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Home Office

# **Country Policy and Information Note**

## **Syria: Alawites and Actual or Perceived Assadists**

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# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Assessment</b>	<b>5</b>
About the assessment	5
1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals	5
1.1 Credibility	5
1.2 Exclusion	6
2. Convention reason(s)	6
3. Risk	7
3.1 Risk from the state: Alawites	7
3.2 Risk from the state: actual/perceived Assadists	8
3.3 Risk from 'rogue' state and/or non-state actors	10
4. Protection	10
5. Internal relocation	11
6. Certification	11
<b>Country information</b>	<b>12</b>
About the country information	12
7. Fall of the Al-Assad regime	12
8. Limits on reporting, disinformation and misinformation	12
8.1 Reporting, disinformation and misinformation in respect of Alawites	12
9. Alawites in Syria	14
9.1 Practice and beliefs	14
9.2 Numbers of Alawites in Syria	15
9.3 Main locations of Alawites in Syria	16
10. Alawites and (perceived) Assadists during the Assad regime	17
10.1 Situation of Alawites under the Assad regime	17
10.2 Attitude of Alawites towards the Assad regime	21
10.3 Actions of previous regime security forces	22
10.4 Treatment of Alawites and (perceived) Assadists by opposition actors	24
11. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)	25
11.1 Overview of HTS	25
11.2 Situation under HTS before the fall of the Assad regime	27
12. Alawites and (perceived) Assadists after the fall of the Assad regime	30
12.1 Fear of reprisals	30
12.2 HTS rhetoric regarding Alawites and (perceived) Assadists	31
12.3 HTS treatment of Alawites and (perceived) Assadists	34
12.4 Treatment of Alawites by non-state/unverified actors	44

12.5 Treatment of (perceived) Assadists by non-state/unverified actors .....	48
13. Events on Syria’s Mediterranean coast, 6–9 March 2025 .....	52
13.1 Starting point .....	52
13.2 Impact .....	55
13.3 Reporting, sources and casualty figures .....	62
13.4 State response .....	64
<b>Research methodology .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Terms of Reference .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>72</b>
Sources cited .....	72
Sources consulted but not cited .....	80
<b>Version control and feedback .....</b>	<b>83</b>
Feedback to the Home Office .....	83
Independent Advisory Group on Country Information .....	83

# Executive summary

On 8 December 2024, the regime of Bashar Al-Assad fell, bringing an end to over 50 years of Al-Assad family rule. An Islamist rebel group called Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) led by Ahmad Al-Sharaa, commenced the 11-day offensive which culminated in the toppling of Al-Assad. Ahmad Al-Sharaa is now the de facto leader of Syria, and figures affiliated with HTS occupy the major positions in the new government.

In the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Al-Assad regime, reports indicated that Alawites in Syria feared being the target of sectarian violence by the new authorities. They fear that Alawites as a group will be considered as supporters, or 'remnants', of the former regime, regardless of whether they had any involvement with it, and that they will therefore be targeted in reprisal actions. These fears are due to Alawites having had a large presence in state agencies, including military, intelligence and security agencies, of the former regimes of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad.

The new government has worked to assure Alawites that they will not be subject to violent reprisals and that they will be holding perpetrators of crimes against Alawites accountable through legal means. Many Alawites report that HTS have treated them respectfully and that their fears had not materialised.

However, over the weekend of 6–9 March 2025, Alawites in various villages and towns on Syria's Mediterranean coast were subject to a series of attacks. These were conducted by a variety of assailants, but reports indicate that this included HTS-affiliated groups and members.

Reports on the number of people killed varies and is hard to verify due to a heavy prevalence of mis- and dis-information. However, the Syrian Network for Human Rights is widely regarded as a generally reliable source; their estimate is 800 people. There have been other incidents – albeit on a much smaller scale and frequency. In general, Alawites are likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the state due to their religion and/or an imputed political opinion.

In general, a person who has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state is unlikely to obtain protection nor be able to internally relocate to escape that risk.

A person who has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a rogue state actor and/or a non-state actor is unlikely to obtain protection from the state. Whilst the interim authorities appear to be taking reasonable steps to operate an effective legal system for the detection, prosecution and punishment of acts constituting persecution and to ensure a person is generally able to access that protection, given the length of time the interim authorities have been in power, it is not clear how it plans to conduct investigations or how effective its judicial system will be in practice.

Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

All cases must be considered on their individual facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate they face persecution or serious harm.

[Back to Contents](#)

# Assessment

Section updated: 7 April 2025

## About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is the [country information](#), refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw – and provides an assessment of **whether, in general**:

- an Alawite person faces a real risk of persecution/serious harm by the Syrian government or non-state actors because of their actual or imputed religion
- a (perceived) supporter of the former al-Assad regime faces a real risk of persecution/serious harm by the Syrian government or non-state actors because of their actual or imputed political opinion
- the state (or quasi state bodies) can provide effective protection
- internal relocation is possible to avoid persecution/serious harm
- a claim, if refused, is likely or not to be certified as ‘clearly unfounded’ under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case’s specific facts.

Sources cited in the [country information](#) may refer interchangeably to Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), or the interim or de facto government or authorities. Within this assessment, we use the (new) Syrian government and, since 8 December 2024 they are considered the controlling party of the state or a substantial part of the territory of the State (for the purposes of Article 1(A)(2) of the Refugee Convention).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals

### 1.1 Credibility

- 1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 1.1.3 Decision makers must also consider making an international biometric data-sharing check, when such a check has not already been undertaken (see [Biometric data-sharing process \(Migration 5 biometric data-sharing process\)](#)).
- 1.1.4 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person’s claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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[Back to Contents](#)

## 1.2 Exclusion

- 1.2.1 Under the Al-Assad regime, human rights violations were systematic and widespread. Civilians also suffered human rights abuses at the hands of other parties to the conflict.
- 1.2.2 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons to apply one (or more) of the exclusion clauses. Each case must be considered on its individual facts.
- 1.2.3 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 1.2.4 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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[Back to Contents](#)

## 2. Convention reason(s)

- 2.1.1 Actual or imputed religion and/or actual or imputed political opinion.
- 2.1.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.
- 2.1.3 In the absence of a link to one of the 5 Refugee Convention reasons necessary for the grant of asylum, the question is whether the person will face a real risk of serious harm to qualify for Humanitarian Protection (HP).
- 2.1.4 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds, see the Asylum

### 3. Risk

#### 3.1 Risk from the state: Alawites

- 3.1.1 In general, Alawites are likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the state due to their religion and/or an imputed political opinion.
- 3.1.2 In the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Al-Assad regime, reports indicated that Alawites in Syria feared being the target of sectarian violence. They fear that Alawites as a group will be considered as supporters, or 'remnants', of the former regime, regardless of whether they had any involvement with it, and that they will therefore be targeted in reprisal actions. These fears are due to Alawites having had a large presence in state – including military, intelligence and security – agencies of the former regimes of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad.
- 3.1.3 Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) worked to assure Alawites that they will not be subject to violent reprisals and that they will be holding perpetrators of crimes against Alawites accountable through legal means. Many Alawites report that HTS have treated them respectfully and that their fears had not materialised.
- 3.1.4 However, over the weekend of 6–9 March 2025, Alawites in various villages and towns on Syria's Mediterranean coast were subject to a series of attacks. These were conducted by a variety of assailants, but reports indicate that this included HTS-affiliated groups and members (see [Events on Syria's Mediterranean coast, 6-9 March 2025](#)).
- 3.1.5 Reports on the number of people killed varies and is hard to verify due to a heavy prevalence of mis- and dis-information. However, the Syrian Network for Human Rights is widely regarded as a generally reliable source; their estimate is 800 people. There have been other incidents – albeit on a much smaller scale and frequency.
- 3.1.6 Alawites make up approximately 12% of Syria's population, which is currently estimated at 23.865 million (see [Numbers of Alawites in Syria](#)). Alawite communities are primarily concentrated on the Mediterranean coast, in the governorates of Latakia and Tartous, as well as in Homs, Hama and Damascus (see [Main locations of Alawites in Syria](#)). Alawism is generally seen as an offshoot of Shia Islam. However, Alawites are said to worship privately and to have a more liberal interpretation of certain principles of Islam (see [Practice and beliefs](#)).
- 3.1.7 Alawites were disproportionately represented within state agencies under the regimes of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad, who were themselves Alawite. The Assads placed Alawites in key roles within the military, intelligence, security services and government, and concentrated positions of power within the regime in the Alawite community (see [Situation of Alawites under the Assad regime](#), [Attitude of Alawites towards the Assad regime](#)).
- 3.1.8 The Assad regime also portrayed the Syrian civil war as a sectarian issue, framing the uprising as a threat to the survival of Alawites as a group. This narrative created fear among Alawites and thus ensured their continued loyalty, even though many either did not support or had become privately



disillusioned with the regime. It also created a perception within parts of Syrian society that Alawites are associated with the Assad regime (see [Situation of Alawites under the Assad regime](#), [Attitude of Alawites towards the Assad regime](#)).

- 3.1.9 The Assad regime committed widespread human rights abuses, including mass incarcerations, torture, enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killings, often to quash dissent. The regime also relied on sectarian militias, known as the shabiha, predominantly composed of Alawites, to carry out atrocities. As a result, sectarian tensions grew while Assad was in power and various non-state actors targeted Alawite communities in retaliatory violence (see [Actions of previous regime security forces](#), [Treatment of Alawites and \(perceived\) Assadists by opposition actors](#)).
- 3.1.10 Since the fall of the Assad regime, many Alawites reported fearing retaliation and revenge attacks due to their perceived ties to the former regime (see [Fear of reprisals](#)).
- 3.1.11 Whilst the new government has refrained from targeted reassurances to Alawites, they have emphasised broader messages of justice and reconciliation, including that no one would face retribution without due process and clear evidence of wrongdoing, repeatedly stressed respect for the rights of religious minorities and a commitment to preventing sectarian violence, whilst denouncing revenge killings. HTS has also held meetings with Alawite leaders to address their concerns. Many Alawites have expressed that HTS' statements and actions have been encouraging and respectful, alleviating their fears. While some HTS members have voiced a desire for retribution, these sentiments are generally directed towards those responsible for crimes, not the Alawite community as a whole (see [HTS rhetoric regarding Alawites and \(perceived\) Assadists](#)).
- 3.1.12 During security operations in Alawite areas, several reports quoting local Alawites state that HTS forces treated them respectfully. Reports also mention that HTS have worked to reduce retaliatory attacks within communities through measures such as dialogue and curfews. However, some reports mention that Alawites have been subject to sectarian language, intimidation, harassment and beatings during security operations, particularly in Homs. HTS security forces have been responsive to complaints and attribute these incidents to 'undisciplined' personnel, stating that they will be punished. Whilst there have also been reports of extrajudicial killings, torture and kidnappings committed by members of the security forces, these seem to target persons suspected of committing crimes as part of the Assad regime, not Alawites in general (see [HTS treatment of Alawites and \(perceived\) Assadists](#)).
- 3.1.13 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 3.2 Risk from the state: actual/perceived Assadists

- 3.2.1 Some persons (perceived to be) affiliated with the former Assad regime may face persecution or serious harm from the state by virtue of their actual or perceived political opinion.
- 3.2.2 HTS has stated that it is committed to holding those who committed crimes

under the Assad regime accountable through legal processes. However, whilst it has conducted security operations to arrest these persons, violent incidents such as beatings, looting and executions have taken place. There have been reports that some detainees have been tortured or killed in detention. Reports indicate that these actions are generally directed towards regime affiliates who have (or are suspected to have) themselves committed crimes such as torture or execution. While HTS leadership has acknowledged some of these incidents, it insists that they were isolated incidents and were not officially sanctioned.

- 3.2.3 HTS has repeatedly stated that persons responsible for crimes committed under the Assad regime, particularly those responsible for torture and executions, will be held accountable through legal and judicial processes. It has assured the public that it will distinguish between those who committed crimes and those who were not involved in violence, offering clemency to soldiers who surrendered and handed in their weapons. It has stated that there will be no amnesty for those directly involved in crimes such as torture (see [HTS rhetoric regarding Alawites and \(perceived\) Assadists](#)).
- 3.2.4 Whilst it has pledged not to resort to vigilantism or reprisals, some HTS members have expressed a desire for violent retribution against individuals responsible for crimes committed under the Assad regime. However, evidence does not suggest that this viewpoint is generally held among HTS officers (see [HTS rhetoric regarding Alawites and \(perceived\) Assadists](#)).
- 3.2.5 HTS has focused security operations on locating and arresting former Assad regime officials and soldiers, particularly those accused of war crimes. In areas including Homs, Tartous, and rural Hama, security forces have carried out large-scale raids to this effect, with operations in Homs reportedly resulting in more violent confrontations than other areas. Some security operations have led to instances of sectarian slurs, looting, beatings, kidnappings and extrajudicial killings by HTS officials. These actions seem to target persons suspected of being involved in the Assad regime's crimes, although there have been reports that HTS officers have killed people in cases of mistaken identity. HTS leadership has acknowledged that violations occurred but maintain they did not order or authorise these actions and that they are isolated incidents (see [HTS treatment of Alawites and \(perceived\) Assadists](#)).
- 3.2.6 HTS has released many detainees after clearing them of involvement in criminal activity. Of these, some report that they were treated well, while others claim they were beaten or tortured. There have been multiple reports of deaths in detention, particularly in the Homs area, with relatives stating that the detainees' bodies bore signs of torture when they were returned. In one case, HTS confirmed this and stated that it had arrested the perpetrators (see [HTS treatment of Alawites and \(perceived\) Assadists](#)).
- 3.2.7 HTS previously controlled territory in Idlib. A series of United Nations reports covering the period from 2020 to 2024 claimed that detainees under its control were subject to torture and extrajudicial executions (see [Situation under HTS before the fall of the Assad regime](#)).
- 3.2.8 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

### 3.3 Risk from 'rogue' state and/or non-state actors

- 3.3.1 Alawites and actual/perceived Assadists may face persecution or serious harm from non-state actors.
- 3.3.2 Since the fall of the Assad regime, Alawite communities in Homs, Hama, Tartous, and Latakia have faced killings and kidnappings by unspecified gangs and civilians. Reliable statistics on these attacks are lacking, and misinformation targeting Alawites is spreading, especially via social media. (see [Limits on reporting, disinformation and misinformation](#)). Victims are not necessarily connected to the regime, and motivations have ranged from personal disputes to revenge for perceived regime affiliation. Revenge killings more often occur in Homs and parts of Hama, especially in countryside areas where security is limited and there is a higher presence of ex-shabiha (sectarian militias employed by the Assad regime). Militant groups have emerged, claiming to be targeting both Alawites and Assadists. Reprisal actions, when directed towards (perceived) Assadists, are not limited to those who have suspectedly committed crimes but extend to cultural figures such as the director of a news channel and Syria's former grand mufti (see [Treatment of Alawites by non-state/unverified actors](#), [Treatment of \(perceived\) Assadists by non-state/unverified actors](#)).
- 3.3.3 Reports state that unidentified actors have conducted arrests while impersonating HTS officials. HTS have responded by requiring that any arrest be accompanied by an order of arrest signed by the Ministry of Justice (see [Treatment of Alawites by non-state/unverified actors](#), [Treatment of \(perceived\) Assadists by non-state/unverified actors](#)).
- 3.3.4 There have been reports of unidentified armed actors evicting Alawites and (perceived) Assadists from their homes and taking over the properties. When residents approached HTS security services for assistance in these cases, they have been responsive, arresting the perpetrators and allowing people to return to their homes. Reports indicate that HTS' response in these cases has been the same towards Alawites as to those allegedly involved in the regime (see [HTS treatment of Alawites and \(perceived\) Assadists](#)).
- 3.3.5 HTS has condemned reprisal killings and stated that it will find and punish the perpetrators. Whilst HTS leadership has acknowledged that violations have occurred which have been perpetrated by HTS officers, it maintains that it did not authorise or condone these actions and that they are isolated incidents, attributed to 'undisciplined' individuals (see [Risk from the state: Alawites](#), [Risk from the state: actual/perceived Assadists](#)).
- 3.3.6 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 4. Protection

- 4.1.1 A person who has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state is unlikely to obtain protection.
- 4.1.2 A person who has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a rogue state actor and/or a non-state actor is unlikely to obtain protection from the state. Whilst the new government appear to be taking reasonable steps to operate an effective legal system for the detection, prosecution and

punishment of acts constituting persecution and to ensure a person is generally able to access that protection, given the length of time they have been in power, it is not clear how it plans to conduct investigations or how effective its judicial system will be in practice.

- 4.1.3 HTS has consistently stated that those who committed crimes will be held accountable through legal means. It has worked to prevent retaliatory attacks through dialogue and imposing curfews (see [HTS rhetoric regarding Alawites and \(perceived\) Assadists](#), [HTS treatment of Alawites and \(perceived\) Assadists](#)).
- 4.1.4 There have been reports of unidentified armed actors evicting Alawites and (perceived) Assadists from their homes and taking over the properties. When residents approach HTS security services for assistance in these cases, they have been responsive, arresting the perpetrators and allowing people to return to their homes. Reports indicate that HTS' response in these cases has been the same towards Alawites as to those allegedly involved in the regime (see [HTS treatment of Alawites and \(perceived\) Assadists](#)).
- 4.1.5 Reports stated that HTS commanders have transported civilians injured during security operations to hospital. Persons who report acts of violence by HTS agents, for example at checkpoints, have reported a quick resolution to their complaints. Likewise, those who have reported crimes committed by non-state actors are said to have received a rapid response from HTS (see [HTS treatment of Alawites and \(perceived\) Assadists](#)).
- 4.1.6 Whilst HTS leadership has acknowledged that violations perpetrated by HTS officers have occurred, it maintains that it did not authorise or condone these actions and that they are isolated incidents, attributed to 'undisciplined' personnel. HTS also states that it will investigate violent actions committed by its security forces and has reportedly arrested perpetrators (see [Risk from the state: Alawites](#), [Risk from the state: actual/perceived Assadists](#)).
- 4.1.7 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## **5. Internal relocation**

- 5.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 5.1.2 For further guidance on internal relocation and factors to consider, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## **6. Certification**

- 6.1.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 6.1.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

# Country information

## About the country information

This section contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the [research methodology](#). It provides the evidence base for the assessment.

The structure and content follow a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

This document is intended to be comprehensive but not exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned this does not mean that the event did or did not take place or that the person or organisation does or does not exist.

The COI included was published or made publicly available on or before **15 May 2025**. Any event taking place or report published after this date will not be included.

Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

Different sources use different terms (Alawis or Alawites) when referring to members of this sect. For consistency, CPIT uses the term 'Alawites' throughout the CPIN.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 7. Fall of the Al-Assad regime

- 7.1.1 In the early morning of Sunday 8 December 2024, opposition forces (also referred to as rebels) entered Damascus and declared the end of the regime of President Bashar Al-Assad, who fled to Russia. The fall of Damascus was the culmination of an 11-day offensive which started in north-west Syria. Faced with little resistance from the regime, rebels took control of the cities of Aleppo, Hama, and Homs. Meanwhile, other opposition groups gained control of the city of Deir Ezzor in the east of the country, while the regime also relinquished control of the southern cities of Daraa and Suwa<sup>1 2</sup>.
- 7.1.2 Opposition forces comprised an array of different groups, with the most prominent being Sunni Islamist militant group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), led by Abu Mohammed Al-Jolani<sup>3 4</sup>.
- 7.1.3 For more information, see the Country Policy and Information Note, [Syria: Returnees After Fall of Al-Assad Regime](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 8. Limits on reporting, disinformation and misinformation

For general commentary on the limits on reporting, as well as dis- and mis-information – and the effect it is having – see the Country Policy and Information Note, [Syria: Returnees After Fall of Al-Assad Regime](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

### 8.1 Reporting, disinformation and misinformation in respect of Alawites

- 8.1.1 On 3 January 2025, Deutsche Welle (DW) reported that:

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<sup>1</sup> Al Jazeera, [What happened in Syria? How did al-Assad fall?](#), 8 December 2024

<sup>2</sup> Sky News, [How the rebel assault unfolded in Syria...](#), 8 December 2024

<sup>3</sup> Sky News, [Who is Syrian rebel leader Abu Mohammed al Jolani and what are...](#), 9 December 2024

<sup>4</sup> CNN, [After decades of brutal rule, Bashar al-Assad's regime has...](#), 9 December 2024

'Verify-Sy's Al-Shimale previously pointed to a number of inauthentic Facebook pages launched in December with names that resemble groups monitoring human rights. However, the accounts focus mostly on the Alawite community. By posting disinformation and using mechanized, fake accounts or "bots" to amplify disinformation, these fake pages frighten Alawites, then advocate they take up armed resistance, he explained...

'There are some outliers... But most of the opinions that result from misleading social media reports tend to align against the Syrian rebels currently leading the transitional government.'<sup>5</sup>

- 8.1.2 In a blog post updated on 5 January 2025, Misbar, a non-profit fact-checking platform<sup>6</sup>, stated that: 'In the current context of Syria, after Bashar al-Assad's departure, conflicts between religious sects have surged, creating an atmosphere of heightened tension and division. As a result, falsehoods targeting religious minorities and communities have surfaced online, amplifying sectarian strife ...'<sup>7</sup>

- 8.1.3 The same source provided an example regarding the Alawites:

'Several claims surfaced after thousands of people protested on December 25, 2024, in several Syrian cities following the circulation of a video allegedly showing an attack on an Alawite shrine in the north.

'However, media outlets soon confirmed that the video was "old" and that the attack had been carried out by "unknown groups." Authorities warned that the republishing of the footage was designed to "stir up strife,"...

