examining how respondents reacted to the destruction of heritage sites, including how their reactions to destruction varied across different kinds of sites.

PART III: HERITAGE RECONSTRUCTION (10 QUESTIONS)

Examining how respondents view the various heritage reconstruction projects across Aleppo, including how such efforts are perceived in the context of broader humanitarian needs and how initiatives align with the type of reconstruction preferred by locals.

PART IV: STATE ACTORS (5 QUESTIONS)

Assessing how respondents perceive the role played by the Syrian government in heritage protection and reconstruction, including whether they would like to see the Syrian government responsible for managing the ongoing rehabilitation of heritage sites in Aleppo.

PART V: INTERNATIONAL ACTORS (7 QUESTIONS)

Assessing how respondents perceive the role played by international actors in heritage protection and reconstruction, including who they would most like to see responsible for managing the ongoing rehabilitation of heritage sites in Aleppo.

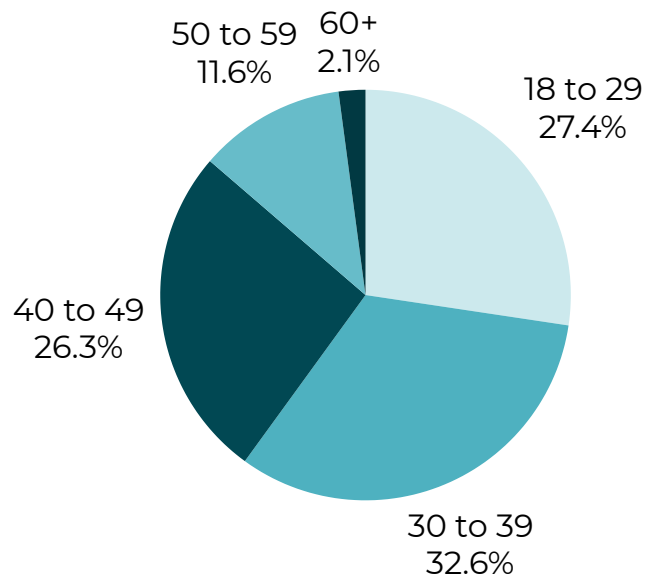
PART VI: DEMOGRAPHICS (16 QUESTIONS)

Obtaining key demographic data about the respondents.

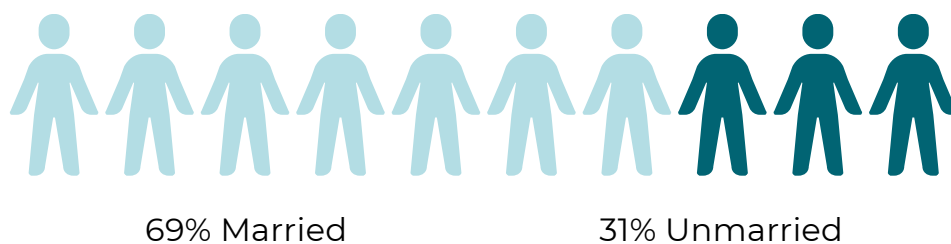
KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

The responses to Part VI revealed the key demographics of 1600 Aleppo residents surveyed. [1]

