

A NEW MODEL FOR DEMOCRACY

In 2011, in the midst of the ongoing Syrian civil war, civilians in Kurdish communities founded a de-facto autonomous region along the border with Turkey. The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), also known as “Rojava,” has since expanded to include Arab-majority regions liberated from ISIS.

Rojava’s residents have developed an increasingly-robust political system based on the principles of direct democracy and decentralization, shaped by the thinking of Abdullah Öcalan, the leading theorist of the Kurdish movement, currently a political prisoner in Turkey. As opposed to centralized representative systems, Rojava’s democratic confederalism consists of decentralized institutions that empower local communities, and particularly women and minorities, to directly participate in decision-making.

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN ROJAVA

“ The consensual democratic federal system guarantees the participation of all individuals and groups, on equal levels, in the discussion, decision, and implementation of affairs. It takes ethnic and religious differences into consideration according to the characteristics of each group based on the principles of mutual coexistence and fraternity. It guarantees the equality of all peoples in rights and duties, respects the charters of human rights, and preserves national and international peace. ”

Social Contract of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, 2016

Öcalan’s main principles of democratic confederalism — direct democracy, women’s liberation, and social ecology — inform the design of Rojava’s political system. The smallest decision-making unit in this system is the commune.

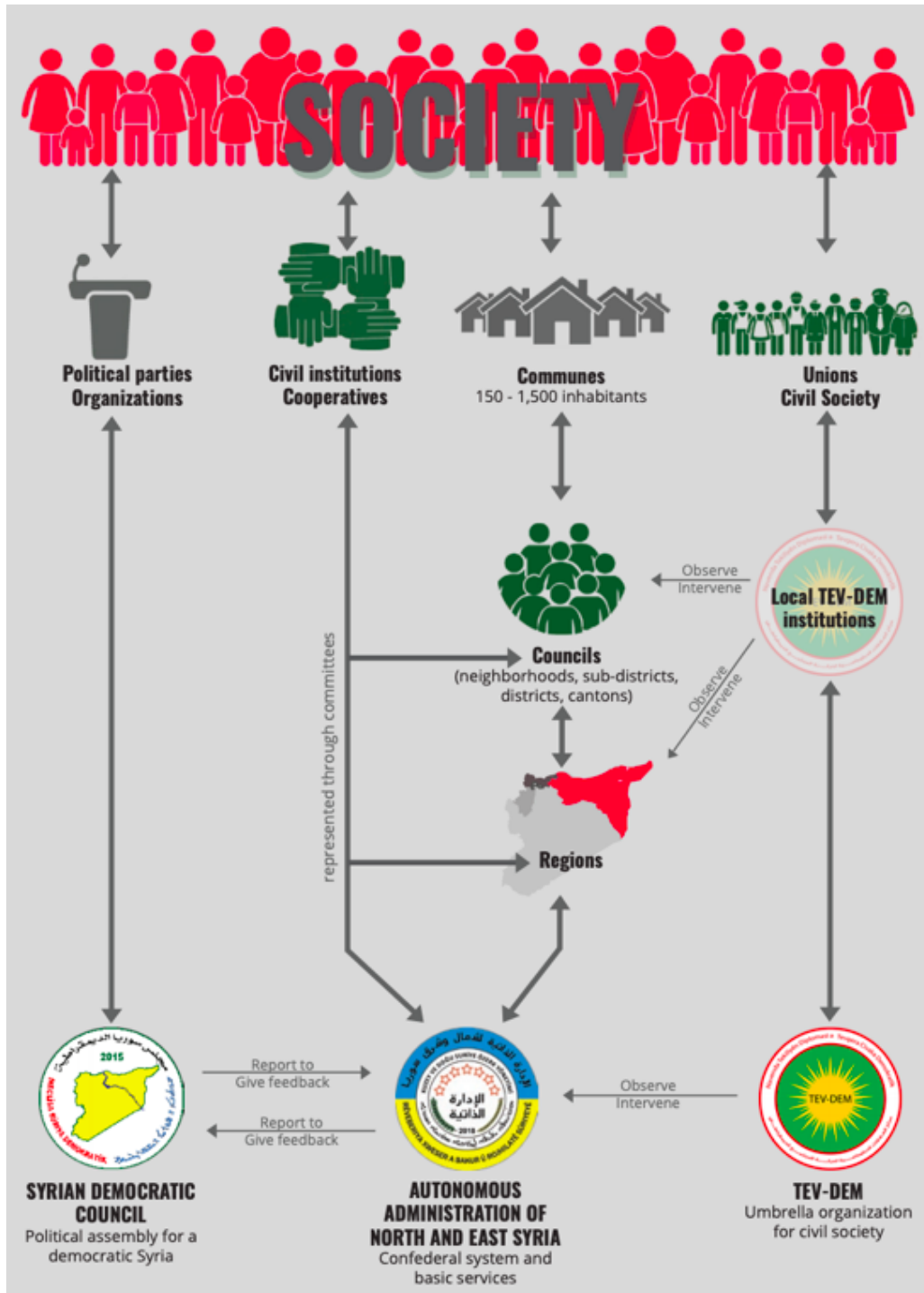
Communes bring together groups of several hundred people for dialogue, decision-making, and resource-sharing. Within communes, **committees** meet to address issues such as health, education, self-defense, and conflict resolution, according to the issues most relevant to the local community.

Councils are organized by street/village, neighborhoods, districts, and regions and are responsible for making decisions that affect their respective areas. As in communes, the work of councils is subdivided into committees. While 60% of council members are elected, the remaining 40% are chosen based on quotas that ensure the participation of both women and men as well as ethnic and religious minorities. At each level, there are also autonomous, parallel women-only structures that ensure women’s issues are prioritized and addressed.

Though communes and councils are the primary structures for bottom-up decision-making, other institutions also work towards this goal. For example, the TEV-DEM (Movement for a Democratic Society) oversees civil society organizing, particularly through unions. Cooperatives also exist to create and bolster communal economies.

Emergency Committee for Rojava

The diagram on this page illustrates how these structures work together with other institutions in Rojava.



Source: Rojava Information Center

For more information about the democratic system in Rojava, read the 2019 RIC report “Beyond the Frontlines” at rojvainformationcenter.com.

For more on Rojava, visit our website at defendrojava.org

If you'd like to be part of our advocacy and education efforts, please contact us at info@defendrojava.org, facebook.com/DefendRojava or [@DefendRojava](https://twitter.com/DefendRojava)