'The Alawite community is now facing increasing fear and retribution, as many members are seen as complicit in the regime's brutal actions, including widespread torture and killings. In this volatile environment, the spread of misinformation has exacerbated fears, deepened sectarian divisions, and further complicated the prospects for reconciliation.'<sup>8</sup>

- 8.1.4 On 26 December 2024, the Middle East Eye, an independent digital news organisation<sup>9</sup>, reported regarding the above-mentioned video of the attack on the Alawite shrine:

'Though the video was circulated purporting to be recent, Sheikh Ammar Mohammed and Sheikh Ahmed Bilal, the shrine's custodians, issued a statement saying the incident happened weeks ago as HTS-led rebels were seizing Aleppo.

'The sheikhs warned that the video was being used to "incite discord and undermine civil peace" ...

'Verify Syria, a factchecking organisation, said the shrine video had been heavily promoted by accounts linked to Assad's government and his allies, seeking to sow discord.'<sup>10</sup>

- 8.1.5 The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP) 'is a non-profit ... that works to center advocates and experts from and in the Middle East and

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<sup>5</sup> Deutsche Welle, [How fake news campaigns could push Syria back to civil war](#), 3 January 2025

<sup>6</sup> Misbar, [About us](#), no date

<sup>7</sup> Misbar, [Facing Oppression and Disinformation...](#), updated 5 January 2025

<sup>8</sup> Misbar, [Facing Oppression and Disinformation...](#), updated 5 January 2025

<sup>9</sup> Middle East Eye, [About](#), no date

<sup>10</sup> Middle East Eye, [Disinformation stokes Alawi unease...](#), 26 December 2024



North Africa (MENA) region in the policy discourse'<sup>11</sup>. In an article published on 30 January 2025, TIMEP explained that: 'Social media ... have become breeding grounds for disinformation campaigns designed to confuse and deepen societal divides. In the post-Assad period, the disinformation ecosystem has evolved ...'<sup>12</sup>

8.1.6 The TIMEP article gave some examples, including:

'... [A] photo of a woman lying on the ground unconscious was shared alongside claims of sectarian violence. Some posts claimed she was murdered, with varying narratives blaming Alawite ... groups. Iranian websites shared the same image, alleging she was an Alawite killed during protests against the alleged attacks on an Alawi shrine. Investigations debunked all these claims ...

'During Syria's reported internet outage on January 23 [2025], certain accounts ... framed the outage as a targeted action against Alawites, linking it to systemic violence. These accounts have been spreading sectarian-based disinformation, using it to urge minorities to arm themselves, join militias, or support movements advocating for the Syrian coast's independence.'<sup>13</sup>

8.1.7 This was also evident following the [Events on Syria's Mediterranean coast, 6–9 March 2025](#).

8.1.8 See fact-checking website [Verify-Sy](#) for more on mis- and disinformation in Syria, as well as information on false and misleading media stories.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 9. Alawites in Syria

**NOTE: The maps in this section are not intended to reflect the UK Government's views of any boundaries.**

### 9.1 Practice and beliefs

9.1.1 A 2020 research paper by Bayram Sinkaya, an Assistant Professor at Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University<sup>14</sup>, stated that: 'Alawism, which initially emerged as a religious sect, in time turned into an identity based on blood ties regardless of whether one performs the religious rituals ... Alawites speak Arabic, but have certain dialectal differences ... Although most Alawites claim to be Muslims ... opponents continue to question their relationship with Islam ...'<sup>15</sup>

9.1.2 In a 28 December 2024 article, Deutsche Welle described the Alawites:

'As a religious sect, the Alawites are often referred to as an offshoot of Shia Islam. But their background is more complex than that ...

'Alawi Islam emerged in the ninth century in northeastern Syria ... The sect is notoriously secretive, but those who have been able to study it say Alawites have a differing interpretation of several pillars of Islam, which are considered foundational by orthodox Muslims ...

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<sup>11</sup> TIMEP, [About us](#), no date

<sup>12</sup> TIMEP, [Truth in Transition: Disinformation in Post-Assad Syria](#), 30 January 2025

<sup>13</sup> TIMEP, [Truth in Transition: Disinformation in Post-Assad Syria](#), 30 January 2025

<sup>14</sup> İnsan & Toplum Dergisi, [Bayram Sinkaya](#), no date

<sup>15</sup> Bayram Sinkaya, [Implications of the Syrian Civil War on the Alawites](#) (page 119), June 2020

‘That includes the regular call to public prayer and the physical pilgrimage to Mecca. Alawites prefer to worship in private, at home or outdoors, believe the pilgrimage could be symbolic, don't think females needed to wear headscarves, use wine in their rituals and incorporate more nature worship, including the sun, moon and stars, into their belief system.

‘The Alawites do also have commonalities with Shiite Muslims. For example, they believe in the divinity of Ali ibn Abu Talib, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad ... and considered the first leader of Shia Islam.’<sup>16</sup>

#### 9.1.3 Encyclopaedia Britannica further described the Alawite belief system:

‘Alawite teachings and practices are not widely understood outside the community, which refrains from publishing or proselytizing their beliefs ... They hold that God manifested himself in some way in the figure of ‘Alī, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad ... perhaps not too dissimilar from mainstream Shi‘i concepts ... Alawites accept the Pillars of Islam (the five duties required of every Muslim), but they interpret them in ways that may not satisfy orthodox Muslim criteria. For example, Alawites hold a symbolic interpretation of the hajj and do not perform a literal pilgrimage to Mecca. Among the holidays they observe are Eid al-Ghadir, a traditionally Shi‘i holiday ... and Christmas, a traditionally Christian holiday...

‘Whether Alawites can be considered Shi‘i has been a matter of debate ... Alawites’ acceptance as Shi‘i by Shi‘i clergy gained traction after they were recognized as such by a 1973 legal decision (fatwa) ... As social and political developments have drawn the communities closer, Alawite leaders have increasingly referred to the rich tradition of the Twelver Shi‘is to inform their interpretation of Alawite doctrine. At least some Alawites continue to reject the label of Shi‘i.’<sup>17</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

## 9.2 Numbers of Alawites in Syria

9.2.1 According to the CIA World Factbook, the estimated total population of Syria as of 2024 was 23.865 million<sup>18</sup>.

9.2.2 The same source, updated on 16 January 2025, estimated that approximately 15% of Syria’s population are Alawite<sup>19</sup>.

9.2.3 On 16 December 2024, the BBC estimated that ‘Alawites ... make up around 10% of Syria’s population.’<sup>20</sup>

9.2.4 The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), ‘a German political foundation [that] ... aims at promoting freedom and liberty, peace and justice’<sup>21</sup>, noted in a September 2024 report that ‘The Alawite community ... constitutes approximately 12% of Syria’s population today ...’<sup>22</sup>

9.2.5 DW noted that ‘Estimates suggest that, before the civil war started in 2011, Alawites made up somewhere between 10% and 13% of Syria’s total

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<sup>16</sup> DW, [Syria's Alawite community: Once feared, now living in fear?](#), 28 December 2024

<sup>17</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, [Alawite](#), updated 16 January 2025

<sup>18</sup> CIA World Factbook, [Syria](#) (People and society), updated 16 January 2025

<sup>19</sup> CIA World Factbook, [Syria](#) (Ethnic groups), updated 16 January 2025

<sup>20</sup> BBC, [Fear of a reckoning simmers in Assad's Alawite heartland](#), 16 December 2024

<sup>21</sup> KAS, [...Alawite Community Dynamics...](#), September 2024

<sup>22</sup> KAS, [...Alawite Community Dynamics...](#) (page 5), September 2024



population'<sup>23</sup>. It also, citing the CIA's World Factbook, put Syria's Alawite community at 12% as of mid-2022<sup>24</sup>.

[Back to Contents](#)

### 9.3 Main locations of Alawites in Syria

9.3.1 Encyclopaedia Britannica shared the below map of Syria<sup>25</sup>. CPIT has highlighted areas as having Alawite populations based on the following COI.



- 9.3.2 In April 2024 country guidance on Syria, referring to previous guidance given in September 2020, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) stated that Alawites '... reside in the coastal side of Syria, but they are also located in Homs and Hama governorates, as well as in the city of Damascus.'<sup>26</sup>
- 9.3.3 In a 16 December 2024 article on the Alawites, the BBC reported that '... Latakia, on Syria's north-west Mediterranean coast is their heartland.'<sup>27</sup>
- 9.3.4 On 31 December 2024, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a research institute aiming to 'advance a balanced and realistic understanding of American interests in the Middle East and to promote the policies that secure them'<sup>28</sup>, described Homs as 'a city that is half Alawite', and the 'coastal region [as] ... the stronghold of the Alawite community'<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> DW, [Syria's Alawite community: Once feared, now living in fear?](#), 28 December 2024

<sup>24</sup> DW, [Syria's Alawite community: Once feared, now living in fear?](#), 28 December 2024

<sup>25</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, [Syria](#), no date

<sup>26</sup> EUAA, [Country Guidance: Syria](#) (page 77), 15 April 2024

<sup>27</sup> BBC, [Fear of a reckoning simmers in Assad's Alawite heartland](#), 16 December 2024

<sup>28</sup> Washington Institute, [About](#), no date

<sup>29</sup> Washington Institute, [Alawites Under Threat in Syria?](#), 31 December 2024

- 9.3.5 In a 13 January 2025 article, international news channel France24 described Tartus as ‘... the Alawite stronghold...’<sup>30</sup>
- 9.3.6 Encyclopaedia Britannica’s entry on the Alawites, updated on 16 January 2025, stated that ‘The sect is predominant in the Latakia region of Syria ... Many Alawites also live around or in Homs and Hama.’<sup>31</sup>
- 9.3.7 Regarding movement of the Alawite population over time, in a 2021 paper, Fabrice Balanche, adjunct fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy<sup>32</sup>, stated that:
- ‘The Alawi community of Syria traditionally inhabited the country’s western coastal region ... Institutionalised state persecution from the sixteenth century drove the Alawis to seek refuge in the mountains of Jebel Ansariya and its peripheral areas ... In the mid-nineteenth century, when internal strife and dwindling resources drove these minority communities from the mountains, many of them settled on the margins of eastern Homs and the Hama steppe ...
- ‘... According to the 1947 census ... over 80 percent of Syria’s ... Alawis ... were concentrated in the coastal mountain region. This region, roughly equating to the boundaries of the governorates of Latakia and Tartus today, was the heartland of the Alawi community comprising a majority Alawi population (63.2 percent) ...
- ‘When Hafez al-Assad came to power in 1970, the over-representation of Alawi officers in the intelligence bureau and key military units was institutionalised, and this further expedited ... the migration of large numbers of Alawis from Jebel Ansariya towards the surrounding plains and, eventually, Damascus ...
- ‘Since the onset of the conflict in 2011, Jebel Ansariya and the coastal region once again has become a mountain refuge for tens of thousands of Alawi families from all over Syria ...’<sup>33</sup>
- 9.3.8 The KAS 2024 report stated that ‘The conflict has led to significant displacement, with many Alawites fleeing Sunni-dominated areas ...’<sup>34</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

## 10. Alawites and (perceived) Assadists during the Assad regime

### 10.1 Situation of Alawites under the Assad regime

#### 10.1.1 The KAS 2024 Report summarised that:

‘The Alawite community ... was historically marginalized and persecuted ... The rise of the Ba'ath Party and Hafez al-Assad's presidency marked a significant shift, with Alawites being promoted to key positions in the military and government. This led to socio-economic improvements but also entrenched sectarian divisions.

‘The Syrian civil war has exacerbated these sectarian tensions, particularly between the Alawite and Sunni communities. The [Assad] regime's strategy

<sup>30</sup> France24, [‘Syrian above all’...](#), 13 January 2025

<sup>31</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, [Alawite](#), updated 16 January 2025

<sup>32</sup> Fabrice Balanche, [Biography](#), no date

<sup>33</sup> Fabrice Balanche, [...Alawi demographic shifts...](#) (pages 3-5, 7, 9, 20), 21 March 2021

<sup>34</sup> KAS, [...Alawite Community Dynamics...](#) (page 5), September 2024

of portraying the conflict as a Sunni-led insurgency against minorities heightened existential fears among Alawites, resulting in increased militarization and mistrust ...<sup>35</sup>

#### 10.1.2 The same source further explained that:

‘The Ba’ath Party ... attracted many Alawis and other minorities due to its secular ideology and promise of social mobility ... Hafez al-Assad, an Alawi ... emerged as a dominant figure within the Ba’ath Party and the military. His ascent to the presidency in 1970 marked the beginning of the Alawite dominance in Syrian politics. Assad's regime systematically promoted the Alawites to key positions in the military, security services, and government, creating a loyal base of support within the state apparatus. Under Hafez al-Assad, the Alawite community experienced significant socio-economic improvements ...

‘Bashar al-Assad’s ascension to power in 2000 marked a continuation ... Under Bashar, the regime increasingly emphasised its Alawite base ... the regime [became] more insular, with key military and security positions increasingly staffed by Alawites, which reinforced the community’s critical role in maintaining the regime's power structure. Economic policies under Bashar favoured ... sectors of the economy that were dominated by Alawites ... As tensions rose, the regime’s reliance on its Alawite base ... [tied] the community's fate closely to the survival of the Assad regime ...

‘... Since the onset of the Syrian war, the regime, led by Bashar al-Assad, has been accused of deliberately stoking sectarian fears to consolidate support among ... particularly the Alawites. This strategy ... involved portraying the uprising as a Sunni-led insurgency intent on eradicating religious minorities, thereby rallying the Alawites ... around the regime ...<sup>36</sup>

#### 10.1.3 The 2020 research paper by Bayram Sinkaya stated that:

‘Hafiz Assad recruited Alawite people to control key positions in government institutions, especially in security institutions ... The Baath regime’s intelligence and security services were so intertwined with the Alawi community that practically one person from almost each Alawite family worked for one of these organizations ...

‘... Although Alawites were more easily employed in the public sector ... this did not mean that they had a general high standard of living. Contrary to the improvements in Alawites’ living conditions in the first decades of Baath rule, inequality increased among the Alawites, and wealth was gradually concentrated in the hands of a small group directly linked to the Assad family and their allies ...

‘In the aftermath of the eruption of anti-regime demonstrations, the regime tried every means to ensure Alawites’ loyalty. On the one hand, it increased pressure over the Alawites leaning toward the opposition. On the other hand, the regime’s propaganda apparatuses attempted to ignite sectarian fears among Alawites by presenting the opposition as fundamentalist fanatics threatening their well-being and survival ...<sup>37</sup>

#### 10.1.4 The 2021 Fabrice Balanche paper noted that: ‘... In the governorates of

<sup>35</sup> KAS, [...Alawite Community Dynamics...](#) (page 5), September 2024

<sup>36</sup> KAS, [...Alawite Community Dynamics...](#) (pages 12-14), September 2024

<sup>37</sup> Bayram Sinkaya, [Implications of the Syrian Civil War on the Alawites](#) (page 120-123), June 2020

Latakia (54.6 percent) and Tartus (39.5 percent) the proportion of the working population employed in the civilian public sector is far greater than the national average (26.9 percent). Compared with other communities they [Alawites] are vastly over-represented in this sector ...<sup>38</sup>

- 10.1.5 Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024 assesses movements toward democracy and market economy around the world<sup>39</sup>. This report, covering the period from 1 February 2021 to 31 January 2023, noted that: '... [I]n the security sector, the number of Alawites in the upper ranks has increased. In a 2020 report, analyst Muhsen al-Mustafa reported that the top 40 posts in the Syrian Arab Army were filled by Alawites – the situation is similar with sensitive positions in the state security services.'<sup>40</sup>

- 10.1.6 The United States State Department (USSD)'s 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria', published in 2024 and covering events throughout 2023 (USSD 2023 report), noted that:

'Alawites, the dominant religious minority in the regime ... held greater political power in the cabinet than other minorities, as well as more authority than the majority Sunni sect ...

'The ... Alawite community... enjoyed privileged status throughout the regime and dominated the state security apparatus and military leadership. Nevertheless, the regime reportedly also targeted Alawite opposition activists for arbitrary arrest, torture, detention, and extrajudicial killing.'<sup>41</sup>

- 10.1.7 The EUAA's country guidance on Syria, updated in 2023, stated that:

'[Alawites] hold key regime positions, dominate the police and the army and have high-ranking positions in elite military and militia units. They have higher chances of obtaining employment in the public sector compared to other groups ...

'According to sources, almost every Alawite family was affected by the war. Many Alawites died during the war which led many young Alawites to hide and avoid conscription. In some villages and towns, 60% - 70% of the Alawite young males were either killed or wounded during the war, especially in Latakia and Tartous governorates ...'<sup>42</sup>

- 10.1.8 The Freedom House (FH) 'Freedom in the World 2024' report, published on 25 April 2024 and covering events throughout 2023, noted that:

'The largely Alawite-led regime presents itself as a protector of that and other religious minority populations. In practice, political access depends not on sect but on proximity and loyalty to Assad and his associates. Alawites ... who are outside Assad's inner circle are politically disenfranchised ...

'Families and networks with ties to the ruling elite receive preferential treatment in legal matters, and are disproportionately Alawite, though Alawites without such connections are less likely to benefit from any special advantages.'<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Fabrice Balanche, [...Alawi demographic shifts...](#) (pages 11, 15, 18, 21), 21 March 2021

<sup>39</sup> BTI, [Who we are](#), no date

<sup>40</sup> BTI, [Syria Country Report](#) (Welfare Regime), 2024

<sup>41</sup> USSD, [Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria](#) (sections 3, 6), 2024

<sup>42</sup> EUAA, [Country Guidance: Syria](#) (page 77), 7 February 2023

<sup>43</sup> FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Syria](#) (B4, F4), 25 April 2024

- 10.1.9 A 20 December 2024 article published by The Atlantic, an online magazine<sup>44</sup>, stated that: ‘The regime presented itself as the only shield against annihilation for the Alawites ...
- ‘Supporting Assad ... was a matter not of loyalty or politics for this community, the regime insisted, but of choosing between existence and extinction. This narrative, and the fear of Sunni extremist groups such as the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra, kept many Alawites bound to Assad ...’<sup>45</sup>
- 10.1.10 On 22 December 2024, the BBC reported that:
- “During the Assad regime, the stereotype about the Alawites is that they got all the work opportunities and that they are wealthy. But, in fact, most Alawites are poor and you'll only find one among a thousand who is rich,” said Mohammad Shaheen, a 26-year-old pharmacy student.
- “Even when HTS went to Alawite villages near the coast, they found all villages were poor. Only the Assad family amassed wealth,” he added...
- ‘Hasan Dawood, a shopkeeper, chimed in: “We were slaves for him - drivers, cooks and cleaners.”
- ‘... But people from the Alawite community, and indeed from this neighbourhood [Mezzeh 86, a working-class neighbourhood in the west of Damascus], did serve in Assad's brutal security forces.’<sup>46</sup>
- 10.1.11 In December 2024, The Guardian reported that:
- “The only section of the Alawites who were enriched were those who cooperated with the [Assad] regime. The rest of us are the lowest of all the Syrian people,” said Mazen al-Kheir, an anaesthetist from Qardaha. He said the religious minority was among the poorest in Syria and, contrary to the Assad’s regime’s rhetoric, received no favours from Alawite rule.
- ‘Instead, he said the space for dissent under the despotic Syrian regime was even more narrow for Alawites.’<sup>47</sup>
- 10.1.12 DW’s article of 28 December 2024 noted that ‘Unless they were members of a small Syrian elite, Alawites dealt with the same economic hardships as other Syrians ...’<sup>48</sup>
- 10.1.13 In a 31 December 2024 article, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy explained that ‘Under Assad, more than 80 percent of Alawites worked for the state, comprising most of the army and intelligence officer corps, most of the government’s senior administrators, and most of the management in public industries.’<sup>49</sup>
- 10.1.14 The same source added that ‘During the civil war, the wives and children of slain Alawite troops received public jobs to compensate for their losses, swelling the ranks of those who owed their livelihoods to the state and the Assad family.’<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> The Atlantic, [History](#), no date

<sup>45</sup> The Atlantic, [Bashar al-Assad Exploited Alawites’ Fear](#), 20 December 2024

<sup>46</sup> BBC, [Syria's minorities seek security as country charts new future](#), 22 December 2024

<sup>47</sup> The Guardian, [‘Celebrating the unknown’: Syrian Alawites fear for future...](#), 15 December 2024

<sup>48</sup> DW, [Syria's Alawite community: Once feared, now living in fear?](#), 28 December 2024

<sup>49</sup> Washington Institute, [Alawites Under Threat in Syria?](#), 31 December 2024

<sup>50</sup> Washington Institute, [Alawites Under Threat in Syria?](#), 31 December 2024



## 10.2 Attitude of Alawites towards the Assad regime

10.2.1 In a 2020 article, the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI), a think tank working towards 'democratic change in the Arab region'<sup>51</sup>, quoted an Alawite political activist as stating:

"At the outbreak of the revolution, Alawite youth rushed to save and defend the Syrian regime ... large numbers of Alawites volunteered ... According to Alawite communities, it was disgraceful for anyone to dodge conscription or calls to join the reserve forces. Indeed, some Ba'athists even took it upon themselves to draw up blacklists of residents in their neighbourhoods whose loyalty was questionable, so that Syrian Shabiha "militias" could beat them up and force them out of their homes and villages. However, now ... it has become normal for someone in the Alawite community to say that he had made his son flee abroad to dodge conscription, and to have everyone agree with this decision. Moreover, people race to congratulate anyone who was discharged from military service or to cover up for an army deserter. A gradual shift in the viewpoint took place over the past nine years..."<sup>52</sup> The author of the article noted that '... [I]t is hard to determine the prevalence of such discontent [toward the Assad regime], due to their entrenched fear of the security apparatus.'<sup>53</sup>

10.2.2 The 2021 Fabrice Balanche paper noted that '... [T]he Alawi community was more receptive to Assad's call to arms as many considered military service a defensive duty undertaken to ensure the survival of their community. Fear that Damascus might fall to the opposition and expose the Alawi community to Sunni vengeance for the "privileged position" it held under the Assads was a strong motivating for potential recruits...' <sup>54</sup>

10.2.3 A 2021 article in New Lines Magazine, a US global affairs online magazine<sup>55</sup>, written by a Syrian Alawite and former civil servant, stated that:

'... From the perspective of Alawites, demands to overthrow the regime meant targeting Alawites themselves...