AGE



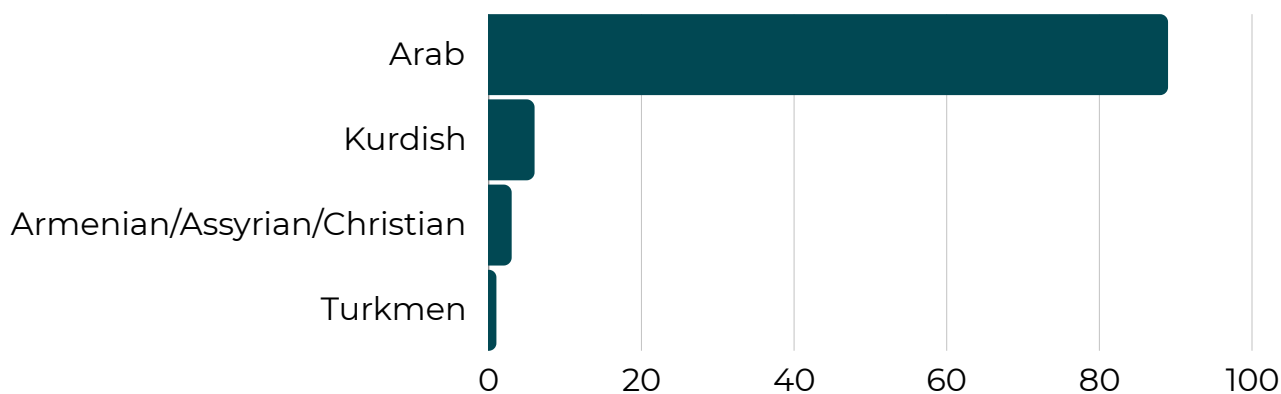
MARITAL STATUS



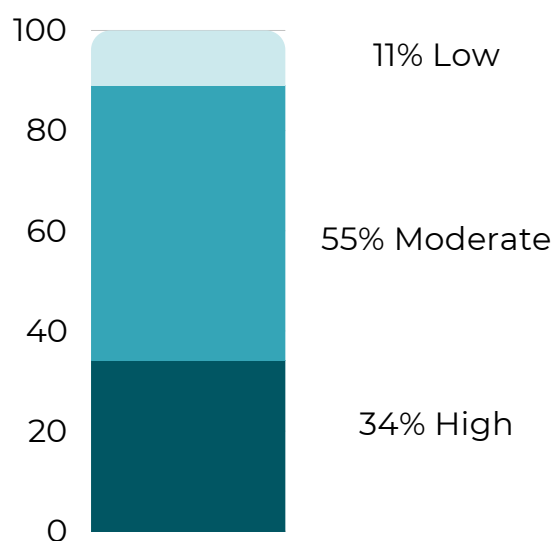
GENDER



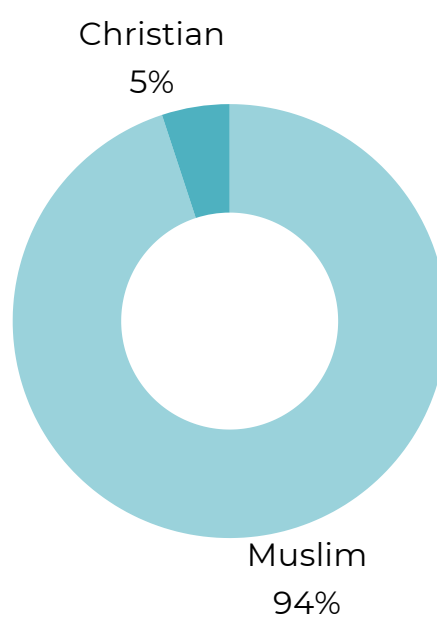
ETHNIC IDENTITY



LEVEL OF RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT



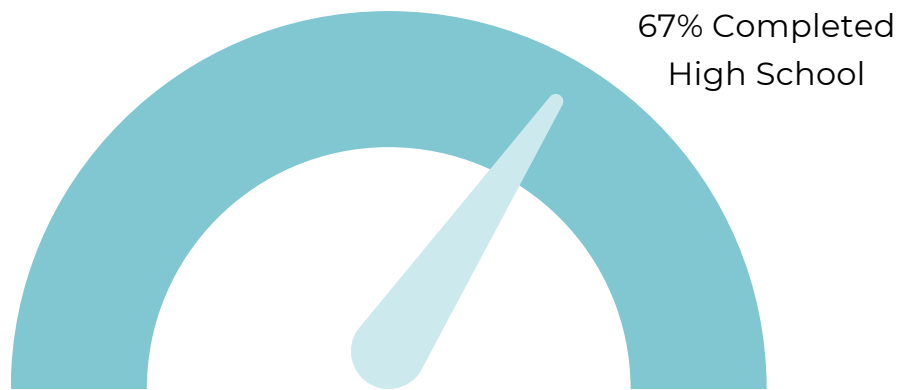
RELIGIOUS IDENTITY



LEVEL OF RELIGIOUS ADHERENCE

91% Close Adherence to Religious Practices and/or Principles

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION



EMPLOYMENT STATUS

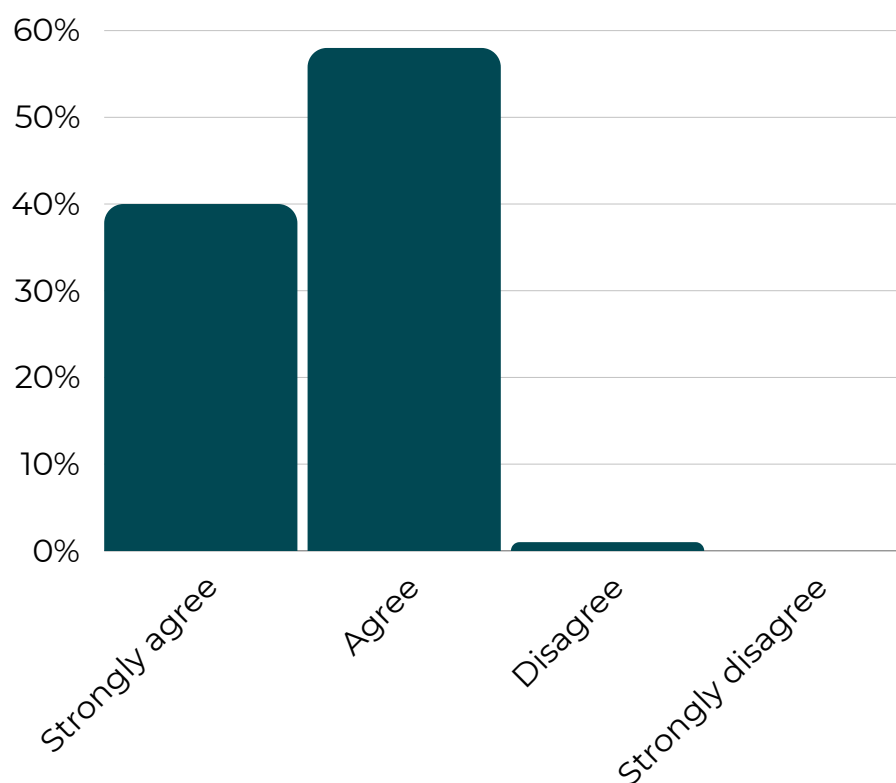


SURVEY FINDINGS

PART I: HOW DO THE PEOPLE OF ALEPPO VALUE AND ENGAGE WITH THEIR HERITAGE?

When asked to respond to the statement: *I am very proud of the rich cultural heritage of this country*, an overwhelming number of participants either strongly agreed (40%) or agreed (58%), compared to a small number who disagreed (1%). See Figure 1. [3]

Figure 1. Do you agree with the following statement: 'I am very proud of the rich cultural heritage of this country?'



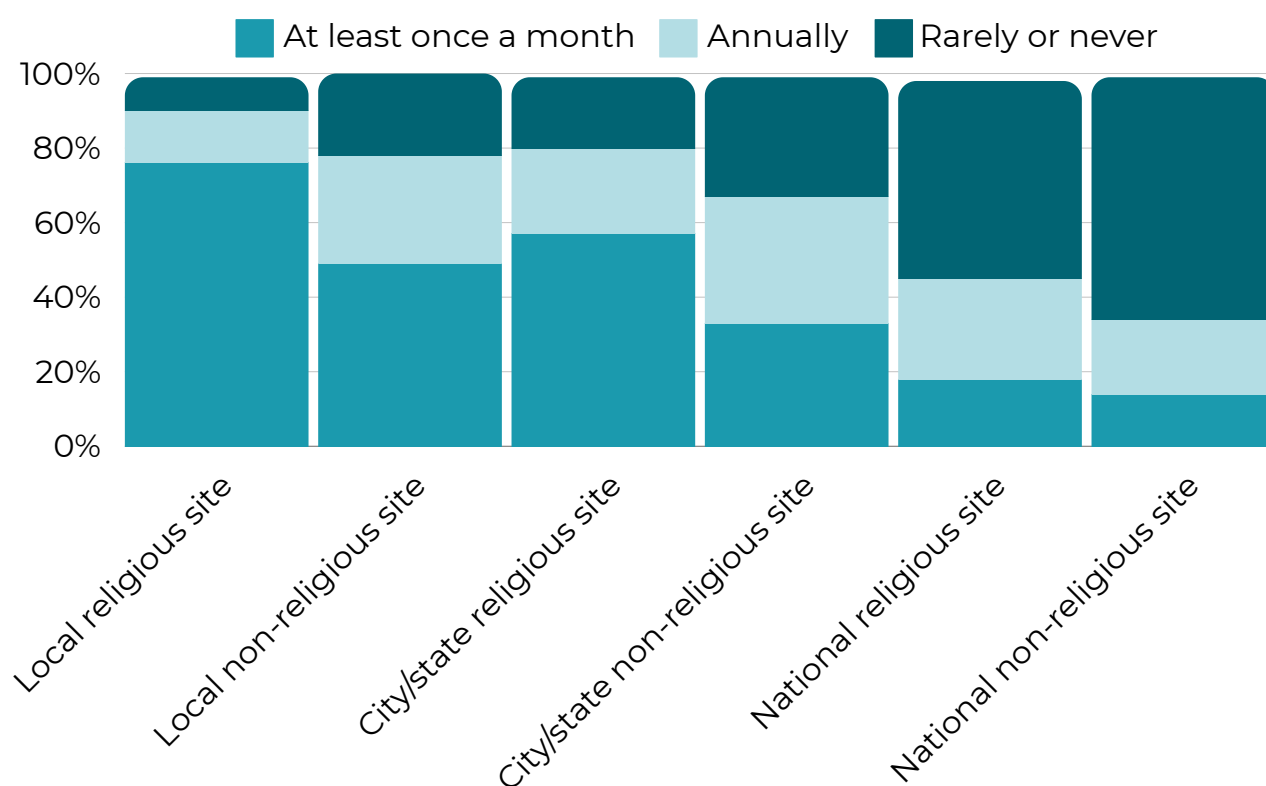
These results indicate that most Aleppines surveyed hold a great sense of pride in Syria's rich cultural heritage.