'... For Alawites, it was a war of existence ... It has also sustained their support for Bashar himself, despite the amount of criticism and bitterness they feel toward the government as a whole ...

'... Alawites quickly isolated [Alawite opposition figures] ... accused them of treason, and threatened them, prompting most of them to flee ...'<sup>56</sup>

10.2.4 The KAS 2024 report stated that '... [F]ear of retribution and economic hardships have led many individuals to develop complex and conflicting political attitudes. This ambivalence results in a mixture of support, opposition, and neutrality towards the regime ...'<sup>57</sup>

10.2.5 The same source elaborated that '... [T]he Alawite community has experienced a profound reshuffling of its relationship with the regime, driven

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<sup>51</sup> ARI, [About](#), no date

<sup>52</sup> ARI, [...Alawite Youth As the Backbone of the Assad Regime](#), 4 August 2020

<sup>53</sup> ARI, [...Alawite Youth As the Backbone of the Assad Regime](#), 4 August 2020

<sup>54</sup> Fabrice Balanche, [...Alawi demographic shifts...](#) (pages 11, 15, 18, 21), 21 March 2021

<sup>55</sup> New Lines Magazine, [About](#), no date

<sup>56</sup> New Lines Magazine, [The Wandering Alawite](#), 17 June 2021

<sup>57</sup> KAS, [...Alawite Community Dynamics...](#) (page 5), September 2024

by growing disillusionment, perceived injustices, and a fundamental change in how they view their own role and sacrifices in the context of the Syrian civil war'<sup>58</sup>. It quoted Alawite interviewees as stating that "... [T]here is a deep-seated resentment evident in private conversations among Alawites, although public declarations often still support the regime."... "When you sit among Alawites – plainly, they all curse Bashar and are not happy with the work he is doing. But when someone from outside the sect comes, Bashar becomes 'God.'"<sup>59</sup>. The authors of the report concluded that '... [T]he Alawite community ... despite their disillusionment with the Assad regime, remain wary of openly expressing dissent due to the real threat of persecution.'<sup>60</sup>

10.2.6 On 22 December 2024, the BBC reported that 'There's... a sense of betrayal. "Bashar was a traitor. And the way he fled was cowardly ..." said Mohammad [a student interviewed by the BBC].'<sup>61</sup>

10.2.7 DW's article of 28 December 2024 noted that: '... [G]iven the authoritarian nature of the Assad regime, many did not feel they could speak out ... 'That is why a binary portrayal of the Alawites as either pro- or anti-Assad "fails to capture the nuanced spectrum of views within the Alawite population, ranging from staunch regime loyalists to discreet dissenters," the researchers concluded.'<sup>62</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

### 10.3 Actions of previous regime security forces

10.3.1 In December 2024, CNN reported that:

'For half a century, the Assad family ruled over Syria with an iron fist, with long-documented reports of mass incarceration torture, extra-judicial killings and atrocities against their own people ...

'... Assad tolerated little dissent and throughout the 13-year civil war, he and his forces have been accused of severe human rights violations and brutal assaults against civilians, with reports of using starvation as a weapon of war, enforced disappearances and killings, and the deliberate bombing of civilian buildings like schools and hospitals.

'Among Assad's worst atrocities was the 2013 sarin gas attack in the city of Ghouta, which killed more than 1,400 people and was labeled a war crime by the then-UN secretary general.

'Assad's notorious detention facilities were black holes where anyone deemed an opponent of the regime disappeared, with widespread reports of torture and inhumane conditions. In 2017, an Amnesty International report claimed as many as 13,000 people had been hanged from 2011 to 2015 at Saydnaya Prison.'<sup>63</sup>

10.3.2 On 18 December 2024, Associated Press reported that:

'More than 150,000 Syrians remain unaccounted for after disappearing into

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<sup>58</sup> KAS, [...Alawite Community Dynamics...](#) (page 27), September 2024

<sup>59</sup> KAS, [...Alawite Community Dynamics...](#) (page 27), September 2024

<sup>60</sup> KAS, [...Alawite Community Dynamics...](#) (page 30), September 2024

<sup>61</sup> BBC, [Syria's minorities seek security as country charts new future](#), 22 December 2024

<sup>62</sup> DW, [Syria's Alawite community: Once feared, now living in fear?](#), 28 December 2024

<sup>63</sup> CNN, [After decades of brutal rule, Bashar al-Assad's regime has been toppled...](#), 9 December 2024

Assad's prisons and most are believed to be in mass graves around the country, said Mounir al-Mustafa, deputy director of the White Helmets, a Syrian search and rescue team.

'An array of prisons run by the military, intelligence and security agencies were notorious for systematic torture, mass executions and brutal conditions that killed other inmates from disease and starvation, according to human rights groups, whistle-blowers, and former detainees ...

'Moussa Al-Zouebi, the head of ... [a] village's health directorate, said some of the people whose remains were uncovered were executed by "shooting in the head, in the eye, or by burning."<sup>64</sup>

- 10.3.3 On 23 December 2024, the Washington Post reported that 'More than 110,000 detainees have been "forcibly disappeared," by the regime since 2011, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights. More than 15,000 have died from torture.'<sup>65</sup>
- 10.3.4 A January 2025 report from the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) stated that: 'Since 2011, Syrian civilians have been subjected to arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, enforced disappearances and related violations in order to quash dissent and erode opposition to the government led by former President Assad ... The prevalence of detention violations coupled with widespread impunity is cited as a key driver ... of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.'<sup>66</sup>
- 10.3.5 On 8 December 2024, Reuters described 'shabiha' as 'brutal sectarian militias drawn from the Alawite community.'<sup>67</sup> The Middle East Monitor (a news site owned and operated by a UK-based publisher<sup>68</sup>) had previously reported in 2023 that '... [C]ountless human rights violations [were] committed by the shabiha – including wholesale massacres of towns and villages, rapes, lootings and torture ...'<sup>69</sup>
- 10.3.6 Gregory Waters is an analyst at the Counter Extremism Project<sup>70</sup>, and a former consultant at the International Crisis Group<sup>71</sup>, who conducts independent field work in Syria<sup>72</sup>. On 12 February 2025, he shared an interview with an Alawite based in Homs on his website Syria Revisited. The interviewee stated, regarding the shabiha, that: 'In the beginning of the revolution many men were involved with the regime in breaking up protests. But after the protests stopped ... they stayed ... They robbed us, kidnapped us for money, and just generally harass everyone ... No one could speak to them or they would just kill you. The police would always say "we can't do anything to them."<sup>73</sup>
- 10.3.7 On 16 February 2025, referring to life under the Assad regime, The Guardian reported that:

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<sup>64</sup> Associated Press, [After Assad's fall, the task of unearthing the dead...](#), 18 December 2024

<sup>65</sup> Washington Post, [To evade Assad's secret police...](#), 23 December 2024

<sup>66</sup> UNHRC, [...Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and Ill-Treatment...](#) (page 1), 27 January 2025

<sup>67</sup> Reuters, [Assad loyalists shaken by his fall, some relieved by lack of violence](#), 8 December 2024

<sup>68</sup> Middle East Monitor, [About](#), no date

<sup>69</sup> Middle East Monitor, [Assad regime organised 'shabiha' militias...](#), 6 July 2023

<sup>70</sup> Counter Extremism Project, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>71</sup> International Crisis Group, [Who we are](#), no date

<sup>72</sup> Gregory Waters, [An Alawite Voice From Homs City](#), 12 February 2025

<sup>73</sup> Gregory Waters, [An Alawite Voice From Homs City](#), 12 February 2025



‘... Security services largely made up of Alawites raided the homes of their neighbours in majority-Sunni neighbourhoods, often a short drive from the imposing detention centres ... where the officers surveilled their neighbours. Officials worked house by house to crack down on anyone accused of joining protests against Assad’s rule that began in 2011, with Homs witnessing the largest demonstrations in Syria, as well as mass arrests in response ...

‘... [T]he Assad regime attacked its own citizens with airstrikes and shelling. Neighbourhoods ... contain whole blocks ground into ... dust.’<sup>74</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

#### 10.4 Treatment of Alawites and (perceived) Assadists by opposition actors

10.4.1 The 2021 Fabrice Balanche paper noted that: ‘... [R]evolt in the spring of 2011 in the Sunni quarters and villages of Baniyas ... led to violent confrontations between members of the Sunni and Alawi communities. The Alawis were accused of monopolising jobs in the public sector ...’<sup>75</sup>

10.4.2 The 2021 article in New Lines Magazine stated that:

‘... When the Syrian protests began ... [s]ome slogans were... transparently sectarian ... [with] calls to exclude Alawites from power, linking them to the regime, even calling for their extermination by some extremists. Much has been said about these slogans and whether they were actually used, and later the regime itself would be accused of highlighting these slogans to mobilize minorities ... Among the demonstrators, there were some who did not hide their desire to end the domination of minorities over the state ...

‘Since 2011, the Alawites have been implicated in brutality, murder, extortion, and theft that many of them had nothing to do with ... The hatred against them increased day by day, and what was whispered in the past is now expressed openly and publicly on social media ...’<sup>76</sup>

10.4.3 In 2022, the Syrian Network of Human Rights (SNHR), an independent organisation monitoring human rights violations in Syria<sup>77</sup>, published a report based on interviews with 85 people including ‘witnesses, survivors, victims’ families, local activists, lawyers, judicial workers, and former members of opposition factions’<sup>78</sup>. Covering the period between the beginning of 2012 and December 2021<sup>79</sup>, the report stated that: ‘HTS personnel force detainees ... to dig the graves used to bury the people executed by the group [HTS] on various charges. According to the accounts we have obtained, HTS practices this method mainly with prisoners from among Syrian regime troops from the Alawite community ...’<sup>80</sup>

10.4.4 The USSD 2023 Report stated that ‘Violent extremist opposition groups targeted Alawite communities on several occasions for their perceived proregime stance ....’<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> The Guardian, [‘We live in constant fear’: Alawites in Syria’s Homs terrified...](#), 16 February 2025

<sup>75</sup> Fabrice Balanche, [...Alawi demographic shifts...](#) (pages 11, 15, 18, 21), 21 March 2021

<sup>76</sup> New Lines Magazine, [The Wandering Alawite](#), 17 June 2021

<sup>77</sup> SNHR, [About us](#), no date

<sup>78</sup> SNHR, [...Notable Hay’at Tahrir al Sham Violations...](#), 31 January 2022

<sup>79</sup> SNHR, [...Notable Hay’at Tahrir al Sham Violations...](#), 31 January 2022

<sup>80</sup> SNHR, [...Notable Hay’at Tahrir al Sham Violations...](#) (page 58), 31 January 2022

<sup>81</sup> USSD, [Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria](#) (section 6), 2024

- 10.4.5 The EUAA's country guidance on Syria, updated in 2023, stated that:
- '... [T]he Alawite community is targeted by different non-state actors. Alawi shrines and other sacred places and monuments were destroyed by Islamist groups. Throughout the conflict, Alawite civilians were executed by anti-government armed groups ...
- 'In the Kurdish-controlled areas in north-east Syria, sources indicate that Alawites are at risk of being treated as adversaries, based on their political affiliation with the Syrian government rather than their religious affiliation.'<sup>82</sup>
- 10.4.6 The KAS 2024 report stated that:
- '... Some Sunni groups ... considered that the Alawites had hijacked power in Syria. They began targeting Alawite army officers with assassinations in the 1970s and 1980s, leading to a full-scale confrontation ... This conflict ... left deep scars regarding the divisions between Sunnis and Alawites ...
- 'The targeting of Sunni civilians by regime forces, often perceived as collective punishment ... has led to retaliatory attacks on Alawite communities, creating a vicious cycle of violence that has further entrenched sectarian divisions.'<sup>83</sup>
- 10.4.7 On 15 December 2024, The Guardian reported that: '... A video published by extremist rebels during the Syrian civil war where they sang "We are coming to slaughter you, [Alawites]" sent fear through the community ... many in the community believed that the opposition ... wanted to harm them ...'<sup>84</sup>
- 10.4.8 In a 31 December 2024 article, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy stated that '...[in] Alawite localities ... in places like Arima (Latakia) in August 2013 and al-Zarah (Homs) in May 2016 ... the HTS predecessor Jabhat al-Nusra was involved in the massacre of Alawite civilians.'<sup>85</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

## 11. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)

### 11.1 Overview of HTS

- 11.1.1 A BBC article entitled 'Who are the rebels in Syria?', published on 30 November 2024 and updated on 8 December 2024, stated:
- 'HTS was set up under a different name, Jabhat al-Nusra, in 2011 as a direct affiliate of al-Qaeda. The leader of the self-styled Islamic State (IS) group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was also involved in its formation. It was regarded as one of the most effective and deadly of the groups ranged against President Assad. It was proscribed as a terrorist group by the UN, the US, Turkey and other countries – and it remains so.
- 'But al-Jolani publicly broke ranks with al-Qaeda, dissolved Jabhat al-Nusra and set up a new organisation, which took the name Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) when it merged with several other similar groups a year later. There were doubts at the time – and some still remain – over whether HTS had completely renounced its links with al-Qaeda ... The group has in the past been involved in internecine conflict with other rebel and opposition

<sup>82</sup> EUAA, [Country Guidance: Syria](#) (page 99), 7 February 2023

<sup>83</sup> KAS, [...Alawite Community Dynamics...](#) (pages 12-14), September 2024

<sup>84</sup> The Guardian, ['Celebrating the unknown': Syrian Alawites fear for future...](#), 15 December 2024

<sup>85</sup> Washington Institute, [Alawites Under Threat in Syria?](#), 31 December 2024

groups.<sup>86</sup>

- 11.1.2 A Sky News article, published on 9 December 2024 and entitled 'Who is Syrian rebel leader Abu Mohammed al Jolani and what are his links to al Qaeda?', stated:

'Rebel leader Abu Mohammed al Jolani ... has spent years trying to distance himself from his former ties to al Qaeda ...

'Al Jolani's real name is Ahmad al Sharaa – it's what he was known by before he adopted jihad and it is how he has begun referring to himself again...

'In 2011, a popular uprising in Syria sparked a brutal crackdown by regime forces – a conflict that deteriorated into more than a decade of civil war. Al Jolani was directed by al Baghdadi to establish a branch of al Qaeda called the Nusra Front ['Jabhat Al-Nusra' in Arabic<sup>87</sup>]. The new group was labelled a terrorist organisation by the US – a designation that remains in place.

'His influence grew and he defied orders from al Baghdadi to dissolve his group and merge it with what had become the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

'In his first interview in 2014, he kept his face covered and told a reporter that his goal was to see Syria governed under Islamic law and made clear that there was no room for the country's Alawite ... minorities. In 2016 he revealed his face to the public for the first time and announced two things: his group was renaming itself Jabhat Fateh al-Sham - the Syria Conquest Front – and it was cutting its ties with al Qaeda. He was able to assert control over fragmented militant groups and consolidated power in Idlib. He again rebranded his group, calling it Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) – Organisation for Liberating Syria – as it has been known since.

'Few could have predicted what happened next. Secure in his position, al Jolani sought to transform his image. He swapped his military garb for a shirt and trousers. What's more, he appeared to renounce some tenets of hardline Islamic law and began calling for religious tolerance and pluralism.<sup>88</sup>

- 11.1.3 The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC), a Syrian human rights organisation that documents and analyses violations<sup>89</sup>, stated on 22 January 2025 that 'The new Syrian government, currently a caretaker government led by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, now controls the majority of Syrian territory, including Daraa, Suwayda, Damascus, Rif Damascus, Homs, Hama, Latakia, Tartous, and Idlib governorates, along with parts of Aleppo, Deir Ezzor, Al-Raqqa governorates.'<sup>90</sup> These areas include those in Syria with the largest Alawite populations (see [Main location\(s\) of Alawites in Syria](#)).
- 11.1.4 On 29 January 2025, The Guardian reported that Ahmed al-Sharaa 'has been appointed president of Syria for a "transitional period"' and that 'The transitional government is supposed to hand over power to a new government in March, but it is unclear how the transition will be managed. In

<sup>86</sup> BBC, [Who are the rebels in Syria?](#), updated 8 December 2024

<sup>87</sup> BBC, [Who are the rebels in Syria?](#), updated 8 December 2024

<sup>88</sup> Sky News, [Who is Syrian rebel leader Abu Mohammed al Jolani and what are...](#), 9 Dec 2024

<sup>89</sup> SJAC, [About](#), no date

<sup>90</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria December 2024 - January 2025](#), 22 January 2025

an interview with Al Arabiya last month, Sharaa said holding elections could take up to four years ...<sup>91</sup>

11.1.5 On 25 April 2025, International Crisis Group reported that:

‘On 29 March [2025], Syria’s interim president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, announced the formation of a 23-member cabinet to replace the caretaker government that had been in place since December 2024 ...

‘The new cabinet includes a mix of figures. Some are affiliated with HTS ... others are technocrats or civil society leaders. Still others were ministers in the ousted Assad regime. HTS, however, retains the most powerful posts ...

‘Nine are from Syria’s largest minority communities – Kurds, Druze, Christians and Alawites ...

‘The 13 March [2025] constitutional declaration ... which is essentially a transitional constitution, is set to remain in effect for five years, after which a permanent charter will be adopted, followed by elections.

‘The constitutional declaration establishes a strong presidential system, with no prime minister. In granting the president overarching authority, with no meaningful checks, it exhibits a strong authoritarian bent ... The judiciary is formally independent, but the president selects the members of the Supreme Constitutional Court.

‘The declaration guarantees the separation of powers, freedom of belief and equal citizenship without discrimination based on race, religion or gender ... it recognises the constitutional validity of international human rights treaties, charters and agreements ratified by the Syrian state in the past – even if most treaties will still require appropriate legislation for them to be implemented.’<sup>92</sup>

11.1.6 On 30 March 2025, Al-Monitor, an independent news agency focused on the Middle East<sup>93</sup>, reported that ‘Amid international calls for an inclusive transition, the new government has four ministers from minority groups in Syria -- a Christian, a Druze, a Kurd and an Alawite, none of whom were handed key portfolios.’<sup>94</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

## 11.2 Situation under HTS before the fall of the Assad regime

11.2.1 An 8 December 2024 article by Al Jazeera stated that ‘Before November 27 [2024], Syrian opposition forces were mostly confined to their stronghold in the northwestern governorate of Idlib ...’<sup>95</sup> The sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#), [Main location\(s\) of Alawites in Syria](#)) did not highlight Idlib as an area with a large Alawite population. The below COI therefore refers to HTS treatment of people under its control in general.

11.2.2 The EUAA April 2024 country guidance report on Syria stated: ‘In territory controlled by HTS, a number of individuals were targeted based on allegations of collaboration with the GoS [Government of Syria]. Several executions and detentions on these grounds were reported in 2020, 2021

<sup>91</sup> The Guardian, [...Ahmed al-Sharaa made transitional president of Syria](#), 29 January 2025

<sup>92</sup> International Crisis Group, [What Lies in Store for Syria...](#), 25 April 2025

<sup>93</sup> Al-Monitor, [About](#), no date

<sup>94</sup> Al-Monitor, [What we know about Syria's new government](#), 30 March 2025

<sup>95</sup> Al Jazeera, [Taking Syria: The opposition's battles shown in 11 maps...](#), 8 December 2024

and 2022. Unclaimed assassinations, reported in autumn 2020 in Rural Damascus, targeted prominent civilian figures who had mediated reconciliation deals between the GoS and opposition fighters.<sup>96</sup>

11.2.3 The USSD 2023 Report stated that ‘HTS violently oppressed and discriminated against members of all non-Sunni Arab ethnic minorities in the territories it held.’<sup>97</sup> No additional information was provided regarding the nature, scale or extent of the oppression or discrimination.

11.2.4 A 3 August 2023 blog post by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a ‘nonprofit policy research organization’<sup>98</sup>, stated that:

‘... While HTS presents itself as less ideologically extreme than al Qaeda or ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], the brutal measures HTS uses to maintain control over its territory are a far cry from the benevolent, citizen-led government shown on its media outlets ...

‘... HTS has shown limited tolerance for political dissent, reacting swiftly and harshly to any protests or civilian complaints. The group has been criticized for its arrest and torture of ... political opponents ...

‘... [HTS] has made extensive attempts at framing itself as a moderate force worthy of international support and is unlikely to undermine those efforts intentionally ...

‘However, HTS’s authoritarian style of governance poses a threat to the local population. HTS has been swift in combating political and religious dissent among the residents of the territory it controls. Civilians living in HTS-controlled territory face similar dangers to those living under authoritarian rule such as the threat of extrajudicial killings, police torture, and false imprisonment. HTS has reacted harshly to protests and will likely continue to crack down on political dissent in areas it controls.’<sup>99</sup>

11.2.5 The UNHRC has consistently documented human rights violations committed by HTS in a series of reports by its Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. The Commission is mandated ‘to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law since March 2011 in the Syrian Arab Republic and to present public reports on its findings’<sup>100</sup>. A 2023 UNHRC report, ‘based on 254 interviews conducted by the Commission between January 2020 and April 2023’<sup>101</sup>, stated that:

‘... The Commission has previously documented ... enforced disappearances and incommunicado detention, torture and ill-treatment, forms of sexual violence and death in detention of persons in HTS custody...

‘... According to one former HTS detainee at the facility where he was detained (branch 77), there was a “welcome” practice for detainees who had not yet “confessed” to the charges against them – they would be tortured for seven days ...

‘Detainees also reported sexual violence, corroborating previously

<sup>96</sup> EUAA, [Country Guidance: Syria](#) (page 64), 15 April 2024

<sup>97</sup> USSD, [Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria](#) (section 6), 2024

<sup>98</sup> CSIS, [About CSIS](#), no date

<sup>99</sup> CSIS, [Examining Extremism: Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham \(HTS\)](#), 3 August 2023

<sup>100</sup> UNHRC, [Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic](#), no date

<sup>101</sup> UNHRC, [...Torture and ill-treatment... 2020-2023](#) (page 4), 10 July 2023



established patterns ...

‘Former detainees ... described the facilities as “secret prisons,” where detainees were confined to their cells, neither provided with adequate food nor medical care, denied access to legal counsel and, except in one case, also denied contact with their families ...

‘Those detained included activists, media workers and others critical of HTS ...

‘The Commission has previously found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that HTS members committed the war crime of carrying out executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court. It continues to receive multiple, consistent, and credible reports of ongoing execution of detainees by HTS ...’<sup>102</sup>

- 11.2.6 A February 2024 UNHRC report, covering the period from 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2023 and based on 528 interviews<sup>103</sup>, stated that ‘The Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that HTS members continued to commit acts that may amount to the war crimes of torture and cruel treatment and unlawful deprivation of liberty, including in a manner tantamount to enforced disappearance ...

‘The Commission also received credible reports indicating that HTS continued to carry out executions based on summary trials and in secrecy.’<sup>104</sup>

- 11.2.7 An August 2024 UNHRC report, covering the period 1 January 2024 to 30 June 2024 and based on 385 interviews<sup>105</sup>, stated that:

‘Since February, Syrians have been protesting against practices by Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in the north-west, including torture and death in detention ...

‘... Mr. Al-Julani publicly acknowledged the use of “prohibited and severe means of pressure on the detainees” and reportedly pledged to investigate and to hold those responsible accountable. While demonstrations initially unfolded peacefully, with little or no interference, HTS later began using force, assaulting and arresting protestors ...

‘HTS detained men, women, and children as young as seven. They included civilians detained for criticizing HTS ... as well as victims of crime arrested for attempting to pursue justice ...

‘During the reporting period, methods of torture ... were documented in the following detention facilities: Harem prison, prisons in Sarmada including the courthouse prison and Hakim prison (C-11 branch), Al-Dana police station, the HTS criminal security branch, and the prosecutor’s office building in the city of Idlib, and the prosecutor’s office building in the city of Idlib...

‘A former detainee released in 2024 from the Sarmada courthouse prison described a dedicated room in the prison where detainees were tortured ...

‘... In one case, food deprivation had been used as a punishment ... and

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<sup>102</sup> UNHRC, [...Torture and ill-treatment... 2020-2023](#) (pages 23-25), 10 July 2023

<sup>103</sup> UNHRC, [Report... Independent International Commission of Inquiry...](#) (page 2), 9 February 2024

<sup>104</sup> UNHRC, [Report... Independent International Commission of Inquiry...](#) (page 12), 9 February 2024

<sup>105</sup> UNHRC, [Report... Independent International Commission of Inquiry](#) (page 2), 12 August 2024

denial of medical attention and of medication was reportedly used as punishment ... Children, including girls, were detained with adults ...

'Fair trial guarantees were lacking. All detainees accused in security-related cases documented by the Commission were barred from legal representation ...

'Four executions of detainees by HTS were documented. Three men were former fighters and one was a civilian; all were accused of security-related offences ... HTS ... confirmed the executions...

'Numerous allegations were received regarding the execution of other civilians, including women, reportedly as punishment for adultery, prostitution and murder. Investigations are ongoing...

'The Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that HTS members continued to commit acts of torture and cruel treatment, as well as passing sentences and carrying out executions without a previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court affording all judicial guarantees ... there are reasonable grounds to believe that HTS members may have committed acts tantamount to enforced disappearance.'<sup>106</sup>

- 11.2.8 For information covering the period between the beginning of 2012 and December 2021, see the 2022 SNHR report: [The Most Notable Hay'at Tahrir al Sham Violations Since the Establishment of Jabhat al Nusra to Date](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## **12. Alawites and (perceived) Assadists after the fall of the Assad regime**

### **12.1 Fear of reprisals**

- 12.1.1 On 10 December 2024, Voice of America, a US international broadcaster<sup>107</sup>, reported that:

'... [C]oncerns persist that once the rebels solidify their control over the country, they may turn against the Alawite community because of its perceived ties to the former Syrian regime ...

'David Adesnik, vice president of research at the Washington-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said ...

“A key question is whether HTS considers Assad’s identity as an Alawite to be a cause of his extreme brutality ...”<sup>108</sup>

- 12.1.2 On 15 December 2024, The Guardian reported that ‘... [M]ost Alawites were... afraid of what was to come ... They were afraid rebels would retaliate against Alawites for their perceived association with the Assad regime ...’<sup>109</sup>

- 12.1.3 In a 20 December 2024 article discussing minority groups in post-Assad Syria, the Atlantic Council, an organisation promoting ‘constructive leadership and engagement in international affairs’<sup>110</sup>, noted that ‘The Alawites ... remain wary of the new leaders’ promises, balancing a cautious optimism with deep-seated concerns about potential reprisals ... some within

<sup>106</sup> UNHRC, [Report... Independent International Commission...](#) (pages 4, 11-13), 12 August 2024

<sup>107</sup> Voice of America, [About](#), no date

<sup>108</sup> Voice of America, [Syria post-Assad: Alawite minority faces uncertainty...](#), 10 December 2024

<sup>109</sup> The Guardian, [‘Celebrating the unknown’: Syrian Alawites fear for future...](#), 15 December 2024

<sup>110</sup> Atlantic Council, [About](#), no date

the community have distanced themselves publicly from Assad, framing the current transition as an opportunity for a fresh start and a shared national future ...<sup>111</sup>

- 12.1.4 On 26 December 2024, Middle East Eye reported that: ‘Assad, his family and many senior members of his government and security forces are Alawi ... That association has prompted fears in the community that they will be targeted by Syria's new authorities...

‘Ali, an Alawi fitness coach in Mezzeh 86, said the community does not feel particularly safe now. “We're afraid of people taking out vendettas with the former regime on us.”<sup>112</sup>

- 12.1.5 On 13 January 2025, France24 quoted an Alawite interviewee: “I don’t feel like a citizen ... I don’t have the right to be happy. We’re labelled as heretics ... We’ve all been branded as pro-Assad. Many massacres he committed were portrayed as Alawites killing Sunnis. Now, they want to kill us.”<sup>113</sup>

- 12.1.6 In Gregory Waters’ 12 February 2025 article, the interviewee is quoted as stating ‘There is fear here but it is fear from the unknown, we don’t know what will happen in the future but we are optimistic ... I think it is what the regime did over 60 years trying to separate us. People ... only know what the regime said about the opposition, that they are all terrorists and sectarian, but it isn’t the truth ... People are still afraid. Every rumor triggers new fears of a massacre or war between sects.’<sup>114</sup>

- 12.1.7 On 16 February 2025, The Guardian reported that:

‘Homs’ Alawites, including many who once filled the ranks of Assad’s army and security forces, say they are terrified of reprisal attacks...

“We live in constant fear and instability now,” said Abu Mohammed, an Alawite former three-star captain in Assad’s army.

‘... [M]any of the lower-ranking officers and security personnel who could not afford to leave the country are now in hiding, either in Homs or the nearby Alawite heartland of Latakia ...’<sup>115</sup>

- 12.1.8 See also section 1.3.2 of the European Union Asylum Agency’s (EUAA) March 2025 [COI Report - Syria: Country Focus](#). However, refer to the relevant footnote(s) as that report and this note have used the same or similar sources and reports in places.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 12.2 HTS rhetoric regarding Alawites and (perceived) Assadists

- 12.2.1 On 9 December 2024, Reuters reported that ‘The rebel alliance, led by HTS, made a point of offering clemency for members of the security forces when it seized Aleppo ...’<sup>116</sup>

- 12.2.2 On 10 December 2024, The Guardian reported that: ‘... Ahmed al-Sharaa, has offered rewards for senior army and intelligence officers involved in war

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<sup>111</sup> Atlantic Council, [What will minority and women's rights look like...](#), 20 December 2024

<sup>112</sup> Middle East Eye, [Disinformation stokes Alawi unease...](#), 26 December 2024

<sup>113</sup> France24, [...The Alawite community refuses to pay for Assad's crimes](#), 13 January 2025

<sup>114</sup> Gregory Waters, [An Alawite Voice From Homs City](#), 12 February 2025

<sup>115</sup> The Guardian, [‘We live in constant fear’: Alawites in Syria's Homs terrified...](#), 16 February 2025

<sup>116</sup> Reuters, [Assad's fall in Syria weakens Iran but may fuel Islamist resurgence](#), 9 December 2024



crimes ... “We will not hesitate to hold accountable the criminals, murderers, security and army officers involved in torturing the Syrian people,” Sharaa ... said in a statement on the Telegram messaging app on Tuesday.’<sup>117</sup>

12.2.3 On 10 December 2024, Voice of America reported that:

‘... [S]tatements by HTS chief Abu Mohammad al-Golani have been well-received among the Alawites. Golani told CNN on Friday, “No one has the right to erase another group. These sects have coexisted in this region for hundreds of years, and no one has the right to eliminate them.”

“Alawite community leaders have also said positive things after the fall of the regime, but it is still the beginning,” ... [Anwar al-Bunni, a prominent Syrian human rights lawyer] said.’<sup>118</sup>

12.2.4 On 14 December 2024, Enab Baladi, a Syrian non-profit media organisation<sup>119</sup>, reported that: ‘... Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Mohammad al-Jolani), stated that there would be no amnesty for those involved in torturing and executing detainees ...’<sup>120</sup>

12.2.5 On 15 December 2024, The Guardian reported that:

‘... [M]ore than a dozen ... Alawite people with whom the Guardian spoke, said HTS’s behaviour and statements so far had been encouraging. Early on, the rebel group had published statements – including one issued directly to the Alawite community – that said religious minorities’ rights would be respected.

‘Senior HTS officials have held meetings with Alawite community notables to allay their fears, and the group’s leader, Ahmad al-Sharaa, has said that the only form of revenge will be the pursuit through court of those suspected of war crimes.’<sup>121</sup>

12.2.6 On 19 December 2024, Al Jazeera reported that ‘Syria’s new rulers have pledged to create special tribunals for those who have “committed crimes against Syrians” under deposed President Bashar al-Assad’s regime ...’<sup>122</sup>

12.2.7 In its 20 December 2024 article, the Atlantic Council noted that: ‘... [T]he situation remains... nuanced with the Alawite community. The new government refrained from delivering targeted reassurances to the Alawites, instead embedding its messages of justice and reconciliation within broader declarations. The new authorities emphasized that no one would face retribution without due process and clear evidence of wrongdoing.’<sup>123</sup>

12.2.8 On 21 December 2024, Associated Press reported that: ‘... HTS ... has vowed not to discriminate against any religion ... and it has denounced revenge killings ... HTS has vowed to gather evidence and hold trials in a special court against former officials who oversaw, or worked in, Assad’s notorious prisons. It has also promised amnesty for other government workers and former members of the military, some of whom have started

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<sup>117</sup> The Guardian, [...reward for details of Assad officials involved in war crimes](#), 10 December 2024

<sup>118</sup> Voice of America, [Syria post-Assad: Alawite minority faces uncertainty...](#), 10 December 2024

<sup>119</sup> Enab Baladi, [About](#), no date

<sup>120</sup> Enab Baladi, [Latakia: Ambush claims lives of three...](#), 14 December 2024

<sup>121</sup> The Guardian, [‘Celebrating the unknown’: Syrian Alawites fear for future...](#), 15 December 2024

<sup>122</sup> Al Jazeera, [Syria’s interim gov’t pledges justice, jobs and security in ‘new era’](#), 19 December 2024

<sup>123</sup> Atlantic Council, [What will minority and women’s rights look like...](#), 20 December 2024

handing in their weapons ...<sup>124</sup>

12.2.9 On 22 December 2024, the BBC reported: “Until now, we are OK. We are talking to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and they are respectful...” said Mohammad [an Alawite interviewee] ... HTS and its allies said those from the deposed regime who had been involved in torture and killings would be held to account, although it is unclear so far what form that justice will take.<sup>125</sup>

12.2.10 In a 31 December 2024 article, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy stated that ‘So far, HTS has consistently stated that Alawites will be part of the new Syria, that there will be no reprisals against them, and that those involved in Assad-regime crimes will be held accountable via the justice system, not vigilantism ...’<sup>126</sup>

12.2.11 In a 17 January 2025 article, SJAC stated that:

‘... al-Sharaa begins to discuss the amnesty that Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) offered to soldiers of the Assad government on December 9<sup>th</sup> [2024]. According to al-Sharaa ... Assad’s soldiers were able to surrender without fear ... he stated, “We gave people our word and we cannot go back on it now.”

‘... While he provides examples of who should be prosecuted on multiple occasions, he ultimately states that the amnesty must be comprehensive, and, “If the accused was among those included in the wartime amnesty, then our moral, religious, and logical duty is to say that we no longer have a claim against this person.”’<sup>127</sup>

12.2.12 On 23 January 2025, the Los Angeles Times reported that:

‘Although the new government seems willing to listen to Alawite concerns, there’s a lingering resentment, with many pointing to the community’s complicity in torture and war crimes - whether in the security services or gangs of thugs known as the shabiha - over the 14 years of the conflict.

“The things that the people of this area did to us Sunnis, it would make you cry,” said Abu Stayf, a 37-year-old member of the Hayat Tahrir al Sham .... He spoke of Alawite police officers in the past beheading Sunni victims ... “We should be stomping on their heads for what they did, but Allah is forgiving - and so are we.”

‘... The interim government has promised amnesty to those who served in the Syrian army ... At the same time, it said it will hold accountable those implicated in “spilling Syrian blood.”

“Look, we’re treating them better than they ever treated us,” said Moaz Abu Ahmad, a 27-year-old clerk taking down soldiers’ information for the new authorities ...

“But anyone involved in bloodshed and thuggery, those people will be held responsible - but in a legal way,” the clerk said.

‘Yet there is little clarity on what that means ...’<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Associated Press, [Sectarian violence in Syria has been less intense...](#), 21 December 2024

<sup>125</sup> BBC, [Syria's minorities seek security as country charts new future](#), 22 December 2024

<sup>126</sup> Washington Institute, [Alawites Under Threat in Syria?](#), 31 December 2024

<sup>127</sup> SJAC, [Amnesty & Accountability: Justice in post-Assad Syria](#), 17 January 2025

<sup>128</sup> Los Angeles Times, [Alawites wary as a post-Assad Syria takes shape](#), 23 January 2025

12.2.13 On 16 February 2025, The Guardian reported on a conversation between armed guards at the Homs political security directorate:

‘They clashed ... about whether they should be allowed to torture officers from the deposed regime of Bashar al-Assad before any accused of crimes face trial ...

“I just want to meet one of them and torture them as they did to me,” ...

“If you saw someone who tortured your father, your brother, your loved one, can you really say you would deal with them peacefully?” ... He only wanted to hurt those who had harmed his family, he said, although he conceded he would not recognise their names or faces if he passed them on the street ...

‘Junaid [one of the guards] was quick to say he had no issue with the Alawite people, but he hoped to see justice served “for those who committed crimes” ...

“The good Alawites who committed no crimes can live peacefully, as long as they don’t establish sleeper cells,” he said ... From the perspective of Homs’ Sunnis, the source of the problem was remnants of the former regime ...

“Our goal is to stop the fighting,” said Abu Salem Hawash, a HTS fighter standing guard ...

‘Another fighter, Abu Mossah Kermaz, said he was among the forces raiding Alawite homes, and was adamant that suggestions of reprisal attacks were lies. The militants had been careful to treat people with respect when they went inside looking for people, he said, adding that they had directed all the women in the house to one room and asked homeowners to keep hold of their valuable items and electronics.

“The new government will solve all these problems soon, god willing,” he added. What the new authority in Damascus may do other than target remnants of the former regime remained unclear.’<sup>129</sup>

12.2.14 See also section 1.3.2 of the European Union Asylum Agency’s (EUAA) March 2025 [COI Report - Syria: Country Focus](#). However, refer to the relevant footnote(s) as that report and this note have used the same or similar sources and reports in places.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 12.3 HTS treatment of Alawites and (perceived) Assadists

12.3.1 On 8 December 2024, Reuters reported that: ‘After taking over Homs, rebels searched government offices and security branches in the city but did not ransack them or destroy property, residents said. ... [An Alawite Syrian] said the way the rebels had so far acted, notably in Homs, a city with a large Alawite population, had eased the concerns of many in the region ...’<sup>130</sup>

12.3.2 On 9 December 2024, Reuters reported that:

‘... [R]ebels who toppled Syria’s Bashar al-Assad met elders in the former president’s Alawite hometown on Monday ... in what residents said was an encouraging sign of tolerance ...

‘The rebel delegation visited ... Qardaha ... meeting with dozens of religious

<sup>129</sup> The Guardian, [‘We live in constant fear’: Alawites in Syria’s Homs terrified...](#), 16 February 2025

<sup>130</sup> Reuters, [Assad loyalists shaken by his fall, some relieved by lack of violence](#), 8 December 2024

men, elders and others at the town hall for a discussion, before the Alawite notables signed a statement of support ...

“We affirm the unity of the Syrian Arab Republic's territory and religious and cultural diversity and diversity of thought,” said the statement signed by around 30 of the town's notables. It was not signed by the rebels ...

‘One resident ... said the discussion had helped to assuage the fears of the local population ...’<sup>131</sup>

- 12.3.3 On 16 December 2024, the BBC reported on the treatment of an Alawite woman named Noor by HTS security officers in Latakia. She had requested their help after being forced out of her home by armed men not belonging to HTS:

“Most of the oppressed that come with complaints are from two sects, the Sunni and the Alawite. We do not differentiate...” [said the HTS security officer]...

‘...at Noor's apartment ... half a dozen armed HTS men hurry up the stairs...

‘The woman behind the door ... and her family are ordered to leave ...

“When I went to HTS today I was terrified,” says Noor. “Their appearance was so intimidating and frightening. Honestly, though, they were very nice.”<sup>132</sup>

- 12.3.4 A 19 December 2024 article in The New Arab, a ‘non-partisan news outlet that focuses on issues of democracy, social justice and human rights’,<sup>133</sup> stated:

‘The Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS)-led Military Operations Command in Syria has opened a large number of “reconciliation centres” for former personnel from the forces of the ousted Assad regime to hand in their weapons and receive temporary IDs affording them protection ...

‘After handing in all their documents, weapons and equipment they will receive three-month ID cards which exempt them from legal prosecution ...

‘Those who refused to comply or provided false or incomplete information would face legal action, they warned.

‘The Military Operations Command began opening these centres on 6 December [2024], first in Aleppo ...

‘Reconciliation centres have also been opened in Latakia, Tartous, Homs, Hama, Deir az-Zour and Idlib provinces.’<sup>134</sup>

- 12.3.5 In its 20 December 2024 article, the Atlantic Council noted that: ‘The deployment of rebel forces in Latakia and its surrounding mountains occurred without notable violence, with explicit orders to safeguard public property and prevent retaliatory attacks. Such actions suggest an effort to mitigate fears of collective punishment among Alawites ...’<sup>135</sup>

- 12.3.6 On 21 December 2024, Associated Press reported that: ‘... HTS has worked

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<sup>131</sup> Reuters, [...Syrian rebels win statement of support](#), 9 December 2024

<sup>132</sup> BBC, [Fear of a reckoning simmers in Assad's Alawite heartland](#), 16 December 2024

<sup>133</sup> The New Arab, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>134</sup> The New Arab, [Reconciliation centres' for Assad regime personnel...](#), 19 December 2025

<sup>135</sup> Atlantic Council, [What will minority and women's rights look like...](#), 20 December 2024

to reduce tensions in villages where revenge killings - as well as looting and harassment - have taken place, according to local activists ... HTS hosted a meeting over the weekend that brought together Sunni and Alawite dignitaries from nearby villages ... By the end of the meeting, the participants reconciled and agreed to end any acts of violence ...<sup>136</sup>

12.3.7 On 25 December 2024, Voice of America reported that: 'Alawite protests ... took place along the coast of Syria, in the city of Homs and the Hama countryside. Some called for the release of soldiers from the former Syrian army now imprisoned by the HTS. At least one protester was killed and five were wounded in Homs by HTS forces suppressing the demonstration, said the Syrian Observatory. In response to the protests, HTS imposed a curfew from 6 p.m. until 8 a.m. ...'<sup>137</sup>

12.3.8 On 26 December 2024, Middle East Eye noted that:

'On Wednesday night [25 December 2024], scores of youths - some armed - gathered in Mezzeh 86's streets [a suburb of Damascus], banging on the shutters of shops and demanding rights for the Alawi community.

'In response, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham ... deployed fighters to the area, firing their guns in the air to disperse the crowd.

'Talks with Alawi elders helped calm the situation, and eventually everyone went back to their homes ...'<sup>138</sup>

12.3.9 On 13 January 2025, France24 reported that:

'[A] former Syrian soldier claims he was stopped a few days ago at a checkpoint near the village of Khirbet al-Ma'zah, close to ... Tartus.

"They told me, 'You're an Alawite pig!' ..."