Participants were then asked to respond to the question: *How often do you visit the following heritage sites?* They were provided with six options covering two types of sites and three locations of sites:

- Religious Sites: *A mosque, church, shrine or other religious site.*
- Non-Religious Sites: *A museum, historical building, or pre-Islamic archaeological site.*
- Local Sites: *Nearest or most accessible site.*
- City/State Sites: *Sites across Aleppo City and Governorate.*
- National Sites: *Heritage outside in any other locations in Syria.*

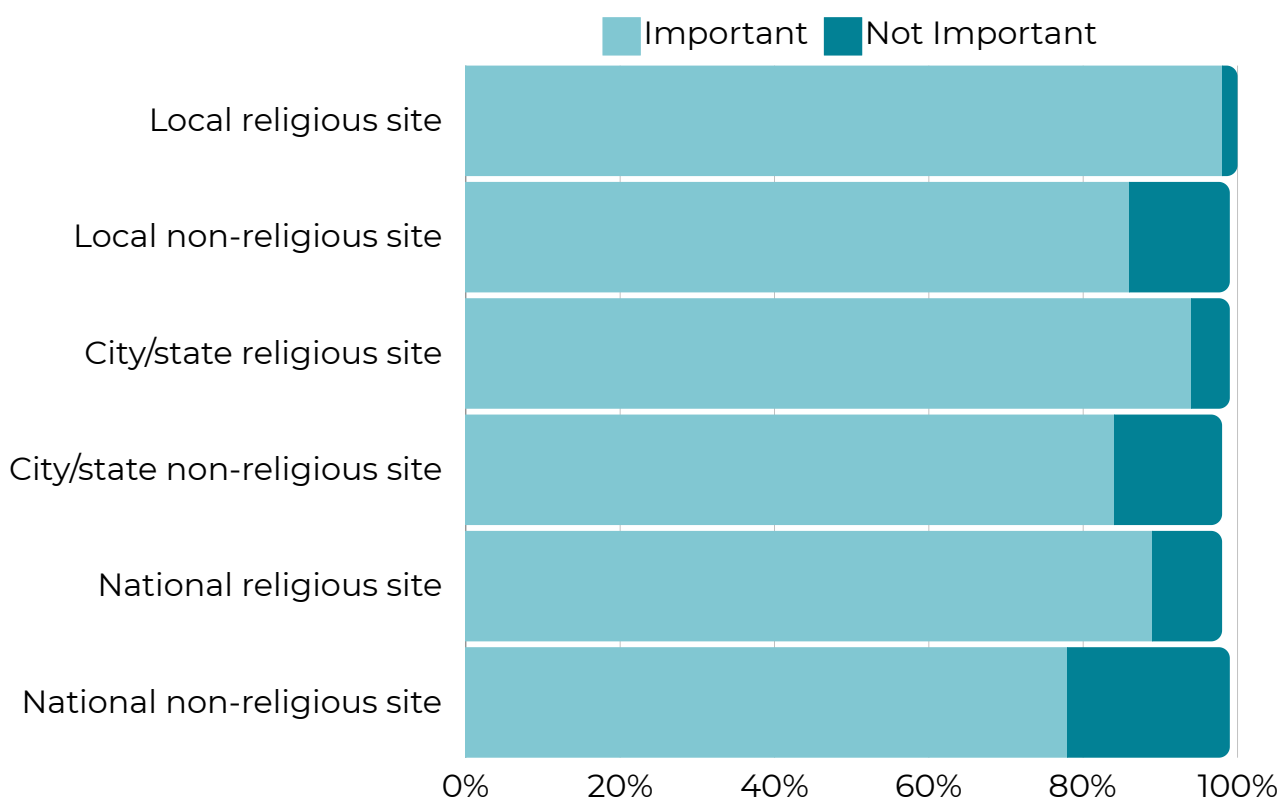
A majority of respondents affirmed that ‘local religious sites’ were visited most frequently (76%) and that ‘national non-religious sites’ were ‘rarely or never’ visited (65%). See Figure 2.

Figure 2. How often do you visit the following heritage sites?



Similarly, when asked to respond to the follow-up question: *Despite how often you visit, how important are the following heritage sites to you personally?* and provided with the same six options, locals consistently ranked 'local religious sites' as the most important (98%) and 'national non-religious sites' as the least important (21%). See Figure 3.

Figure 3. Despite how often you visit, how important are the following heritage sites to you personally?