'... Ali recounted being dragged off a bus by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham ... militants while on his way to seek the promised amnesty for ex-regime soldiers who had not committed acts of bloodshed or torture ... he described being tied up, detained and beaten with fists, feet and iron bars ... [for] five hours ... before being dumped on the roadside ...

'... "There may be isolated incidents at checkpoints, but these are rare," said Rahim Abu Mahmoud, an HTS official overseeing soldier reintegration in Tartus. "We make no distinctions between communities and our relations are good with everyone. Our issue is with those who have not regularised their status or hidden weapons. Others have nothing to be scared of ..."

'Reports of insults, harassment, punitive raids, disappearances and murders have proliferated on social media since Assad's fall. Videos allegedly showing HTS fighters humiliating, beating, or inciting violence against Alawites circulate without verification ...'<sup>139</sup>

12.3.10 In a 21 January 2025 report, the Middle East Institute, a non-partisan think tank dedicated to the study of the Middle East<sup>140</sup>, shared examples of security operations in Alawite communities:

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<sup>136</sup> Associated Press, [Sectarian violence in Syria has been less intense...](#), 21 December 2024

<sup>137</sup> Voice of America, [At least 6 fighters killed in Syria in clashes...](#), 25 December 2024

<sup>138</sup> Middle East Eye, [Disinformation stokes Alawi unease...](#), 26 December 2024

<sup>139</sup> France24, [...The Alawite community refuses to pay for Assad's crimes](#), 13 January 2025

<sup>140</sup> Middle East Institute, [About](#), no date

‘... [O]n the afternoon of Dec. 25 [2024] ... Security forces began a three-day operation... [in Khirbet Maazah in Tartous, ‘home to many ex-regime militia members’<sup>141</sup>] and in the bordering villages ... that saw shoot-outs in the streets ... According to several local sources, Red Bands [HTS special forces] fighters raided homes ... in one case allegedly stealing valuables. Several civilians were wounded in the fighting, all of whom were quickly transported to Tartous’ hospital by the local HTS commander.

‘Despite ... reports from locals of the use of sectarian language and intimidation by Red Bands soldiers ... Alawites living in the surrounding villages said that the security forces stationed there were polite and respectful.

‘... [The] Most troublesome have been the foreign fighter groups within the DMO [Department of Military Operations] and HTS’s elite “Red Bands” unit, which leads many of the new government’s raids. Both of these groups are regularly accused of committing violations (usually harassment and intimidation, and rarely murders) against Alawites in the communities in which they are operating.

‘...[A] group of local forces ... raided four villages along the Talkalakh-Tartous border on Jan. 17. Local Facebook pages claimed that, while some homes were searched “respectfully,” others were looted, men beaten, and 21 detained. During the raid some locals made calls to the Tartous General Security, which sent several trucks of their own members and forced the Talkalakh unit to leave. Most of the detained men were then released two days later.

‘... [I]n Tartous ... security forces raided ... Beit Nour al-Deen, where locals reported that HTS fighters vandalized some homes and shouted sectarian slurs at their occupants, yet, as one local told the author, “in spite of all the terror at first, the HTS individuals are all remembered by their good manners and consideration when it comes to most civilians.”’<sup>142</sup>

12.3.11 The same source summarised, regarding human rights violations committed by members of HTS security forces, that:

‘Rumors of ... sectarian-motivated violations by Syria’s new security forces ... have been widespread since Dec. 9 [2024] ... Many of these rumors are impossible to verify, while others are quickly disproven by fact-checking organizations ...

‘Locals’ experiences ... have not been universal, with many of the confirmed violations appearing to stem more from a lack of professionalism when detaining wanted people than from explicitly sectarian motivations ... some rank-and-file soldiers and local commanders have engaged in sectarian-based harassment and kidnappings of Alawite civilians.

‘... [T]he bulk of violations committed by security forces across Syria seem to be directed toward specific ex-regime elements ... these attacks have sectarian undercurrents, with anti-Alawi slurs being directed at detained men, while other Alawite civilians even in the same village are left alone.

‘... [B]eating detainees and chanting sectarian slurs at former regime

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<sup>141</sup> Middle East Institute, [Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria](#), 21 January 2025

<sup>142</sup> Middle East Institute, [Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria](#), 21 January 2025



elements appear to be the most prevalent violations. However ... Sunnis and even detained opposition fighters have been filmed being beaten while being arrested. The ubiquitousness ... suggests it is less an issue of sectarianism and more a lack of professionalism among parts of the police.

‘... In general, security force violations are targeted against men who are believed to have committed crimes ... rather than any Alawite that soldiers come across. The most egregious cases ... are the kidnappings and executions of ex-regime members.

‘... It is only in the Alawite communities where the hunt for criminals has resulted in recurring violations against civilians. Yet as one Alawite in Tartous told the author, “We are documenting individual cases when we expected massacres.”

‘... [V]ariance in experiences across Alawi regions is by itself strong evidence that the new government is not pursuing a blanket policy of sectarian revenge or punishment against Alawites ... “cases of violations are followed up by intense outreach via HTS authorities, indicating that these are individual actions... If they really wanted to kill us Alawites, why didn’t they kill civilians in Maazah?” [quoting an Alawite from near Khirbet Maazah]’<sup>143</sup>

#### 12.3.12 The same source also stated that:

‘... [C]onditions in the cities of Latakia and Jableh are by all accounts good, with locals describing security forces as polite and well-behaved, while the HTS-assigned officials (many of whom are from these cities) have been deeply engaged in interfaith efforts since day one.

‘... [M]en from Tartous who spoke of a rise in crime in the city also highlighted the quick response of security forces in dealing with criminals. Similar stories have been shared online in Latakia and rural Hama, where men kidnapped or extorted by criminals were able to quickly engage the support of the General Security Department ... Locals in [rural east Hama] ... have consistently spoken highly of their new security officers and their rapid response and kind treatment ... Videos and statements have been shared online showing local commanders scolding ... those who “steal under the pretext of sectarianism” (e.g. claiming the victims are regime criminals).

‘... The use of local commanders from the SNA [Syrian National Army] in Homs seems to be a large factor in that governorate’s noticeably worse security situation ... ex-SNA commanders ... are ... accused by locals of committing crimes against Alawite civilians ...’<sup>144</sup>

#### 12.3.13 In a 22 January 2025 report covering the period 8 December 2024 to 15 January 2025, SJAC stated that: ‘... [M]ultiple civilians living in ethnically diverse areas of Hama and Tartous governorates ... claimed that the HTS-affiliated security forces they encountered were generally “respectful” as they searched homes during combing campaigns and [were] responsive to security concerns ...’<sup>145</sup>

#### 12.3.14 However, the same source also stated that:

‘The HTS-affiliated General Security conducted operations ... in Homs,

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<sup>143</sup> Middle East Institute, [Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria](#), 21 January 2025

<sup>144</sup> Middle East Institute, [Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria](#), 21 January 2025

<sup>145</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria December 2024 - January 2025](#), 22 January 2025

Hama, and Rif Dimashq ... during the reporting period, looking for weapons and wanted individuals who were affiliated with the Assad government military or intelligence ... SJAC received some reports that General Security personnel treated civilians poorly while searching homes (breaking or stealing items).

'HTS also conducted similar operations in Qamhana (Hama governorate), a city known for its ... involvement in the former government's armed forces. HTS's General Security ... arrested several people who refused to turn over their weapons. Video footage circulated on social media, showing security personnel beating some of the men detained ... with what appear to be a baton and a stun gun ...

'... HTS has released many of those arrested during its combing operations, on the pretext that their "hands were not stained with blood" (had not killed people or committed other serious offenses)...<sup>146</sup>

12.3.15 On 23 January 2025, the Los Angeles Times reported that:

'Alawites ... whisper of vigilante attacks and neighbors forced to flee their homes at gunpoint. Across social media, activist groups have cropped up claiming to document sectarian score-settling - kidnappings, killings, expulsions, robberies - which they fear were perpetrated by factions working with the new ruling authorities ...

'Hayat Tahrir al Sham ... insist that incidents targeting Alawites are not a matter of official policy but the fault of undisciplined individuals or factions, and that the interim government would punish perpetrators. Still, critics say there's little accountability, with victims left in limbo between the kaleidoscope of jihadi groups working with the new government and Hayat Tahrir al Sham's inability to police everywhere....<sup>147</sup>

12.3.16 The same source also reported that:

'Hayat Tahrir al Sham has run dragnets to pick up those unwilling to surrender. Authorities arrested almost 2,000 people in Homs city in a five-day campaign this month targeting "criminals who have harmed the Syrian people for 13 years and had not handed over their weapons in [reconciliation] centers," according to a government statement.

"A number of suspects were arrested, and we transferred those proved to have committed crimes to the judiciary and released a number of others," it said.<sup>148</sup>

12.3.17 The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) is 'an independent and impartial UK-based human rights organisation' which 'monitors, documents and publishes the daily developments within Syria in order to provide an objective understanding of the situation'. Its website states that it 'produces its reports using multiple sources, such as video evidence and testimonies, as well as medical, military and field reports'<sup>149</sup>, however no further information is given regarding its sources and methodology. On 28 January 2025, SOHR stated:

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<sup>146</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria December 2024 - January 2025](#), 22 January 2025

<sup>147</sup> Los Angeles Times, [Alawites wary as a post-Assad Syria takes shape](#), 23 January 2025

<sup>148</sup> Los Angeles Times, [Alawites wary as a post-Assad Syria takes shape](#), 23 January 2025

<sup>149</sup> SOHR, [About Us](#), no date



‘... [V]illages and towns inhabited by civilians of the Alawite ... communities in Homs countryside have experienced a dramatic increase in violations, crimes and extrajudicial executions against civilians.

‘... [T]he Military Operations Administration arrested tens of gunmen who participated in the security campaigns which were launched in Homs countryside for “committing violations in different village in the northern and western countryside, and it promised to hold accountable the gunmen who attacked religious symbols.”<sup>150</sup>

12.3.18 On 30 January 2025, New Lines Magazine reported that

‘Since the HTS-led takeover of most of the country, much concern has been voiced by the international community and Syrian civil society about possible acts of vengeance or the targeting of minorities, which were long seen as having enjoyed preferential treatment from the former regime.

‘Thus far, such incidents seem isolated. The current government seems to be quietly taking action against perpetrators, though a culture restrained by decades of heavy-handed media restrictions means it is difficult to ascertain facts on the ground in a timely manner.’<sup>151</sup>

12.3.19 On 1 February 2025, France24 reported on the killing of 10 people in an Alawite village, stating that: ‘Syrian newspaper Al-Watan, quoting a security source in Hama, said security forces “are surrounding the Arzah area to hunt the criminals” behind the killings.’<sup>152</sup>

12.3.20 On 3 February 2025, SNHR reported on the death of 3 people in Homs governorate, who had been arrested due to affiliation with the former regime:

‘... [O]n January 29, 2025, personnel from the General Security Directorate of Syria’s transitional government detained ... Mohammad Louay Mohammad Talal Tayyara, from... Homs city. According to ... sources close to his family, he was detained on charges of having previously belonged to the National Defense Forces affiliated with the deposed Assad regime ... He was subsequently taken to a detention center ... one day after his arrest, his family received notification of his death inside the detention center. When his body was returned to his mother ... severe signs of torture were evident... According to accounts gathered by SNHR, Mohammad was in good health at the time of his arrest ...

‘[According to] an official statement issued ... by the General Security Directorate on February 1, 2025, via the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) ... Mohammad Tayyara was arrested on the basis of a warrant issued by the Public Prosecutor’s Office for failing to resolve his legal status and for possessing unauthorized weapons. The statement added that during his detention, violations were committed by some security personnel responsible for his transfer, which led to his death. It also announced that a formal investigation had been launched under the supervision of the Public Prosecutor’s Office and that all the individuals involved had been arrested.

‘... On ... January 30, 2025, the body of Ridwan Hussein Mohammad ... from al-Shnyah village in western rural Homs, was returned to his family ... five days after he was detained by General Security Directorate personnel

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<sup>150</sup> SOHR, [With Homs topping the list...](#), 28 January 2025

<sup>151</sup> New Lines Magazine, [Life Returns to a Syrian Border Town ...](#), 30 Jan 2025

<sup>152</sup> France24, [Gunmen in Syria kill at least 10 in Alawite village, war monitor says](#), 1 February 2025

on January 25, 2025, during a security campaign targeting former members of the Assad regime's forces. Ridwan had previously volunteered with the Homs branch of the Assad regime's Military Security Intelligence Directorate. According to sources close to his family, he was healthy when he was detained, but when his body was returned to them, it bore gunshot wounds to the head and signs of torture.

'... [T]he body of Badr Mohi Sqour, from al-Kanisa village in western rural Homs governorate, was returned to his family on ... February 1, 2025 ... 10 days after he was detained by General Security Directorate personnel on January 22, 2025, during a security campaign targeting former members of the Assad regime's forces. According to the information we obtained, Sqour was healthy when he was detained, but when his body was returned to his family, it bore signs of torture and gunshot wounds.'<sup>153</sup>

12.3.21 On 8 February 2025, SOHR reported that:

'Three people from Al-Zahraa neighborhood [in Homs province] were directly shot dead ... after they were arrested by the General Security Administration of Military Operations Administration during the security campaign ... in Homs City.

'According to reliable SOHR sources, the three detainees are Alawite ...

'The Syrian Observatory has documented the death of 19 people, mostly from Homs province, under torture in prisons and security centres of the Military Operations Administration since the fall of Al-Assad regime, after having been arrested during security campaigns and at checkpoints.'<sup>154</sup>

12.3.22 On 11 February 2025, SOHR reported that

'Yesterday... the Military Operations Administration and the General Security carried out a security campaign ... in western Rif Dimashq, in search of suspects ... refusing to undergo reconciliation...

'According to residents, the members showed aggressive behavior, made residents imitate sounds of animals and prevented filming, where some members put a paper in pockets of people during the search, which instructs them to leave the area during 48 hours.'<sup>155</sup>

12.3.23 On 12 February 2025, International Politics and Security (IPS), an online journal<sup>156</sup>, stated that:

'... HTS officially promised protection and non-discrimination, repeatedly emphasising that ... no one should fear revenge. At the grassroots level, however, these promises appear to have barely resonated. Since 8 December [2024], attacks on Alawites are on the rise ... Countless reports and photos show armed fighters affronting people in the Syrian coastal region ... Academics, civil servants and prominent religious figures are being abducted or found dead.

'The increasing violence reached a climax on 23 January 2025 when an operation was initiated in Homs to persecute the "remnants of the regime" ... HTS denies these allegations, claiming that they are only isolated cases.

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<sup>153</sup> SNHR, [SNHR Condemns Torture, Death of Three Detainees...](#), 3 February 2025

<sup>154</sup> SOHR, [Three Alawite people of one family "field executed"...](#), 8 February 2025

<sup>155</sup> SOHR, [To pursue criminals and wanted individuals...](#), 11 February 2025

<sup>156</sup> IPS, [About](#), no date

Critics ... regard this as an attempt to mask the true extent of persecution.<sup>157</sup>

12.3.24 On 12 February 2025, Gregory Waters quoted an Alawite interviewee:

‘When the new army came to our neighborhood [in Homs], they searched every house for weapons and wanted people, they were very kind and polite and didn’t harm us at all in words or actions, and I heard this from other neighborhoods too. They had a list of names and were searching for weapons. Regarding men who were taken and executed ... I believe that most of these men were criminals ... there was a military engineer mistaken for a criminal with the same name, and they executed the innocent one.

‘... There were violations and abuses by some security commanders, but when people spread accusations against these men the government responded and removed them from their positions ... Two or three weeks ago at a checkpoint a soldier asked men directly which sect they are from. We complained to the mukhtar and he told the officer responsible for the checkpoint and they removed the man from the checkpoint two hours after the incident...

‘... [T]here were innocent names executed [in Western Homs] ... most men killed were guilty ... Now all the military actions stopped in west Homs, and they stopped looking for wanted people in Homs city.’<sup>158</sup>

12.3.25 On 13 February 2025, Sky news quoted Abdulrahman Dabbagh, head of security in Damascus, as stating that: “There are assessments, research, and round-the-clock work being done to locate these criminals [senior leaders from the Assad regime]” ... “It’s not always about taking direct action against every person we identify, though, we wait for official orders to arrest certain figures.”<sup>159</sup>

12.3.26 On 13 February 2025, SOHR reported that:

‘Security authorities ... released tens of civilians from security centres and Homs central prison, after having been detained for weeks.

‘According to SOHR sources, the number of released civilian exceeded 50, who had been arrested during the latest security campaigns in Homs city and countryside.

‘SOHR sources have reported that ... some of the detainees have been tortured by guards for days in prisons and during interrogation.

‘One of the released civilians has told SOHR that there are ... people... suffering from chronic diseases ... [and are] offered no appropriate healthcare.

‘... [S]ome of the released civilians confirmed that they have been mistreated during the first days of their detention, while others have praised the guards’ good treatment and denied acts of torture.’<sup>160</sup>

12.3.27 On 13 February 2025, SJAC stated that:

‘Since early January, the General Security has conducted multiple security campaigns in Homs city and rural areas of western Homs.

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<sup>157</sup> IPS, [In the shadow of change](#), 12 February 2025

<sup>158</sup> Gregory Waters, [An Alawite Voice From Homs City](#), 12 February 2025

<sup>159</sup> Sky News, [Meet the soldiers hunting down senior Assad regime leaders...](#), 13 February 2025

<sup>160</sup> SOHR, [...Tens of people released from security centres in Homs](#), 13 February 2025

‘... In late January and early February 2025, SJAC documenters received reports of at least six individuals being killed in the custody of security forces. To verify claims that originated in media reports, SJAC documenters spoke with relatives of the deceased and/or residents of their villages who also had knowledge of the incidents and confirmed their occurrence.

‘... Some were known to be affiliated with the Assad government. In some of these cases, SJAC documenters received reports from relatives that the bodies bore signs of torture ... SJAC cannot independently verify these claims.

‘... On February 1 and 2, relatives of three ... men were told to collect the bodies of their relatives from hospitals in Al-Waer. These men, Badr Muhi Suqour (policeman), Hikmat Younis Raslan (member of the State Security), and Mohammad Younis Mansour (police officer) had been arrested from Al-Kaneiseh village on January 22.

‘... SJAC documenters also verified two incidents in which members of the General Security detained civilians related to wanted Assad government affiliates ... In the first instance in mid-January, security forces arrested two brothers from Homs city ... an individual close to the family ... shared that security forces arrested them to prompt a third brother ... to turn himself into the authorities. Days after the arrest, one of the arrested brothers ... was found dead in Homs city.

‘... The caretaker government and HTS leadership have acknowledged that violations have occurred, including those committed by its own General Security personnel, but maintained that they did not order or authorize these actions. While the transitional government’s leadership may not be sanctioning this behavior ... violations continue to occur.’<sup>161</sup>

12.3.28 In a 15 February 2025 report covering the period 15 January 2025 to 30 January 2025, the Harmoon Center, ‘an independent nonprofit research institution, focusing on the production of political, social and intellectual studies and research related particularly to the Syrian issue’,<sup>162</sup> stated that:

‘[On 22 January 2025] ... security forces conducted a wave of arrests in ... Damascus, targeting former regime members carrying weapons. On January 27 and 28, the General Security Directorate carried out further security campaigns in ... Damascus, arresting former regime members who had evaded capture.

‘Tartous has remained relatively stable ... On January 26, the Military Operations Department released 160 military personnel as part of efforts to ... ease restrictions on former military members. Security services launched extensive search operations across the governorate to maintain order and pursue suspects. Temporary permits continued to be issued to individuals undergoing investigation, helping to regularise their status ... Unlike in some other governorates, no military trials or field executions were reported. Arrests of former military personnel were temporary, with most being released after interrogation.

‘Significant confrontations occurred in Homs on January 20 and 21, when security forces launched a large-scale operation in the western countryside.

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<sup>161</sup> SJAC, [...Assad-Like Violations Are Still Being Committed in Syria](#), 13 February 2025

<sup>162</sup> Harmoon Center, [About Us](#), no date

The campaign resulted in at least six deaths during violent clashes... The operations targeted ... armed groups affiliated with the former regime that had refused to surrender their weapons.

‘... The new administration launched a large-scale security campaign [in Idlib] ... targeting former security figures implicated in past crimes. The campaign led to the arrest of several wanted individuals.’<sup>163</sup>

12.3.29 On 16 February 2025, SOHR reported that: ‘... [T]he general security service carried out a security campaign ... in Deir Ezzor city, targeting top figures affiliated with the former regime and its proxy militias. The campaign led to arresting persons involved in violations and crimes ...’<sup>164</sup>

12.3.30 On 16 February 2025, The Guardian reported that: ‘... [A] fighter, Abu Mossah Kermaz, said he was among the forces raiding Alawite homes, and was adamant that suggestions of reprisal attacks were lies. The militants had been careful to treat people with respect when they went inside looking for people, he said ...’<sup>165</sup>

12.3.31 See also section 1.3.2 of the European Union Asylum Agency’s (EUAA) March 2025 [COI Report - Syria: Country Focus](#). However, refer to the relevant footnote(s) as that report and this note have used the same or similar sources and reports in places.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 12.4 Treatment of Alawites by non-state/unverified actors

12.4.1 On 21 December 2024, Associated Press reported that:

‘... [D]ozens of Syrians have been killed in acts of revenge, according to activists and experts who monitor Syria. The vast majority have been from the minority Alawite community ...

‘... [A]t least 72 men and women have been killed in sectarian violence, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights ... It says the killings occurred in four religiously mixed provinces - Hama and Homs in central Syria, and Tartus and Latakia along its eastern coast.