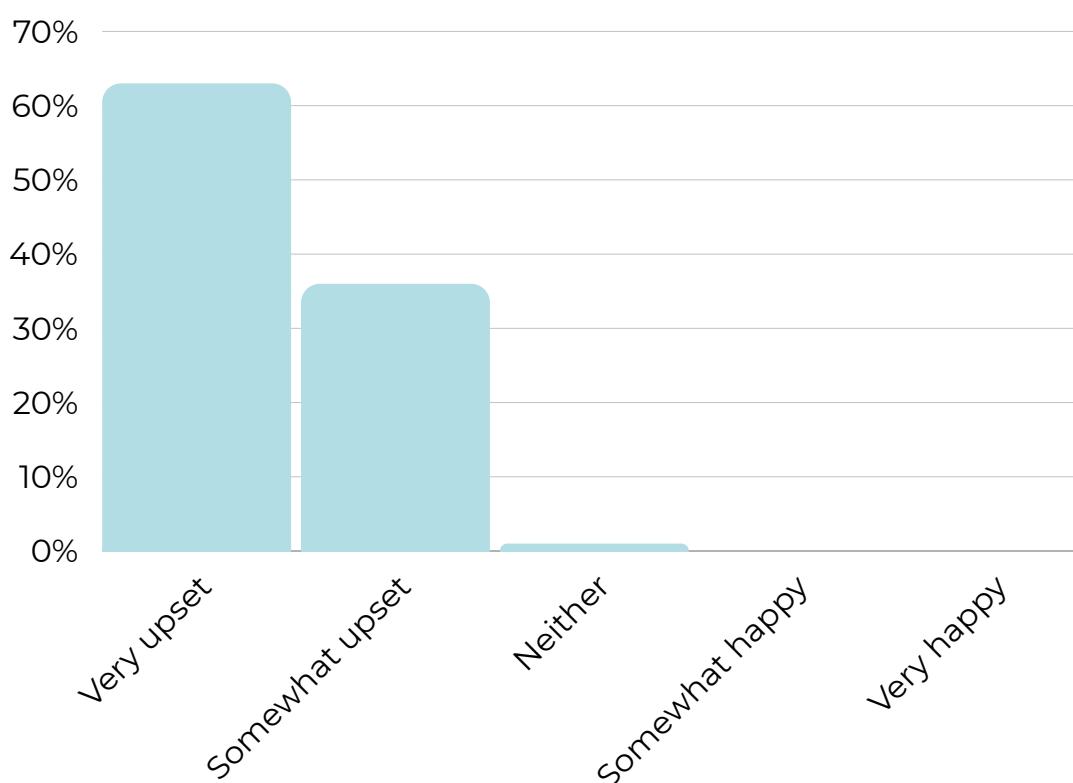


Overall, religious sites were visited more frequently and more greatly valued than non-religious sites by Aleppo residents. While respondents were more likely to visit local sites than those located further afield, the proximity of sites did not influence their importance, with religious sites consistently ranking higher than non-religious sites.

PART II: HOW DO THE PEOPLE OF ALEPPO INTERPRET THE DESTRUCTION OF THEIR HERITAGE?

Respondents were also asked: *Overall, how would you describe your feelings when heritage sites were destroyed during the recent conflicts?* Nearly all respondents (99%) indicated a negative reaction that did not support the deliberate or conflict-related damage to sites by the IS and other actors. See Figure 4.

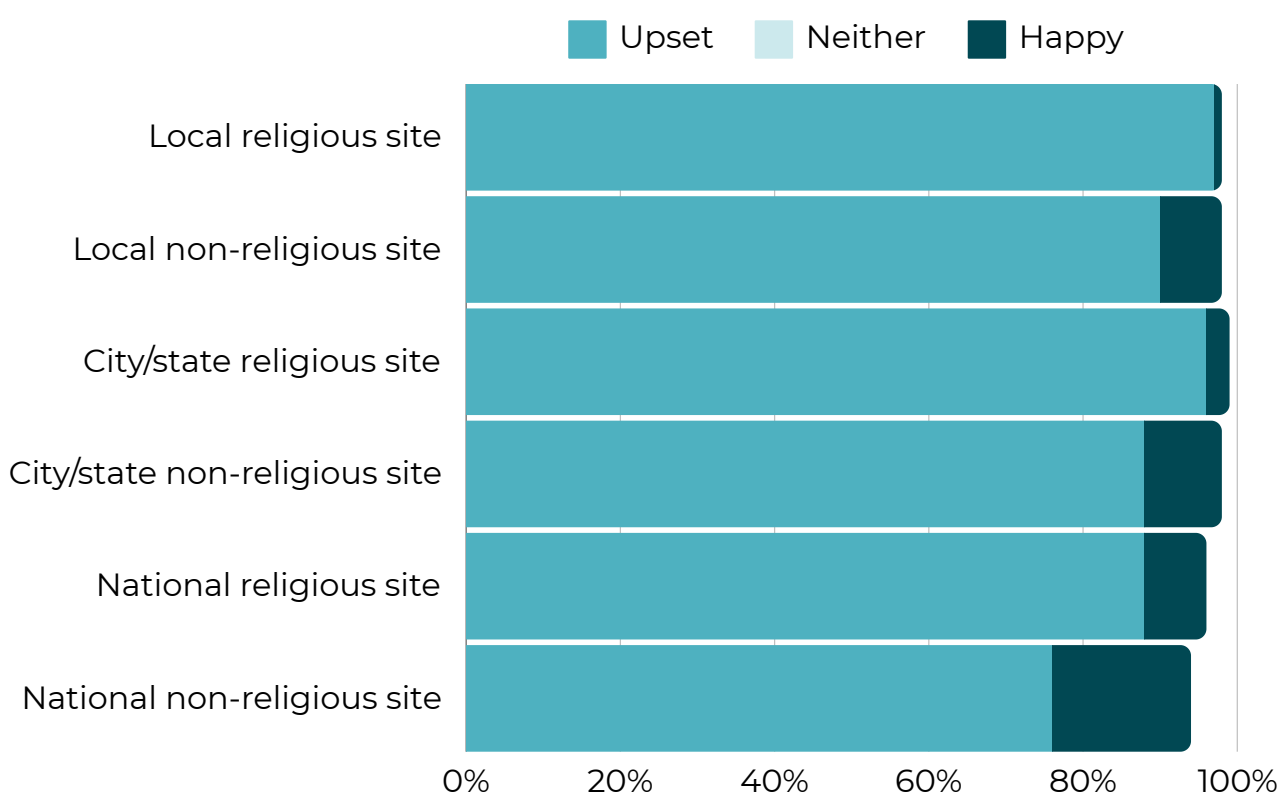
Figure 4. Overall, how would you describe your feelings when heritage sites were destroyed during the recent conflicts?



We also sought to understand how participants reacted to destruction and whether this was influenced by variations in the type and location of sites.

We therefore asked: *How did you react to the damage and destruction at the following heritage sites?* and identified the same six options for sites. The results indicated that respondents were marginally more upset at the destruction of religious sites than non-religious sites regardless of vicinity. See Figure 5.

Figure 5. How did you react to the damage and destruction at the following heritage sites?



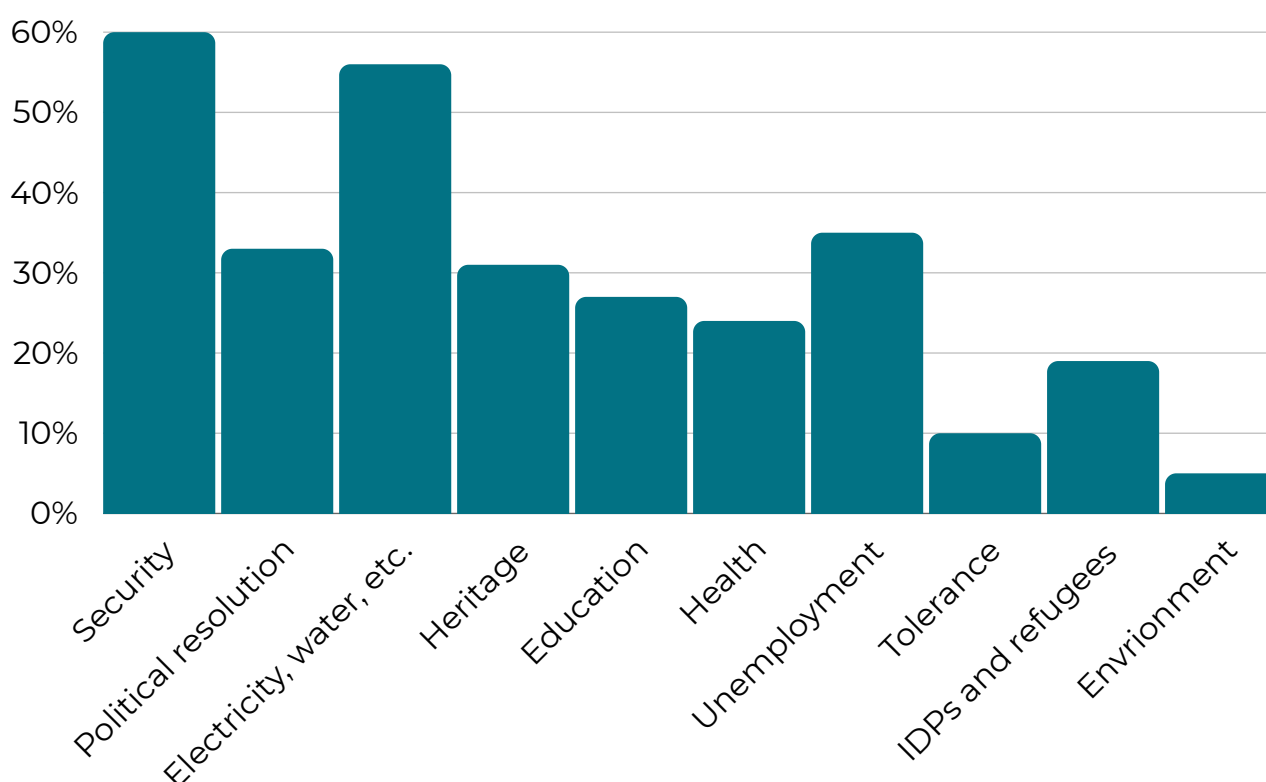
PART III: HOW DO THE PEOPLE OF ALEPPO VIEW THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THEIR HERITAGE?

To determine the level of priority assigned to heritage reconstruction, we asked participants: *If you had to choose just three, which of the following do you think are the most urgent priorities for the future of Syria?*

We then presented them with a list of 10 options broadly reflecting a spectrum of pressing needs facing Aleppines.

The results indicate that the highest number wanted to prioritise ‘safety and security’ (60%), followed by ‘electricity, water and other services’ (56%), ‘unemployment and poverty’ (35%), and ‘a political solution’ (33%). ‘Heritage protection and reconstruction’ had lower support (31%). See Figure 6.

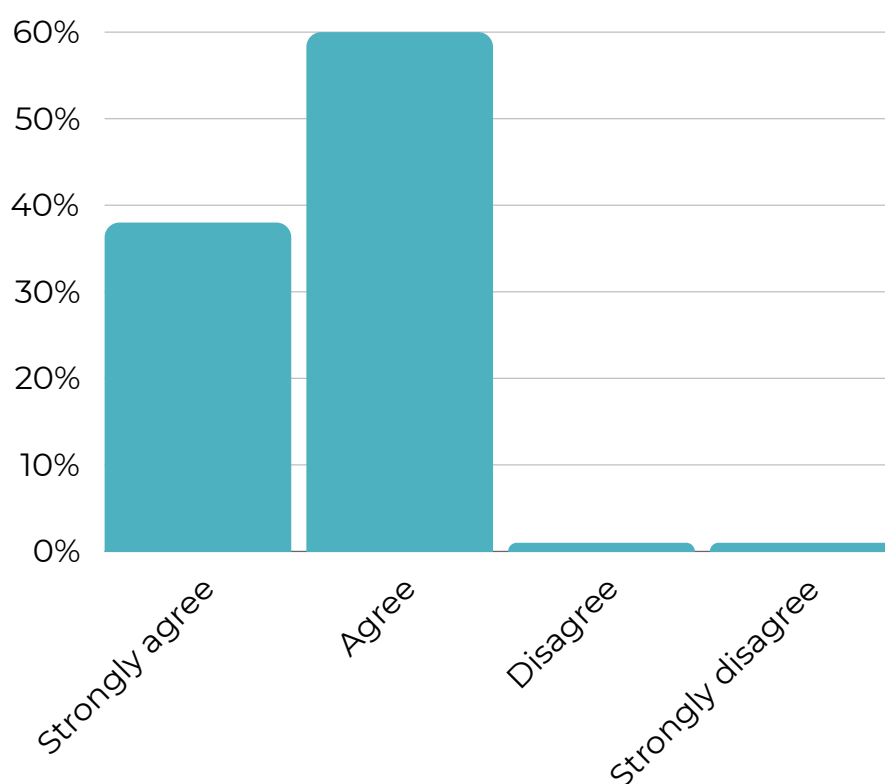
Figure 6. If you had to choose just three, which of the following do you think are the most urgent priorities for the future of Syria?



These results call into question the privileging of heritage reconstruction projects across Aleppo by various multilateral institutions, INGOs, and foreign governments.

Despite this, when asked to respond to the statement: *Heritage sites that were damaged or destroyed during recent conflicts should be restored or reconstructed*, almost all Aleppines surveyed ‘agreed’ (98%) with only a small number who ‘disagreed’ (2%). See Figure 7.

**Figure 7. Do you agree with the following statement:
‘Heritage sites that were damaged or destroyed during recent
conflicts should be restored or reconstructed?’**



Finally, we asked respondents the multiple-choice question: *What would you prefer to see happen to the heritage sites that have been damaged or destroyed during the recent conflicts?*

The most frequent reply was that sites should be restored and reconstructed 'into a new and more modern structure' (30%), followed by 'their pre-war condition' (24%) or the way they were 'when they were first built' (17%) and at least partially repaired 'so as to be useful again' (15%). See Figure 8.