‘Gunmen stormed the village of Bahra in Hama province on Dec. 9 [2024], and killed a dozen Alawites over three days ... according to a resident of the village... In nearby Mouaa, six men were killed, and in Um al-Amad, a man and his son were shot dead, the resident of Bahra said.

‘... “We are witnessing some sectarian incidents, but they are all individuals acts,” said Rayan Maarouf, an anti-Assad activist...’<sup>166</sup>

12.4.2 On 22 December 2024, the BBC reported that: ‘There have been reports of a few reprisal killings in parts of the country, but so far there is no evidence to suggest they were carried out by HTS.

‘... “Until now, we are OK. We are talking to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and they are respectful. But there are people who aren’t from HTS but pretend to be them who are making threats. They want our society to fall and they are the

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<sup>163</sup> Harmoon Center, [Harmoon Center Monitoring Report, 15-30 January 2025](#), 15 February 2025

<sup>164</sup> SOHR, [The General Security in Mahardah arrests lieutenant of former regime](#), 16 February 2025

<sup>165</sup> The Guardian, [‘We live in constant fear’: Alawites in Syria’s Homs terrified...](#), 16 February 2025

<sup>166</sup> Associated Press, [Sectarian violence in Syria has been less intense...](#), 21 December 2024



ones we are scared of,” said Mohammad [an Alawite interviewee].<sup>167</sup>

12.4.3 On 29 December 2024, the BBC reported that:

‘... [F]rom different parts of Syria, reports of suspected revenge attacks involving killing, kidnapping and arson are increasingly coming in. There are no reliable statistics confirming how many attacks have taken place ...

‘In the past week, three judges who arbitrated property-related matters in the previously regime-controlled town of Masyaf in north-western Syria - Mounzer Hassan, Mohammed Mahmoud and Youssef Ghanoum - were killed. Sources from the hospital where their bodies were examined have told the BBC they were struck in the head by a sharp object.

‘... Mounzer's wife, Nadine Abdullah, told us she believed her husband was targeted because he was an Alawite ...

“Since they were civil, not criminal court judges, I think they were killed simply because they were Alawites. All Alawites did not benefit from Bashar al-Assad...” Nadine said.

‘Mounzer's brother Nazir said: “... Those being killed had no connection to the politics of the regime...”

‘... “Everyone says HTS did not commit the crime. But as the governing authority now, they must find out who did it. They have to ensure protection for all of us,” Nadine said...

‘HTS's interim government has condemned the killing of the judges and said it will find the perpetrators. It has also denied being involved in any reprisal killings.

‘Protests were held in Masyaf following the killing of the judges, and many Alawites have told the BBC they are now worried for their safety.’<sup>168</sup>

12.4.4 On 1 January 2025, the Washington Post noted that ‘While HTS has said it will dissolve the country’s disparate rebel forces to create a unified army, that process has not yet started, making it often difficult to discern who is behind the violence, and the reasons some people are being targeted.’<sup>169</sup>

12.4.5 On 9 January 2025, Arab News, a Saudi research and publishing company<sup>170</sup>, reported that:

“Thousands of mourners gathered at the funeral of three Alawite farmers from the same family, including one child, killed by foreign Islamist fighters allied to Syria’s new authorities,” said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor.

‘... On Tuesday [7 January 2025], three Alawite clerics were also killed by unknown gunmen on the road from Tartus to Damascus, the monitor said.

‘Another cleric and his wife were found dead in the Hama countryside Thursday [9 January 2025] after they were abducted a day earlier.’<sup>171</sup>

12.4.6 SJAC’s 22 January 2025 report provided the below examples of attacks

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<sup>167</sup> BBC, [Syria's minorities seek security as country charts new future](#), 22 December 2024

<sup>168</sup> BBC, [Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre'...](#), 29 December 2024

<sup>169</sup> WaPo, [Alawites live in fear as Syrian rebels hunt members of Assad's regime](#), 1 Jan 2025

<sup>170</sup> Arab News, [Homepage](#), no date

<sup>171</sup> Arab News, [Thousands of Alawites mourn 3 killed by foreign Islamists...](#), 9 January 2025



against Alawites:

‘... On 9 January, unidentified gunmen fired at civilians working on farmland near Jableh, killing an Alawi man and his child.

‘In another incident, the bodies of an Alawi man and his wife were found shot near their home in a village near Salamiyah (Hama governorate) on January 10 ... conflicting reports circulated about the murders, perpetrators and alleged motive. ... On January 12, a 24-year-old Alawi man was found with gunshots to the head in the Karam Al-Zeitoun neighborhood in Homs, three days after being kidnapped from his home. The following day, the body of another young man from a majority-Alawite village in Latakia was found stabbed and bound in a farm near his home. Media reports claim that this murder was likely part of a robbery, based on the testimony of another man who was with the deceased when armed men approached both of them.’<sup>172</sup>

12.4.7 In a 31 January post on X, Benjamin Fève, a research analyst at Badil, a Beirut-based think-tank<sup>173</sup>, summarised his view of the situation based on having spent 17 days in Damascus between 14 January and 30 January 2025<sup>174</sup>. He noted that: ‘... most people I spoke with feel safe, including minorities, though the consensus is weaker. Christians and Druze seem okay with the current administration. Alawites, less so. The stories of what happened on Dec 8 and the days that followed are grim -intimidation and beatings. This seems to have subsided. Many Alawites in Damascus don’t feel particularly unsafe, but they acknowledge that things could turn bad for them at any moment.’<sup>175</sup>

12.4.8 SOHR provided the following examples of Alawites being reportedly murdered by unknown individuals, with unclear motivations:

- [...Young man shot dead in western Hama](#), 13 February 2025
- [...Janitor killed after being kidnapped in Latakia countryside](#), 15 February 2025
- [...Body of young man found in Homs](#), 18 February 2025
- [...Two drivers killed in Homs and Latakia countryside](#), 18 February 2025

12.4.9 On 10 March, International Crisis Group reported:

‘In places where General Security has been overstretched, such as Homs (both the city and the countryside) and the rural hinterlands of Hama, unrest has simmered since Assad’s fall. The civil war left a grim legacy of sectarian violence in these areas, which have a highly diverse population. Today, they have seen numerous revenge killings and kidnappings, sometimes for ransom, creating a pervasive feeling of danger among the public. Not every act of violence has a clear motive, but Alawites have been at the receiving end of most of them, with many taking place along the coast, in Homs or in Hama. Whether due to lack of capacity or lack of concern, the new authorities in Damascus have struggled to restore public safety...’<sup>176</sup>

<sup>172</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria December 2024 - January 2025](#), 22 January 2025

<sup>173</sup> The New Arab, [Benjamin Feve](#), no date

<sup>174</sup> X (@BenjaminFeve), [Post on X dated 31 January @ 12:44PM](#), 31 January 2025

<sup>175</sup> X (@BenjaminFeve), [Post on X dated 31 January @ 12:44PM \(#11\)](#), 31 January 2025

<sup>176</sup> ICG, [Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria](#), 10 March 2025

12.4.10 On 30 April 2025, SNHR reported that it:

‘... has documented a surge in violent and un-lawful killings in Homs city between April 23 and 28, 2025 that saw the killing of at least 20 civilians, including one woman, in separate and successive incidents across the city. Most victims were found shot dead, in circumstances clearly suggesting the involvement of armed groups operating outside the law.

‘Initial investigations indicate that the killings were concentrated in the neighborhoods of Wadi al-Thahab, Karm al-Zaitoun, al-Nuzha, and Karm al-Luz – all areas predominantly inhabited by members of the Alawite sect. These killings ranged from targeted assassinations of individuals previously affiliated with the Assad regime, some of whom had gone through reconciliation agreements, to random killings suspected to be driven by sectarian and retaliatory motives.’<sup>177</sup>

12.4.11 In a 13 May 2025 article, SJAC stated that:

‘... one pattern of violence ... has ebbed and flowed from January [2025] to early May 2025 and ... has shown no signs of stopping: the killing of Alawite civilians in Homs city and surrounding areas. Though SJAC was unable to confirm every incident, reports suggest that Alawite victims are being targeted based on their sect ...

‘Reports of civilians, often Alawite individuals, being killed by “unknown gunmen” or “unknown masked men” have been circulating weekly since early 2025. In contrast to the ongoing revenge killings of both Sunni and Alawite individuals with suspected involvement in the Assad military/intelligence, the deaths of these civilians are not tied to their direct involvement in past atrocities but to their sectarian identity. SJAC assesses that many of these incidents amount to sectarian revenge killings because they are committed based on a perception that Alawites have some affiliation with the [Assad] regime ...

‘Reports show that these incidents are concentrated in specific geographic areas. While similar incidents have occurred in Latakia and Hama, these incidents appear to be most prevalent in several neighborhoods in Homs city and nearby areas of Homs governorate. The sentiment that Alawites are by default complicit in the Assad regime’s atrocities is likely stronger in Homs city compared to other areas of Syria, given Homs city’s unique history during the conflict. There, thousands of Sunni civilians were displaced after being exposed to gross forms of violations - including several massacres - that were sometimes committed by their neighbors from an Alawite background ...

‘SJAC documenters assess that since a large portion of these victims are Alawites, these random attacks may indicate that Alawites are specifically targeted. Witnesses increasingly report unknown masked gunmen on motorcycles firing at homes in Alawite-majority neighborhoods, killing and wounding civilians on the streets, inside their homes, or sitting on their balconies. SJAC has not verified the identities of the perpetrators.

‘Since late April [2025], SJAC has received multiple reports of these incidents, including a woman who was killed and her husband injured in Homs city’s Karam Al-Zeitoun neighborhood when unknown gunmen on a

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<sup>177</sup> SNHR, [No Fewer than 20 Civilians Extrajudicially Killed in Homs City...](#), 30 April 2025

motorcycle fired on their home while the victims were sitting outside. “Unknown militants” reportedly shot and killed an Alawite man, Ali Asef Ibraim, while he was standing near his home in the Al-Nuzha neighborhood of Homs city in April as well. Another woman, Sahar Ibrahim, was killed in early May in a similar incident in Karam Al-Loz neighborhood. Karam Al-Zeitoun, Karam Al-Loz, and Al-Nuzha neighborhoods, along with Wadi Al-Dahab, are Alawite majority neighborhoods.

‘In dozens of other cases since early 2025, Alawite men and women have been kidnapped from areas near their homes or workplaces, and their bodies are reportedly found several days later bearing gunshot wounds. For example, two brothers, Mohammad and Amjad Samer Shaddoud, were kidnapped near the Al-Asil roundabout in Homs city while returning home from work. Five days later, the two men were found dead in Hama governorate. In another case, five Alawite men from a single family were found dead after being kidnapped from their home in the Alawite-majority Al-Sabeel neighborhood in early April [2025]. SJAC documenters have received reports of numerous other similar cases between February [2025] and early May 2025.

‘... Though SJAC documenters note that the transitional government has some security presence in areas of Homs city where killings have occurred, this security presence is not an effective deterrent against violent attacks on civilians. In social media posts announcing the deaths, a significant portion of those commenting imply that the transitional government and its security forces have condoned or even facilitated these murders. Despite the presence of General Security checkpoints at the entrances to the city, documenters report that Syrians have doubts about the transitional government’s ability and/or willingness to prevent such attacks, which further contributes to a general attitude of distrust and fear.

‘... In recent months, protests have occurred in Homs featuring chants like “Homs is for the Sunnis, Alawites - get out!”<sup>178</sup>

- 12.4.12 See also section 1.3.2 of the European Union Asylum Agency’s (EUAA) March 2025 [COI Report - Syria: Country Focus](#). However, refer to the relevant footnote(s) as that report and this note have used the same or similar sources and reports in places.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 12.5 Treatment of (perceived) Assadists by non-state/unverified actors

- 12.5.1 On 1 January 2025, the Washington Post noted that ‘... there have been surging calls for retribution against figures from the old regime.’<sup>179</sup>
- 12.5.2 Stating that ‘Many crimes are being committed by gangs and civilians not affiliated with the new government’<sup>180</sup>, the 21 January 2025 article from the Middle East Institute offered a regional perspective and stated:

‘Latakia governorate seems to be doing the best ... Tartous and Hama are next, with some flare-ups in villages home to particular ex-regime criminals, while Homs governorate appears to be the only region with some truly

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<sup>178</sup> SJAC, [...Investigate the Targeting of Alawite Civilians in Homs](#), 13 May 2025

<sup>179</sup> WaPo, [Alawites live in fear as Syrian rebels hunt members of Assad's regime](#), 1 Jan 2025

<sup>180</sup> Middle East Institute, [Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria](#), 21 January 2025

concerning developments and more overtly sectarian crimes ...

‘Cases of local retribution have been a serious issue in Homs and parts of Hama, where local Sunnis from towns that suffered massacres at the hands of neighboring Alawite militias have undertaken revenge killings. One significant case occurred on Jan. 8 in Tasnin, Homs ... Security forces responded by imposing a curfew on both Tasnin and the neighboring Alawite village where the victims were from ...

‘The more serious crimes are generally occurring in the countryside where there is a more limited security presence and a higher concentration of ex-shabiha. On Jan. 8, three Alawite men were murdered in their farm outside the village of Ain Sharqiyeh ... Locals blamed “foreign fighters” in the base for the murders ... Perhaps a sign of how rare such a blatant murder of civilians is in this region, the crime triggered days of protests and unrest...’<sup>181</sup>

12.5.3 In SJAC’s 22 January 2025 report, it stated that it had ‘verified reports of several types of violations in the past month, including arbitrary detention and humiliation of detainees, armed attacks, and executions.’<sup>182</sup> It stated that ‘these violations are... widespread’<sup>183</sup> and are committed by ‘a variety of actors for various reasons, from personal disputes to... revenge/retribution for alleged affiliation with the Assad government.’<sup>184</sup> It noted, however, that ‘the attacks do not represent widespread violations against minorities that are facilitated by the new HTS-led government,’ but that ‘HTS-affiliated security forces have engaged in some of these violations.’<sup>185</sup>

12.5.4 The same source provided the following examples of attacks against actual or perceived Assadists:

‘On December 10, 2024 in Latakia, a group of people beat ... Ali Ashour, a man who many outlets claimed to be an informant for the former government, and left him lying near a dumpster ... Following the beating, HTS issued a statement that the people responsible ... would be arrested and held accountable. The statement also urged Syrians not to engage in these actions ...

‘... [G]unmen publicly executed Mazen Kanina, the mukhtar of the town of Dummar, near Damascus on January 11, days after his arrest. Media accused Kanina of being an informant for the Assad government ... Separately, unknown armed men kidnapped Omar Muhi Al-Din Hourri, the imam of a mosque in Damascus’s Al-Baramkeh neighborhood in January, and his body was discovered days later on January 13. Reports stated that Hourri, a Sunni, was accused of cooperating with security forces in the Assad government.

‘... [V]ictims of reprisal attacks during this reporting period included both Alawite and Sunni individuals. The common thread between these attacks involves the victim being accused of significant past involvement with the Assad government and violations against civilians, rather than a common sectarian affiliation.’<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Middle East Institute, [Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria](#), 21 January 2025

<sup>182</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria December 2024 - January 2025](#), 22 January 2025

<sup>183</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria December 2024 - January 2025](#), 22 January 2025

<sup>184</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria December 2024 - January 2025](#), 22 January 2025

<sup>185</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria December 2024 - January 2025](#), 22 January 2025

<sup>186</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria December 2024 - January 2025](#), 22 January 2025

- 12.5.5 The same source also stated that: ‘Individuals or groups claiming to be affiliated with the new government have also been involved in detentions. To stop unsanctioned detentions, the Ministry of the Interior issued a communique on January 12 stating that any arrest must be accompanied by an order of arrest signed by the Ministry of Justice.’<sup>187</sup>
- 12.5.6 On 23 January 2025, the Los Angeles Times quoted Ghadeer Al-Khayer, an Alawite who works for the Health Ministry: “The problem is that everyone speaks in the name of the Hayat, but when someone comes to your house or arrests you, there’s no way to verify their identity,”<sup>188</sup>
- 12.5.7 On 26 January 2025, The Guardian, citing SOHR, reported that ‘Fighters affiliated with Syria’s new leaders have carried out 35 summary executions over 72 hours, mostly of Assad-era officers’<sup>189</sup>. The article also noted that ‘Official news agency Sana said the authorities on Friday accused members of a “criminal group” of using a security sweep to commit abuses against residents while “posing as members of the security services”’<sup>190</sup>.
- 12.5.8 In a 31 January 2025 post on X, Lizzie Porter, ‘a freelance foreign news and features journalist with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa’<sup>191</sup>, summarised her view of the situation based on having spent three weeks in Syria. She described her thread as ‘... thoughts based on everyday interactions as well as during my reporting, and are personal observations ...’<sup>192</sup>. She observed: ‘... There is evidence of revenge/sectarian killings in places like rural western Homs, suggesting command and control is not fully in order among the security forces, or that they cannot prevent such killings by unknown groups ...’<sup>193</sup>
- 12.5.9 On 1 February 2025, France24 reported that:
- ‘Gunmen killed at least 10 people in Syria on Friday [31 January 2025] in an attack on a village from former president Bashar al-Assad’s Alawite minority, in what the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights called a “massacre”. The war monitor said the attacks “bear all the hallmarks of sectarian killings” ...
- ‘The Britain-based monitor ... said gunmen “rapped on the doors of houses in the village and shot at people using handguns equipped with silencers” before fleeing ... [Syrian newspaper Al-Watan] said “former officers and soldiers” were among those who died in the attack.’<sup>194</sup>
- 12.5.10 On 13 February 2025, BBC Monitoring reported that:
- ‘A radical Sunni militant group that recently announced its emergence in Syria has vowed to “hunt down” and kill the “remnants” and “loyalists” of the former Assad government, as well as ... Alawites in the country, and has already claimed responsibility for multiple such killings.
- ‘The group, calling itself Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah (Supporters of the Sunnah Battalions), announced its emergence in late January ... It claims to be a

<sup>187</sup> SJAC, [Human Rights Violations in Syria December 2024 - January 2025](#), 22 January 2025

<sup>188</sup> Los Angeles Times, [Alawites wary as a post-Assad Syria takes shape](#), 23 January 2025

<sup>189</sup> The Guardian, [Syrian fighters execute 35 in three days, war monitor says](#), 26 January 2025

<sup>190</sup> The Guardian, [Syrian fighters execute 35 in three days, war monitor says](#), 26 January 2025

<sup>191</sup> Middle East Eye, [Lizzie Porter](#), no date

<sup>192</sup> X (@lcmporter), [Post on X dated 31 January @ 8:50PM](#), 31 January 2025

<sup>193</sup> X (@lcmporter), [Post on X dated 31 January @ 8:50PM](#) (#10), 31 January 2025

<sup>194</sup> France24, [Gunmen in Syria kill at least 10 in Alawite village, war monitor says](#), 1 February 2025



“decentralised” network operating through “lone wolves” - individuals or small cells with minimal connections to one another and no shared bases.

‘One of the group’s key claimed attacks - the killing of a number of Alawites in the ... village of Arza in Hama province on 1 February - was widely reported in the media. The incident was attributed to “unknown gunmen” ...

‘... [T]he group claims it has taken matters into its own hands to exact revenge on Alawites and former Assad personnel. It also asserts that its actions are necessary to prevent Alawites ... from regrouping.

‘... There has been considerable uncertainty and speculation about its authenticity and affiliations ... The group claims to operate “anywhere and everywhere” across Syria. However ... primary focus would be on five provinces: the coastal regions of Latakia and Tartus, the capital Damascus, as well as Homs and Hama, probably because these are the areas where most Alawites ... live.

‘... On 2 February, it claimed responsibility for killing a man named Ahmed Hamoud Abu Yousef in the coastal city of Jabla ... stating that he had held a military position in the former government.’<sup>195</sup>

12.5.11 On 15 February 2025, BBC Monitoring reported that:

‘Istanbul-based Syria TV reported that masked men had kidnapped Ibrahim [Saleh Ibrahim, former director of a Syrian news channel] on 10 February [2025] ... in central Damascus.

‘According to the report, the masked men claimed to be members of the public security forces ... Ibrahim’s relatives told Syria TV that they had contacted the public security services after he was taken away, but they “denied sending any patrol to arrest or detain him”.’<sup>196</sup>

12.5.12 Citing SOHR, BBC Monitoring stated that Saleh Ibrahim had been released, but further information was not provided<sup>197</sup>.

12.5.13 On 16 February 2025, The Guardian reported that ‘For Alawites [in Homs], it is armed extremists they say are targeting civilians, accusing the new government of turning a blind eye ... [Abu Mohammed, an Alawite former captain in Assad’s army] described witnessing Sunni militants assault an Alawite student who they had pulled from a nearby bus as he waited in a queue outside the settlement centre.’<sup>198</sup>

12.5.14 On 19 February 2025, BBC Monitoring reported on the treatment of Dr. Ahmad Badreddin Hassoun, who served as Syria’s grand mufti under Bashar al-Assad. The article stated that:

‘Since Assad’s ouster, Syria-focused jihadists, Islamists and activists have voiced anger and frustration at the perceived failure of the new government to punish those closely associated with the former regime.

‘... [C]alls for “retribution” against Assad-era figures has not been limited to politicians, military and security officials; but has also targeted cultural figures, such as those who worked in the media and entertainment sectors

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<sup>195</sup> BBC Monitoring, [...New militant group in Syria targets Alawites, Assad loyalists](#), 13 February 2025

<sup>196</sup> BBC Monitoring, [...Former director of Syrian state-run channel kidnapped](#), 15 February 2025

<sup>197</sup> BBC Monitoring, [...Former director of Syrian state-run channel kidnapped](#), 15 February 2025

<sup>198</sup> The Guardian, [‘We live in constant fear’: Alawites in Syria’s Homs terrified...](#), 16 February 2025



during the rule of the previous government.