Figure 8. What would you prefer to see happen to the heritage sites that have been damaged or destroyed during the recent conflicts?

Response	%
<i>Not Reconstructed</i>	
That the sites are not restored and reconstructed but left damaged and in ruins	1%
That the sites are not restored and reconstructed but developed into entirely new facilities	12%
<i>Reconstructed</i>	
That the sites are partially restored and reconstructed so as to be useful again	15%
That the sites are restored and reconstructed to their pre-war condition	24%
That the sites are restored and reconstructed to the way they were when they were first built	17%
That the sites are restored and reconstructed into a new and more modern structure	30%

Although not placed among Aleppines' most urgent priorities facing Syria in the wake of the Civil War and the ongoing crises affecting Aleppo since mid-2012, nearly all participants were in favour of rebuilding sites overall.

Specifically, there were high levels of support for projects that would transform heritage sites into more modern and useful spaces that can be accessed well into the future.

PART IV AND PART V: WHAT ROLE DO THE PEOPLE OF ALEPPO SEE FOR NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS?

We also asked respondents a set of questions designed to gauge their level of support for both domestic and international heritage projects in Aleppo.

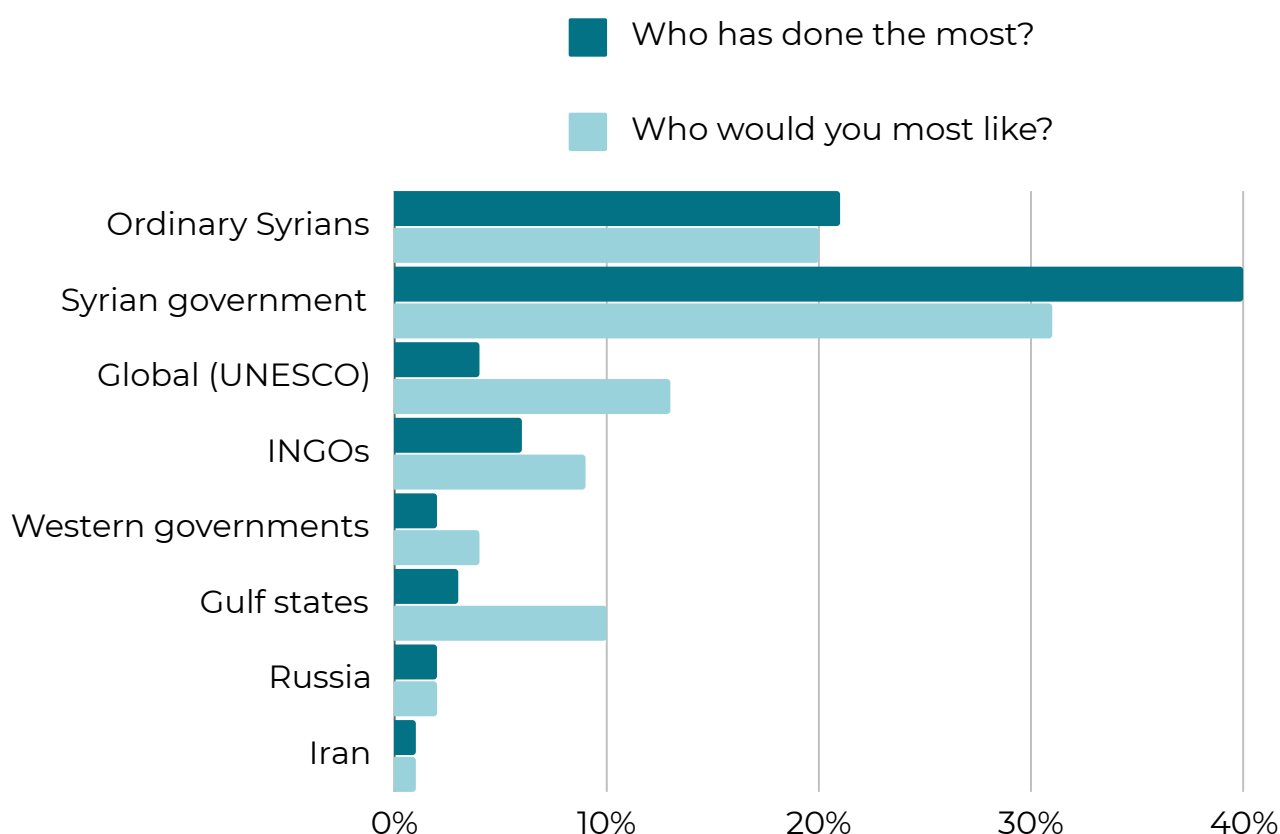
We therefore asked: *Which actor do you think has done the most to restore or reconstruct heritage sites across Syria?* We then provided respondents with 14 different options ranging from 'ordinary Syrians' to foreign actors.

Participants most prominently recognised the roles played by the Syrian government (40%), followed by ordinary Syrians (21%), INGOs such as AKTC and the WMF (6%), key global agencies like UNESCO (4%), and the Gulf States (3%). Western governments (including the UK and the US) were least mentioned (2%), appearing alongside Russia (2%) and Iran (1%). See Figure 9.

We then asked them to respond to the follow-up question: *If you had to choose just one, who would you most like to see being entrusted with any restoration or reconstruction work at heritage sites?*

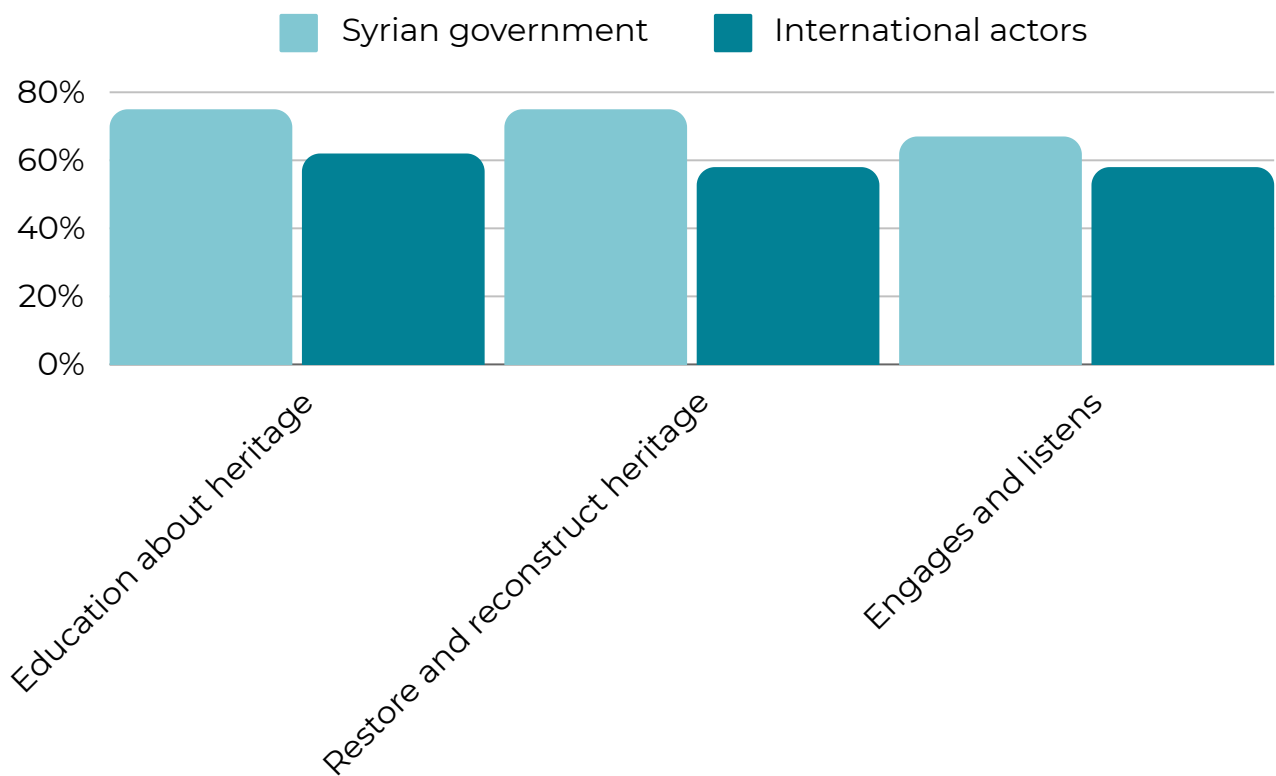
Here a higher number of participants selected the Syrian government (31%) or ordinary Syrians (20%) over global agencies (13%), Gulf states (10%), and INGOs (9%) - with the lowest level of support for Western governments (4%), Russia (2%) and Iran (1%). See Figure 9.

Figure 9. Which actor do you think has done the most to restore or reconstruct heritage sites across Syria? If you had to choose just one, who would you most like to see being entrusted with any restoration or reconstruction work at heritage sites?



The survey also sought to illuminate the opinions of Aleppo residents on the track records of the 'Syrian government' and 'International actors' and whether each was doing enough to: *Promote heritage and educate people about the rich heritage of this country*; *Restore and reconstruct heritage sites after conflict*; and *Engage with and listen to the Syrian people when it comes to their ideas on heritage*. Here, the Syrian government was consistently viewed as performing better (75%, 75%, and 67%, respectively) than international actors (62%, 58%, and 58%, respectively). See Figure 10.

Figure 10. The Syrian Government/International actors are doing enough to: promote heritage and educate people about the rich heritage of this country; restore and reconstruct heritage sites after conflict; engage with and listen to the Syrian people when it comes to their ideas on heritage, its destruction and reconstruction.



Together, Parts IV and V revealed that despite the successes of foreign-led heritage programs, Aleppines generally considered that the Syrian government was better at heritage education and restoration as well as listening to the Syrian people, with most respondents preferring to see reconstruction projects entrusted to the Syrian government and ordinary Syrians into the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) HERITAGE RECONSTRUCTION IS NOT THE MAIN PRIORITY

In light of the intensely violent context in which much of Aleppo's heritage was damaged or destroyed, it is not surprising that respondents did not view heritage as the main priority. Understandably, most respondents were more concerned with securing improvements in security, basic services, and employment.

UNESCO has maintained that its 'Emergency Safeguarding of Syrian Cultural Heritage' project will "contribute to restoring social cohesion, stability and sustainable development through the protection and safeguarding of cultural heritage" (UNESCO: n.d.).

UNESCO and other foreign actors could address this issue by ensuring they partner with humanitarian agencies to help guarantee that such efforts are conducted in keeping with the broader conflict humanitarian, security, and infrastructure needs facing the people of Aleppo.



Damage to Aleppo city during the early stages of the Civil War (Mehmet Ali Poyraz/Shutterstock, February 2012)

They must also ensure that local communities are directly involved in the design and implementation of heritage reconstruction initiatives. Given the complexity of challenges being dealt with by Aleppo residents, these measures are essential in preventing the sidelining of other development agendas in favour of investing solely in heritage.

They are also important if meaningful and lasting progress is to be made in overcoming local tensions, rather than simply relying on the symbolic value of rebuilding heritage sites as a gesture of peace.



A downtown market stall selling handmade olive oil and lye soap, one of Aleppo's most well-known products (Joel Carillet/iStock, June 2010)

2) DON'T DISMISS LOCAL AND/OR RELIGIOUS HERITAGE SITES

The survey also recorded that the population of Aleppo were more likely to visit and value local and religious sites than sites further away or with no religious significance.

A majority of participants indicated that the destruction of local religious sites was a deeply negative experience and, accordingly, that they wanted to see these sites reconstructed.

This suggests that the people of Aleppo have divergent priorities from the various foreign-led heritage projects taking place across the city and its surrounds.

These tend to emphasise revered iconic sites that are difficult to access (like the Great Umayyad Mosque) or non-religious sites (like the Aleppo Museum). The focus on these kinds of sites, which are reportedly rarely visited by Aleppines and hold less importance in their day-to-day lives, raises questions about the efficacy of resource allocation in heritage management.

Substantial investments in projects that are misaligned with the priority of rehabilitating localised and religious sites vocalised by respondents has meant that more cost-effective initiatives that hold greater positive potential have been passed over.

Key state governments, multilateral institutions, and INGOs would benefit from consulting with communities affected by heritage destruction, including the people of Aleppo, to gain an insight into the local and/or religious sites that were more frequently visited and highly valued thanks to their personal, communal, and spiritual significance.

3) LESS 'AUTHENTICITY' AND MORE MODERN FACILITIES

This survey also revealed that Aleppines hold a clear preference for transforming damaged sites and structures into new spaces that can be used and enjoyed by community members as opposed to repairing buildings to align with their historical or pre-war conditions.

This contrasts against many heritage projects currently underway in Aleppo that have sought to restore the historical and archaeological ‘authenticity’ of the site.