‘... Footage aired on social media showed [Dr. Hassoun] being followed in the street by passers-by who uttered abuse, which grew into a reportedly spontaneous protest outside his house in Aleppo's al-Furqan district.

‘Another video clip ... showed Hassoun in different surroundings, remonstrating with an unidentified interlocutor who called him “mufti al-baramil” (“barrel [bombs] mufti”). This was a reference to his closeness to the Assad regime, whose forces were notorious for their use of barrel bombs against opponents in the Syrian civil war.

‘There were a great number of reactions to this story across social media platforms, which were overwhelmingly hostile to Hassoun. Both online supporters and critics of the new Syrian government cheered the hounding of Hassoun and bemoaned the fact he was still at liberty.

‘Overnight on 17-18 February, numerous Telegram channels shared updates on the protest outside the former grand mufti's Aleppo house, some with photos and video clips from the scene. These included footage purportedly taken from inside Hassoun's residence, after a number of protestors reportedly stormed the property.’<sup>199</sup>

12.5.15 SOHR provided the following examples of former regime personnel being targeted by unknown actors in revenge attacks:

- [Assaulting, abusing and expelling inhabitants...](#), 13 February 2025
- [...Former firefighter injured and his wife arrested by security forces...](#), 13 February 2025
- [...Member of former regime exec\\*uted in Idlib countryside](#), 15 February 2025
- [Three people exec\\*uted in Homs and Lattakia](#), 16 February 2025
- [Nearly 300 people killed under retaliatory actions since early 2025](#), 20 February 2025

12.5.16 See also section 1.3.2 of the European Union Asylum Agency's (EUAA) March 2025 [COI Report - Syria: Country Focus](#). However, refer to the relevant footnote(s) as that report and this note have used the same or similar sources and reports in places.

[Back to Contents](#)

## **13. Events on Syria's Mediterranean coast, 6–9 March 2025**

### **13.1 Starting point**

13.1.1 On 8 March 2025, Syria Direct, ‘an independent, nonprofit media and training organisation’<sup>200</sup>, wrote:

‘On the afternoon of Thursday, March 6, armed groups attacked government security centers and checkpoints across Syria's coastal provinces...

‘Tensions quickly escalated throughout the coast, as attackers seized control of city centers and some military and security headquarters. Government forces were besieged in their barracks until Damascus sent major military

<sup>199</sup> BBC Monitoring, [...protest outside home of Assad-era grand mufti](#), 19 February 2025

<sup>200</sup> Syria Direct, [About us](#), no date

reinforcements to reimpose control over the area and clear it of armed groups.<sup>'201</sup>

13.1.2 On 8 March 2025, Qutaiba Idlbi, a Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council<sup>202</sup>, posted on X that 'Thursday afternoon [6 March 2025] local time: Assad loyalists led an insurgency targeting security checkpoints, police stations, hospitals, and temporarily took control of large suburban areas and highways across Latakia & Tartous governorates.'<sup>203</sup>

13.1.3 On 8 March 2025, Al Arabiya reported that:

'Mustafa Kneifati, a security official in Latakia, said that in "a well-planned and premeditated attack, several groups of al-Assad militia remnants attacked our positions and checkpoints, targeting many of our patrols" around the coastal town of Jableh.

'... authorities on Friday [7 March 2025] announced a security sweep in the Jableh area, between Latakia and Tartus...

'The security operation "targeted remnants of al-Assad's militias and those who supported them," an official cited by SANA said...

'On Friday [7 March 2025] SANA said a security operation was launched in al-Assad's hometown of Qardaha, near Latakia, "against loyalists of the former regime."<sup>'204</sup>

13.1.4 Al Jazeera stated on 9 March 2025 that 'The fighting began after the pro-Assad fighters coordinated attacks on security forces on Thursday [6 March 2025]. The attacks spiralled into revenge killings as thousands of armed supporters of Syria's new leadership went to the coastal areas to support the security forces.'<sup>205</sup>

13.1.5 On 9 March 2025, The Guardian reported: 'To crush the rebellion, the Syrian government called for reinforcements, with thousands of fighters converging on Syria's coast from all over the country. Though fighters are nominally under the auspices of the new Syrian government, militias still persist, some of which have been implicated in past human rights abuses and are relatively undisciplined ...'<sup>206</sup>

13.1.6 On 9 March 2025, the BBC reported that 'A Syrian security source said the pace of fighting had slowed around the cities of Latakia, Jabla and Baniyas on Sunday [9 March 2025], according to Reuters.'<sup>207</sup>

13.1.7 On 10 March 2025, International Crisis Group stated that:

'On 6 March [2025], paramilitaries loyal to the deposed regime staged coordinated attacks on the newly established security forces in Jableh and Baniyas, towns on the Mediterranean coast. The assault prompted a swift, chaotic counteroffensive by the security forces and other armed factions backing the government...

'... During the first two months of the interim government's rule, remnants of

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<sup>201</sup> Syria Direct, [Blood on the coast: Can Damascus pull back from the brink?](#), 8 March 2025

<sup>202</sup> X (@Qidlbi), [Profile](#)

<sup>203</sup> X (@Qidlbi), [Post on X dated 8 March 2025 @ 2:59PM](#)

<sup>204</sup> Al Arabiya, [Syria's al-Sharaa urges Alawites to surrender after deadly clashes](#), 8 March 2025

<sup>205</sup> Al Jazeera, [Syria's al-Sharaa launches probe into deadly clashes...](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>206</sup> The Guardian, [Entire families reportedly killed in fighting in north-west Syria, UN says](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>207</sup> BBC, [Syria leader vows to hunt down those responsible for bloodshed](#), 9 March 2025

the Assad regime ... began attacking the new security forces in an apparent attempt to elicit harsh retribution that would sway the local population to their side. On 3 March [2025], for example, insurgents killed two members of General Security in a hit-and-run attack in Latakia's Datour neighbourhood, prompting the authorities to launch an operation to capture the culprits that reportedly ended up killing four civilians. Overall, efforts to bait General Security and win over the public seem to have had only limited success, with residents of Alawite areas often cooperating with the security forces rather than protecting the insurgents. But the nascent insurgency has nonetheless become more structured, carrying out a rising number of attacks culminating in the 6 March [2025] events.'<sup>208</sup>

- 13.1.8 On 13 March 2025, SJAC reported published an 'Analysis of Atrocities Committed in Latakia and Tartous'. The analysis outlined actors involved in the violence:

'On March 6, 2025, a group of pro-Assad insurgents ambushed members of the new government's General Security forces near Jableh (Latakia governorate), killing more than 13 members. Pro-Assad groups launched several similar attacks on the new government's security forces in Latakia and Tartous the same day, killing dozens. The attacks prompted the interim government led by Ahmed Al-Sharaa to send reinforcements to the area...

'Actors

Following the initial ambushes that killed members of the new government's General Security personnel near Jableh on March 6, three types of actors responded to the attacks. The actions and behavior of these groups towards civilians on the coast vary significantly.

'Government Forces

'The first group to respond were the interim government's forces operating under the Ministry of Defense and the General Security Directorate. The bulk of this group is made up of HTS fighters and the newly recruited General Security personnel. Although several videos appeared showing members of the General Security carrying out summary executions, according to SJAC documenters and open-source evidence, these fighters appeared to be the most disciplined and least likely to have engaged in violations against civilians. SJAC also received reports that members of the General Security forces attempted to help rescue or protect civilians on the coast from being killed by actors from other groups.

'Government-Affiliated Armed Factions

'Another party to respond were factions that are part of what was known as the Syrian National Army, such as the Hamzat and Suleiman Shah/Amshat divisions, who came to Latakia and Tartous from northern Syria. Members of these factions have committed violations against civilians in Afrin, Al-Bab, and elsewhere in northern Syria for several years. They are known for engaging in arbitrary arrests, kidnapping, extortion, looting, and other housing land and property violations. Both factions were part of the "Military Victory Conference" in late January, where they all agreed that Al-Sharaa will become the interim president of Syria. In February, Al-Sharaa made a visit to Afrin, with promises that the factions would be incorporated

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<sup>208</sup> International Crisis Group, [...a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria](#), 10 March 2025

under the new government's Ministry of Defense. SJAC and other observers assess that these factions were responsible for a considerable part of the brutality - executions, looting, burning of property - that has occurred in Latakia, Tartous and Hama since March 6.

#### 'Foreign Fighters

'The final group engaged in the response consists of foreign fighters, including Chechians, Uyghurs (Turkistan Islamic Party in Syria), and Arabs from outside Syria, including Algerians and Egyptians. Video footage shows some of these fighters making religiously-motivated calls for the killing of Alawites as they allegedly headed towards Latakia. Foreign jihadist fighters are suspected of committing serious crimes, namely summary executions. SJAC is still in the process of collecting and analyzing this evidence.'<sup>209</sup>

- 13.1.9 See also section 1.3.2 of the European Union Asylum Agency's (EUAA) March 2025 [COI Report - Syria: Country Focus](#). However, refer to the relevant footnote(s) as that report and this note have used the same or similar sources and reports in places.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 13.2 Impact

- 13.2.1 On 8 March 2025, Qutaiba Idlbi, a Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council<sup>210</sup>, posted on X stating: 'As the insurgency was losing ground on Friday [7 March 2025] afternoon, reports started coming in of summary and indiscriminate killing of Alawites, looting, and destruction. Despite clear disinformation campaign, many of these reports were validated by activists and locals.'<sup>211</sup>
- 13.2.2 On 8 March 2025, Orwa Ajjoub, a PHD student at Malmö university with a focus on Syria and jihadism<sup>212</sup>, posted on X that: 'Assad regime remnants ambushed a security force unit in the coastal areas, killing 13-15 members'<sup>213</sup> and that 'Human rights violations followed. Extrajudicial executions were carried out against Assad loyalists and civilians in Alawite areas. The state denied involvement, claiming it was other factions who had joined the fight were behind the crimes.'<sup>214</sup> He additionally stated that 'Casualty estimates remain unclear, but we are talking about: 125 civilians, 150 security forces, 200 Assad loyalists.'<sup>215</sup>
- 13.2.3 On 9 March 2025, the BBC reported that 'Amid the fighting, hundreds of civilians living along the Mediterranean coast have fled their homes.'<sup>216</sup>
- 13.2.4 On 8 March 2025, Syria Direct cited the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) to explain:
- 'During the clashes and related violence, at least 164 civilians, including seven children and 13 women, were killed by government forces and groups

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<sup>209</sup> SJAC, [SJAC's Analysis of Atrocities Committed in Latakia and Tartous](#), 13 March 2025

<sup>210</sup> X (@Qidlbi), [Profile](#)

<sup>211</sup> X (@Qidlbi), [Post on X dated 8 March 2025 @ 3:00PM](#)

<sup>212</sup> X (@OAjjoub), [Profile](#)

<sup>213</sup> X (@OAjjoub), [Post on X dated 8 March 2025 @ 10:56AM](#)

<sup>214</sup> X (@OAjjoub), [Post on X dated 8 March 2025 @ 10:56AM](#)

<sup>215</sup> X (@OAjjoub), [Post on X dated 8 March 2025 @ 10:56AM](#)

<sup>216</sup> BBC, [Syria leader vows to hunt down those responsible for bloodshed](#), 9 March 2025

affiliated with them in the countryside of Latakia, Tartous and Hama ... At the same time, 121 members of Damascus' security forces and 26 civilians were killed by former regime forces. "This is the minimum, preliminary toll," SNHR's Nour al-Khatib told Syria Direct, adding her organization plans to release an updated report on Monday.'<sup>217</sup>

13.2.5 On 8 March 2025, Al Arabiya quoted SOHR: "The vast majority of the victims were summarily executed by elements affiliated to the Ministry of Defense and the Interior" and stated that SOHR and activists 'released footage showing dozens of bodies in civilian clothing piled in the yard of a house, with blood stains nearby and women wailing. Other videos appeared to show men in military garb shooting people at close range. AFP could not independently verify the images...' <sup>218</sup>

13.2.6 On 9 March 2025, The Guardian reported:

'An adviser to Syria's foreign ministry estimated that 4,000 Assad loyalists were involved in the attacks. Videos showed the bodies of Syrian security officers strewn on the streets as well as bodies seemingly buried hastily in a mass grave in the coastal province of Tartus. The Guardian was unable to independently verify the contents of these videos...

'[UN commissioner for human rights, Volker Türk] said: "There are reports of summary executions on a sectarian basis by unidentified perpetrators, by members of the caretaker authorities' security forces, as well as by elements associated with the former government.'" <sup>219</sup>

13.2.7 The same source also reported:

'Videos showed the bodies of dozens of people in civilian clothes piled up in the town of al-Mukhtariya, where more than 40 people were killed at one time, according to the SNHR.

'Other videos showed fighters in security uniforms killing people point-blank, ordering men to bark like dogs and beating captives. The Guardian was not able to independently verify these videos...

'Another person in Latakia said power and water to the area had been cut off for the past day... "...The factions are killing anyone who appears in front of them..." they said.' <sup>220</sup>

13.2.8 On 9 March 2025, Timour Azhari, the Iraq Bureau Chief for Reuters<sup>221</sup>, stated in a post on X that:

'More than 1,000 people have been killed in two days of violence involving gunmen and security forces linked to Syria's new Islamist rulers amid a crackdown on militants they say are linked to the ousted Assad regime, a war monitor said on Saturday.

'The government has not provided a death toll amid mounting reports of massacres against Alawites.

'The casualties included 745 civilians, 125 members of the Syrian security forces and 148 fighters loyal to Assad, the Syrian Observatory for Human

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<sup>217</sup> Syria Direct, [Blood on the coast: Can Damascus pull back from the brink?](#), 8 March 2025

<sup>218</sup> Al Arabiya, [Syria's al-Sharaa urges Alawites to surrender after deadly clashes](#), 8 March 2025

<sup>219</sup> The Guardian, [Entire families reportedly killed in fighting in north-west Syria, UN says](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>220</sup> The Guardian, [Entire families reportedly killed in fighting in north-west Syria, UN says](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>221</sup> X (@timourazhari), [Profile](#)



Rights said.

'Reuters could not independently verify the reports.'<sup>222</sup>

13.2.9 Ahmed Askary – a writer on Syria<sup>223</sup> – responded that 'Reuters continues to use a dubious source with numbers wildly exceeding anything else actually coming out of the country. Putting "we cannot verify these" isn't enough. This number will now be \*the\* number that is pumped through disinformation networks to become "reality".'<sup>224</sup> The post was subsequently removed.

13.2.10 On 9 March 2025, the BBC cited the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), to report that 'A UK-based monitor said 830 civilians were killed in "massacres" targeting Alawites on the west coast on Friday and Saturday. The BBC has been unable to independently verify the death toll of the violence.'<sup>225</sup> The same report also claimed that 'The fighting has also killed 231 members of the security forces and 250 pro-Assad fighters ... taking the overall death toll to 1,311.'<sup>226</sup>

13.2.11 On 9 March 2025, The Guardian reported that:

'The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said that more than 1,000 people had been killed in the attack, including 745 civilians, 125 members of Syrian security forces and 148 Assad loyalists.

'Death tolls from the two days of fighting varied wildly, with a second rights group, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) saying 148 civilians were killed by Assad loyalists and 327 civilians and captured militants were killed by Syrian security forces.

'The Syrian government has not released figures for casualties, and the Guardian has not been able to independently verify the number of deaths.'<sup>227</sup>

13.2.12 On 9 March 2025, Al Arabiya reported that: 'A resident of the town of Qadmous told Reuters people in the town and surrounding villages had fled to nearby fields to protect themselves. He said a convoy of fighters with tanks, heavy weapons and small drones had burned homes and cars along the main road near his town.

"We don't know how many people are killed yet because they haven't gone home and don't plan to for the next few days," said the resident...'<sup>228</sup>

13.2.13 In an article updated on 10 March 2025, Associated Press reported:

'Rights groups reported dozens of revenge killings resulting from Sunni militants targeting [Alawites]... regardless of whether they were involved in the insurgency...

'The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 745 civilians killed, mostly in shootings. In addition, 125 members of government security forces and 148 militants with armed groups affiliated with Assad were killed. Electricity and drinking water were cut off in large areas around Latakia, the group added.

'Meanwhile, the Syria Campaign and the Syrian Network for Human

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<sup>222</sup> X (@timourazhari), [Post on X dated 9 March 2025 @ 6:01AM](#)

<sup>223</sup> X (@pashadelics), [Profile](#)

<sup>224</sup> X (@pashadelics), [Post on X dated 9 March 2025 @ 10:37AM](#)

<sup>225</sup> BBC, [Syria leader vows to hunt down those responsible for bloodshed](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>226</sup> BBC, [Syria leader vows to hunt down those responsible for bloodshed](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>227</sup> The Guardian, [Entire families reportedly killed in fighting in north-west Syria...](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>228</sup> Al Arabiya, [Syria's al-Sharaa scrambles to contain deadliest violence in years](#), 9 March 2025



Rights... said Saturday [8 March 2025] that both security forces and pro-Assad gunmen were “carrying out mass executions and systematic killings.”

‘The SNHR estimated that 100 members of the government’s security forces were killed Thursday, while 125 of an estimated 140 civilians were slain over the weekend in “suspected revenge killings.”

‘The Associated Press could not verify those numbers, and conflicting death figures during attacks in Syria over the years have not been uncommon...’<sup>229</sup>

13.2.14 On 10 March 2025, Middle East Eye reported that:

‘The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has documented 779 “extrajudicial killings” since Thursday, saying it did not count the deaths of Assad loyalists in combat.

‘This includes 211 civilians and 179 security personnel killed by Assad loyalists, and 396 civilians and unarmed loyalists killed by armed groups and security forces.

‘The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based activist group that monitors the war, put the total death toll at over 1,000.’<sup>230</sup>

13.2.15 The same source summarised events as follows:

‘Thursday [6 March 2025]: Assad remnants’ attack

‘...armed groups loyal to Assad attacked the new government’s security forces in Jableh, killing one officer.

‘According to Shafik, an Alawi man... security forces quickly responded to the incident and told residents of Syria’s coastal areas to stay in their homes and not to be afraid...

‘Syria’s government scrambled to bring in reinforcements but eventually managed to regain some control...

“In the end, things went OK. The factions killed the remnants of the regime, and all night long the sounds of beatings, shootings and bombs did not stop,” Shafik told Middle East Eye.

‘Friday [7 March 2025]: the massacres

‘...clashes on Thursday spiralled into uncontrolled mass killings on Friday.

‘Convoys of gunmen belonging to groups that fought Assad charged into the northwestern provinces of Latakia and Tartus. They spread out through the coastal towns and cities, hunting Alawis...

‘Shafik recalls the fighters arriving at Baniyas...

“They broke into all the shops on the street and stole everything while shouting and cursing Alawis. After they finished stealing, they burned the shops... They started going into the houses, one by one.”

‘Once they reached his neighbourhood, he says it was “up to one’s luck” whether the armed men would kill them, beat them or steal from them...

“The whole time we were living in terror and hearing the voices of people being killed and screaming,” Shafik said. “The bodies in the streets were

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<sup>229</sup> AP, [Syria’s worst violence in months reopens wounds of the civil war](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>230</sup> Middle East Eye, [A weekend from hell in coastal Syria](#), 10 March 2025

terrifying.”

‘...the town of al-Mukhtariya suffered a similar fate...

‘Saturday [8 March 2025]: continued attacks, HTS intervention

‘Shafik says the killings started again early the next morning...

‘Out of sight, were Alawi families that Sunni women and HTS fighters were helping escape and take to areas they could find safe shelter...

‘Sunday [9 March 2025]: government restores control...

‘Across Sunday, fighting and killing on the coast slowed. In the mountains, where some 5,000 pro-Assad insurgents are believed to be hiding, clashes continued.

‘SANA, the state news agency, said a mass grave containing the bodies of Syrian security forces was found in Qardaha.

‘Meanwhile, in Baniyas, Ali [an Alawi interviewed by Middle East Eye] said some of his relatives were also found in mass graves.’<sup>231</sup>

13.2.16 On 10 March 2025, International Crisis Group stated that:

‘While precise numbers cannot yet be verified, reports suggest that hundreds of civilians also perished in shocking atrocities, including summary executions carried out by some of the forces on the government’s side. Nearly all the civilian victims appear to be Alawites...

‘Lack of discipline and command and control are evident among some government forces, particularly those previously affiliated with armed factions outside HTS and which the government now calls its own...

‘The insurgent attacks prompted a general mobilisation across the country of government forces as well as pro-government armed actors apparently operating outside Damascus’s control. The latter forces responded haphazardly and with great brutality, engaging in firefights with insurgents (whose offensive continued) but also murdering civilians in Baniyas, down the coast from the major port city of Latakia, and Mukhtariya, a village along the Latakia-Aleppo highway, among other places. Damascus-controlled General Security forces took constructive steps in some places, for example, protecting Alawite neighbourhoods in the city of Homs by building a human wall to ward off vigilantes, but elsewhere they failed to prevent massacres committed in the government’s name.’<sup>232</sup>

13.2.17 On 11 March 2025, Fadel Abdul Ghany – the Executive Director of the Syrian Network for Human Rights<sup>233</sup> – posted on X:

‘Updated on the Toll of Extrajudicial and Unlawful Killings from March 6 [2025] to March 10 [2025]:

‘The Syrian Network for Human Rights @snhr has documented the deaths of at least 803 individuals, including 39 children and 49 women (adult females), during the period from March 6 to March 10, 2025. The distribution of victims according to the responsible parties is as follows:

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<sup>231</sup> Middle East Eye, [A weekend from hell in coastal Syria](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>232</sup> International Crisis Group, [...a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>233</sup> X (@FADELABDULGHANY), [Profile](#)

A. Non-State Armed Groups Affiliated with the Former Regime:

- At least 172 members of the security, police, and military forces—comprising personnel from the Internal Security Forces and the Ministry of Defense—were killed due to direct attacks and ambushes orchestrated by non-state armed groups. Additionally, fatalities occurred during armed confrontations and clashes within the scope of military operations aimed at reclaiming areas under the control of these groups.
- At least 211 civilians, including a humanitarian worker, were killed as a result of direct gunfire by non-state armed groups.