The Temple of Baalshamin at the World Heritage site of Palmyra, before its demolition by the Islamic State in 2015 (Joel Carillet/iStock, January 2012)

Foreign actors engaged in heritage reconstruction in Aleppo must therefore strive to get the balance right between upholding the historical integrity of the site and delivering urban spaces that are both practical and meaningful to a society with little public infrastructure.

4) GRANT SYRIANS AGENCY OVER THE FUTURE OF THEIR HERITAGE

Despite the substantial funding provided by foreign actors and the many noteworthy success stories, high levels of international involvement in determining the direction of heritage reconstruction can be problematic.

Indeed, while study participants acknowledged the important roles played by INGOs (such as AKTC or the WMF) and global agencies (like UNESCO), they also expressed a desire for domestic control over future heritage projects.

More specifically, in addition to wanting a reduced role for external actors, Aleppines were the least supportive of the bilateral engagement from Russia and Iran, followed by states in the West.

Given that these governments have made significant commitments to reconstructing sites across the city, this lack of endorsement highlights just how important local partnerships and community engagement are to the ways in which heritage projects are received by domestic populations.

Aleppines are hoping for a future characterised by domestic and community-based leadership on heritage actions.

Foreign actors operating in Aleppo must be cognisant of how international heritage management may inadvertently assist in bolstering the appeal of an otherwise autocratic Syrian government whilst ensuring that ordinary Syrians maintain the responsibility for protecting and reconstructing their heritage in the years to come.

CONCLUSION

This report has documented the results of an original public opinion survey of post-conflict Aleppo. Specifically, the 'Reconstruct the Heritage of Aleppo' survey documented respondents' views of heritage destruction during the Syrian Civil War and the many foreign-led projects to reconstruct key historic sites across the city.

The survey has highlighted the tendency for foreign actors to rely on assumptions about how Aleppines value and engage with their heritage, perceive heritage destruction, and view heritage reconstruction. More to the point, the idea that Syrians implicitly support the interventions of external experts and organisations in designing and implementing reconstruction was thoroughly interrogated.

The survey data illustrated that Aleppo residents: take great pride in the rich and varied cultural heritage of their country; were aggrieved by the destruction of their heritage sites; and greatly supported heritage reconstruction.



View of Aleppo from the gate of the Citadel before the start of the Civil War (Abdullah Tuncay/Shutterstock, November 2010)

Further, the project uncovered four crucial areas that are relevant to current and future heritage projects spearheaded by international actors.

Rebuilding heritage sites was generally supported by respondents, especially when projects are conducted in partnership with the Syrian government and actively involve Syrians.

However, failure to engage with public opinion on heritage issues in post-conflict Aleppo has meant that reconstruction projects frequently face significant problems. Heritage projects may risk repeating past mistakes unless corrective actions are taken to re-centre the observations, concerns, and desires of Aleppo's local population.

- **Firstly**, the findings indicated that most Aleppines do not wish for heritage preservation and/or reconstruction efforts to be prioritised over pressing development, security, and peacebuilding initiatives or at the expense of urgent humanitarian needs.
- **Secondly**, respondents hope to see the rebuilding of their local religious sites rather than only globally-recognised sites seen to hold broader significance thanks to their historical, archaeological, or architectural value.
- **Thirdly**, a majority of Aleppines conveyed that their vision for the future involved the transformations of sites into more modern, practical spaces to be enjoyed by the community in the long term.
- **Finally**, Aleppines overwhelmingly called for greater agency, involvement, and control to be afforded to the Syrian state and Syrian citizens as opposed to external bodies and governments determining the future of their heritage.



The courtyard of the Great Umayyad Mosque in the Old City of Aleppo (Petr Louzensky/Shutterstock, December 2010)

International actors would do well to take heed of these findings and ensure that their ongoing work in Aleppo and elsewhere more meaningfully engages with and listens to the local population whose heritage they seek to protect and reconstruct.

Historically, when local concerns have been neglected in heritage conservation and management practices, both human communities and their heritage sites have become more vulnerable to further suffering, inequality, and intentional harm, impeding wider progress towards peace and stability.

It is hoped that the contents of this report will help to spread awareness on the importance of Aleppo's rich cultural heritage and the need for future initiatives seeking to protect and preserve the city's array of unique and diverse sites to be cognisant of, and sensitive to, the expectations and agency of those Aleppines whose heritage they endeavour to reconstruct.

ENDNOTES

[1] The authors note that the data presented in the various charts and tables contained in this report do not always add up to exactly 100%. This is either because participants sometimes answered 'don't know,' some respondents refused to provide answers to a specific question, or because percentages have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

[2] The authors note that this included students as well as individuals not formally employed but who engaged in domestic labour such as caring for children and/or the elderly and/or being responsible for numerous household duties.

[3] The authors note that some responses have been grouped together for ease of presentation (e.g. 'rarely' and 'never' may become 'rarely or never').

REFERENCES

British Council. (n.d.) *Cultural Protection Fund projects: Syria*. London: The British Council.

Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM). (2021) *State Party Report: On the State of Conservation of Syrian Cultural Heritage Sites*. Syria: DGAM.

International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH). (n.d.) *Project(s) supported in Northeastern Syrian and Syrian heritage*. Geneva: ALIPH.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2019a) *Reopening of the National Museum in Aleppo: Saving Syria's Cultural Heritage*. New York: UNDP.

UNDP. (2019b) *Revival of 4 ancient markets in the Old City of Aleppo*. New York: UNDP.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2012) *UNESCO Director-General deplores destruction of ancient Aleppo markets, a World Heritage site*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre: News. Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/940>

UNESCO. (2014) *The Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Cultural Heritage Project*. UNESCO. Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/emergencysafeguardingofthesyrianculturalheritage>

UNESCO. (2017) *UNESCO Reports on Extensive Damage in First Emergency Assessment Mission to Aleppo*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre: News. Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1619>

United States (US). (2014) *Safeguarding heritage sites in Syria*. Washington: US Department of State.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research team would like to thank the participants who generously provided their time and valuable input.

Full survey results can also be found in the authors' peer-reviewed article: Isakhan, B. & Meskell, L. (2024). Local perspectives on heritage reconstruction after conflict: a public opinion survey of Aleppo. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*.
[<https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2024.2342288>].

Further information can be found at the 'After Islamic State' project website:
<https://web.sas.upenn.edu/afterislamicstate/>

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the unceded lands on which Deakin University campuses are located: the Wadawurrung people, the Boon Wurrung people, the Wurundjeri people, and the Gunditjmara people.