B. Armed Forces Engaged in Military Operations (Undisciplined Factions and Organizations Formally Affiliated with the Ministry of Defense): The network recorded the deaths of no fewer than 420 civilians and disarmed militants, including 39 children, 49 women, and 27 medical personnel, as a consequence of the large-scale security and military campaign conducted by these forces in areas controlled by armed groups outside the authority of the former regime. The fatalities were distributed across the following governorates:

- Latakia Governorate: 185 fatalities including 15 children, 11 women, and two medical personnel
- Hama Governorate: 53 fatalities including 15 children, 10 women, and one medical personnel
- Tartous Governorate: 179 fatalities including 9 children, 28 women, and 24 medical personnel
- Homs Governorate: 3 fatalities<sup>234</sup>

13.2.18 [SNHR's report](#) provides further detail.

13.2.19 A 12 March 2025 report published on Vizier, an independent and non-partisan organisation publishing a weekly report on events in the Middle East and North Africa<sup>235</sup>, also referred heavily to SHNR's report, stating:

'As of March 11<sup>th</sup> [2025], SNHR has documented the extrajudicial killing of 803 individuals between March 6th-10th 2025, categorised as follows:

'1. Killings by Assadist insurgents:

'a. 383 individuals, separated into:

'i. 172 members of the General Security Services ("GSS" - under the Interior Ministry of the Syrian government).

'ii. 211 civilians, including a humanitarian aid worker.

'2. Killings by various armed factions, such as those recently integrated into the GSS (e.g. Syrian National Army factions - "SNA"), "undisciplined elements" of the GSS, and armed local residents fighting each other:

'a. 420 individuals, a figure including civilians and disarmed Assadist insurgents. Of these 420 individuals:

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<sup>234</sup> X (@FADELABDULGHANY), [Post on X dated 11 March 2025 @ 10:10AM](#)

<sup>235</sup> Vizier, [About](#), no date

‘b. 39 children, 49 women, and 27 medical workers, totalling 115 individuals.

‘c. Excluding women, children, and medical workers leaves around 305 males of adult age. Their status — whether insurgent or civilian — has been difficult to verify as insurgents were often dressed in civilian clothing. Many insurgents had also previously submitted to taswiya, i.e., the general amnesty, only to embed themselves in the local population on the coast to plan their insurgency.

...

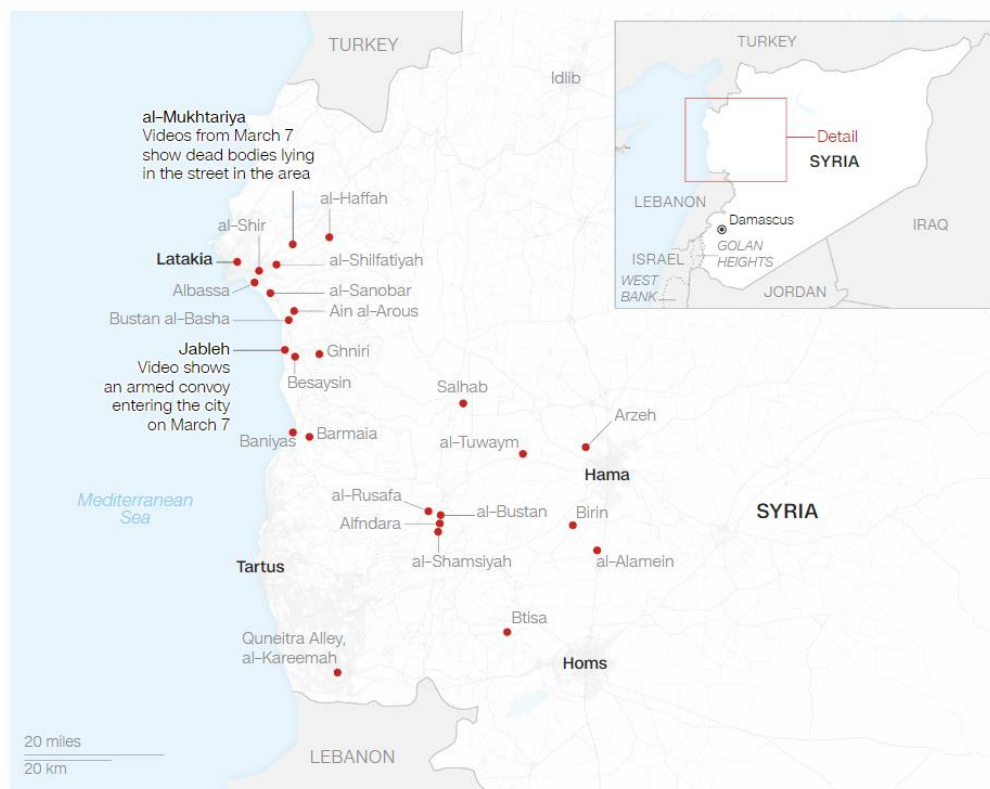
‘e The majority of these killings were committed by military factions that recently integrated into GSS such as Syrian National Army (SNA) factions and armed local residents.

‘Additionally this tally excludes general combat-related fatalities among Assadist insurgents and government security services...’<sup>236</sup>

13.2.20 On 17 March 2025, CNN – drawing on the SNHR report, as well as its own geolocated and verified videos posted on Telegram and X – produced the following map showing areas where mass killings occurred<sup>237</sup>:

**Mass killings took place in at least 25 areas in western Syria from March 6 to 10**

The Syrian Network for Human Rights has identified 25 locations across Latakia, Tartus, Hama and Homs governorates where government forces and affiliated factions killed at least 420 people earlier this month. The mass killings occurred in Alawite-majority areas known as strongholds of non-state armed groups linked to the former Assad regime.



13.2.21 A 3 April 2025 report by Amnesty International stated:

‘Milicias affiliated with the government, killed more than 100 people in the coastal city of Baniyas on 8 and 9 March 2025, according to information received by Amnesty International. The organization has investigated 32 of

<sup>236</sup> Vizier, [Assadist Insurgents Fail at Counterrevolution Attempt in Syria](#), 12 March 2025

<sup>237</sup> CNN, [Syrian government-aligned forces captured revealing ...](#), updated 17 March 2025

the killings, and concluded that they were deliberate, targeted at the Alawite minority sect and unlawful.

‘Armed men asked people if they were Alawite before threatening or killing them and, in some cases, appeared to blame them for violations committed by the former government, witnesses told Amnesty International. Families of victims were forced by the authorities to bury their loved one in mass burial sites without religious rites or a public ceremony ...

‘Amnesty International interviewed nine people, including five residents of Baniyas city who reported that 32 of their relatives and neighbours, including 24 men, six women and two children, had been deliberately killed by government-affiliated militias in Baniyas city between 8 and 9 March 2025. Of the 32 killed, 30 were killed in al-Qusour neighborhood in Baniyas city. Amnesty International also interviewed a medical worker in Baniyas city.

‘Interviewees identified their close relatives and neighbours and described to Amnesty International how they were killed. The organization also received the names of 16 civilians, whose relatives reported that they had been deliberately killed in Latakia and Tartous countryside ...

‘While the UN believes the number of people killed on the coast is much higher, they were able to [document](#) [as of 11 March 2025<sup>238</sup>] the killing of 111 civilians in Tartous, Latakia and Hama governorates. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights many of the cases documented were of “summary executions carried out on a sectarian basis reportedly by unidentified armed individuals, members of armed groups allegedly supporting the caretaker authorities’ security forces, and by elements associated with the former government” ...

‘According to residents [of al-Qusour neighborhood in Baniyas], the authorities did not intervene to end the killings nor did they provide residents with safe routes to flee the armed men. Two residents told Amnesty International they had to walk for at least 15km through the woods to seek safety. Three others said the only way for them to flee was when, eventually, they were able to secure car rides from HTS ...

‘Seven interviewees told Amnesty International that they or their relatives were not allowed by authorities to bury family members killed in al-Qusour neighbourhood according to religious rites, in a location of their choosing, or through a public ceremony. Instead, bodies were piled up in an empty lot next to Sheikh Hilal cemetery close to the neighbourhood.’<sup>239</sup>

13.2.22 See also section 1.3.2 of the European Union Asylum Agency’s (EUAA) March 2025 [COI Report - Syria: Country Focus](#). However, refer to the relevant footnote(s) as that report and this note have used the same or similar sources and reports in places.

[Back to Contents](#)

### 13.3 Reporting, sources and casualty figures

13.3.1 On 12 March 2025, Neil Hauer, a journalist who has spent time in Syria<sup>240</sup>, posted on X that ‘Watching casualty numbers from SOHR - an organization

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<sup>238</sup> UN OHCHR, [Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas](#), 11 March 2025

<sup>239</sup> Amnesty International, [...massacres of Alawite civilians must be investigated...](#), 3 April 2025

<sup>240</sup> X (@NeilPHauer), [Profile](#)



that any Syria-watcher knows has been notoriously unreliable for years and years now - being cited uncritically across Western media is driving me nuts'<sup>241</sup>.

13.3.2 He added that 'SNHR is far better and actually has a wide network on the ground across all of Syria, unlike SOHR. ...'<sup>242</sup> That post linked to the figures outlined in 13.2.

13.3.3 On 9 March 2025, Samer Daboul, a self-described 'Syrian conflict reporter, bomb survivor, advocating for human rights and covering the ongoing crisis in Syria'<sup>243</sup>, posted on X to explain that 'Syria is once again at the center of a massive disinformation campaign. Fake news, exaggerated reports, and deliberate manipulation are flooding social media'<sup>244</sup>. The thread included the following reflections:

'4. Are Social Media Reports Reliable?

No. Disinformation is rampant. Several individuals have publicly denied false reports about their own deaths, proving the extent of media manipulation. News is being exaggerated and weaponized.

'5. How Are Pro-Assad Militias Operating?

- Disguising as civilians.
- Burning security forces alive.
- Burying victims in mass graves.
- Attacking hospitals.
- Targeting infrastructure.

'...

'7. What About Government Violations?

Yes, but the narrative is heavily distorted. The new government has announced investigations and accountability measures, yet transparency is lacking due to the absence of formal media.

'8 Why Is Misinformation Spreading So Rapidly?

Many actors, both local and foreign, are manipulating narratives for their own interests.'<sup>245</sup>

13.3.4 On 10 March 2025, Verify-Sy posted on X that 'Amid the unfolding events on the Syrian coast on March 8 [2025], manipulation in Syria's online space has reached staggering levels. Fake news, miscontextualized content, and outright disinformation have spread like wildfire'<sup>246</sup>.

13.3.5 The examples of claims it had debunked included:

- 'A viral video allegedly showing Syrian forces looting Alawite homes was misrepresented. In fact, the footage, published by SANA this month, documents the Syrian authorities recovering stolen goods amid instability

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<sup>241</sup> X (@NeilPHauer), [Post on X dated 11 March 2025 @ 10:44AM](#)

<sup>242</sup> X (@NeilPHauer), [Post on X dated 11 March 2025 @ 10:45AM](#)

<sup>243</sup> X (@samerdaboul6), [Profile](#)

<sup>244</sup> X (@samerdaboul6), [Post on X dated 9 March 2025 @ 1:28PM](#)

<sup>245</sup> X (@samerdaboul6), [Post on X dated 9 March 2025 @ 1:28PM](#)

<sup>246</sup> X (@VeSyriaE), [Post on X dated 10 March 2025 @ 11:47AM](#)



in the coastal city of Latakia.<sup>'247</sup>

- 'A widely shared video claimed that Syrian aircraft bombed civilian homes [in an Alawite coastal town] with barrel bombs. In reality, the footage shows Israeli airstrikes on Qusaya, Lebanon, in December 2024.<sup>'248</sup>
- 'A viral video claimed to show an "Alawite family being shot by HTS and Turkish mercenaries". Our team research shows the footage was recorded in January 2025 and actually documents Israeli forces attacking a family in Aitaroun, Lebanon.<sup>'249</sup>

13.3.6 On 10 March 2025, International Crisis Group stated that 'Prior to the early March [2025] violence in Latakia and elsewhere, reports of sporadic attacks on individual Alawites had been circulating on social media. Accounts run by the new authorities' opponents have made much of these reports, but they are difficult to verify. Some of the posted video footage is obviously recycled from another time or place, and other reports are outright fabrications. That said, clearly some such incidents have occurred...<sup>'250</sup>

13.3.7 On 24 March 2025, Etana Syria, an independent organisation which 'serves as a civil & diplomatic service for Syrians'<sup>251</sup>, reported that: '... General Security is ... facing growing condemnation over its decision to deny access to foreign journalists and media agencies to coastal cities and villages. Regional access has only been granted to pro-government outlets, and solely to specific areas under tight supervision, effectively preventing independent verification of violations.'<sup>252</sup>

13.3.8 See also [Limits on reporting, disinformation and misinformation](#) and section 1.3.2 of the European Union Asylum Agency's (EUAA) March 2025 [COI Report - Syria: Country Focus](#). However, refer to the relevant footnote(s) as that report and this note have used the same or similar sources and reports in places.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 13.4 State response

13.4.1 Ragıp Soylu, a 'Journalist, writing on Turkey and occasionally on the region'<sup>253</sup>, posted on X that 'Syrian presidency appoints "an independent committee" to investigate the insurgency and the attacks against civilians and security personal in Syrian coastal towns. It has powers to question everyone and will draft a report in 30 days'<sup>254</sup>. His post also listed the members appointed to the commission.

13.4.2 His post also explained:

'The committee shall be entrusted with the following tasks:

1 - Disclosing the causes, circumstances and conditions that led to the occurrence of these events.

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<sup>247</sup> X (@VeSyriaE), [Post on X dated 10 March 2025 @ 11:47AM](#)

<sup>248</sup> X (@VeSyriaE), [Post on X dated 10 March 2025 @ 11:47AM](#)

<sup>249</sup> X (@VeSyriaE), [Post on X dated 10 March 2025 @ 11:47AM](#)

<sup>250</sup> International Crisis Group, [...a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>251</sup> Etana Syria, [About](#), no date

<sup>252</sup> Etana Syria, [Syria Update 22](#), 24 March 2025

<sup>253</sup> X (@ragipsoylu), [Profile](#)

<sup>254</sup> X (@ragipsoylu), [Post on X dated 9 March 2025 @ 2:35PM](#)

2- Investigate the violations against civilians and identify those responsible.

3- Investigating attacks on public institutions, security personnel and the army and identifying those responsible.

'Third: All relevant government agencies must cooperate with the Committee as necessary to accomplish its tasks.

'Fourth: The Committee has the right to seek assistance from whomever it deems appropriate to perform its tasks, and it shall submit its report to the Presidency of the Republic within a maximum period of thirty days from the date of issuance of this decision.'<sup>255</sup>

13.4.3 Charles Lister, 'a senior fellow and head of the Syria Initiative at the Middle East Institute'<sup>256</sup>, also posted on X that '#Latakia's #Alawite religious & civil leaders have issued a joint statement calling for:

1) accountability for crimes on all sides;

2) restrict weapons to the state;

3) "appreciating" Ahmed al-Sharaa's speech & calling for support to interim gov't.'<sup>257</sup>

13.4.4 On 9 March 2025, the BBC reported that: 'Syria's leader Ahmed al-Sharaa has vowed to hold anyone involved in harming civilians accountable after days of clashes where Syrian security forces allegedly killed hundreds of civilians from the Alawite religious minority.'<sup>258</sup> It quoted him as saying:

"We affirm that we will hold accountable, firmly and without leniency, anyone who is involved in the bloodshed of civilians or harming our people, who overstepped the powers of the state or exploits authority to achieve his own ends," Sharaa added in the video speech, posted by state news agency Sana.

"No-one will be above the law and anyone whose hands are stained with the blood of Syrians will face justice sooner rather than later."<sup>259</sup>

13.4.5 On 9 March 2025, The Guardian reported that 'Ahmed al-Sharaa, said the developments were within "expected challenges" and called for national unity' and that 'The Syrian government has said "individual actions" led to the killing of civilians and that the influx of fighters on the coast had led to human rights violations'. The article also noted that the investigation committee consists of seven persons, 'comprising judges and one lawyer.'<sup>260</sup>

13.4.6 On 8 March 2025, Qutaiba Idlbi, a Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council<sup>261</sup>, posted on X that 'President Ahmad al-Sharaa himself has recognized these abuses, pledging that perpetrators will be held accountable and that military actions must adhere to national laws and ethical standards.'<sup>262</sup>

13.4.7 He also posted that 'As of Saturday morning [8 March 2025], the Syrian MoD [Ministry of Defense] announced restrictions on access to both governorates,

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<sup>255</sup> X (@ragipsoylu), [Post on X dated 9 March 2025 @ 2:35PM](#)

<sup>256</sup> Middle East Institute, [Charles Lister](#), no date

<sup>257</sup> X (@Charles\_Lister), [Post on X dated 8 March 2025 @ 8:04PM](#)

<sup>258</sup> BBC, [Syria leader vows to hunt down those responsible for bloodshed](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>259</sup> BBC, [Syria leader vows to hunt down those responsible for bloodshed](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>260</sup> The Guardian, [Entire families reportedly killed in fighting in north-west Syria...](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>261</sup> X (@Qidlbi), [Profile](#)

<sup>262</sup> X (@Qidlbi), [Post on X dated 8 March 2025 @ 3:00PM](#)

and started expelling all armed personnel who are not under MoDs command or were not assigned to report to the regional command. It also announced arrests among pro-government fighters.<sup>263</sup>

- 13.4.8 On 9 March 2025, Al Arabiya reported that: “The Damascus authorities have blamed summary executions of dozens of youths and deadly raids on homes... on unruly armed militias who came to help the security forces and have long blamed al-Assad’s supporters for past crimes ...

‘A security source said insurgents loyal to al-Assad had attacked several public utilities in the last 24 hours, disrupting electricity and water supplies.’<sup>264</sup>

- 13.4.9 On 10 March 2025, International Crisis Group stated that:

‘After offering general exhortations for the security forces to act ethically in a 7 March [2025] speech, [Al-Sharaa] went further in a second address, emphasising accountability, including for those aligned with the government, and announcing the formation of committees, one for fact finding and another for civil peace. The first of these committees will investigate the causes of the unrest, identifying and holding to account those, including on the government’s side, who were responsible for acts of violence against civilians as well as those who attacked the security forces. The second committee is to focus on liaison with communities, listening to their concerns, providing support and protection, and fostering national cohesion.’<sup>265</sup>

- 13.4.10 On 10 March 2025, Al Jazeera reported that:

‘On Sunday [9 March 2025], al-Sharaa announced two new committees to deal with the crisis.

‘One is an independent committee of judges and lawyers to investigate the March 6 [2025] attacks and the violence that ensued and hold those responsible accountable, in pursuit of “higher national interest and civil peace”.

‘The second is a “Supreme Committee for Civil Peace”, tasked with engaging with the residents of the affected areas and safeguarding their security.’<sup>266</sup>

- 13.4.11 On 10 March 2025, the BBC reported that:

‘Defence ministry spokesman Hassan Abdul Ghani announced on X that the security operation in Latakia and Tartous had ended after “achieving all the specified objectives”.

“Our forces have neutralised the security cells and remnants of the former regime from the town of al-Mukhtareyah, the town of al-Mazairaa, the area of al-Zobar, and other locations in Latakia province, as well as Dalia town, Tanita town, and Qadmous in Tartous province, resulting in the thwarting of threats and securing the area,” he said.

‘He also said that public institutions in the region were now able to resume their work, adding: “We are preparing for the return of normal life and working to reinforce security and stability.”

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<sup>263</sup> X (@Qidlbi), [Post on X dated 8 March 2025 @ 3:00PM](#)

<sup>264</sup> Al Arabiya, [Syria’s al-Sharaa scrambles to contain deadliest violence in years](#), 9 March 2025

<sup>265</sup> International Crisis Group, [...a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>266</sup> Al Jazeera, [Syria clashes – what happened?](#), 10 March 2025

‘Abdul Ghani promised that security forces would also “give the investigating committee the full opportunity to uncover the circumstances of these incidents, verify the facts and deliver justice to the oppressed”.

‘In an interview on Monday [10 March 2025], Sharaa acknowledged that there were “many violations” following the outbreak of violence and promised to punish everyone responsible, including his own allies if necessary.’<sup>267</sup>

13.4.12 On 10 March 2025, Middle East Eye reported that ‘While the new Syrian administration's defence ministry said it had completed its operations against “regime remnants”, residents of the coastal cities say violence has not ended, despite being reduced.’<sup>268</sup>

13.4.13 The 12 March 2025 report on Vizier explained:

‘The government has quickly moved to restore order, suppress the Assadist insurgency, and arrest numerous perpetrators of violations ranging from theft to massacres of civilians.

‘Some of those arrested are listed below, and campaigns to make further arrests are ongoing:

- A man named Hussein Wassouf and his gang were arrested after they took advantage of the chaos and committed violations against civilians.
- Two men who filmed themselves riding through a village and shooting and killing an elderly man have been arrested and referred to the judiciary.
- A man who executed a civilian was arrested and referred to the judiciary.
- Four individuals were arrested for committing crimes against civilians and referred to the judiciary.

‘Al-Shara also personally called Hanadi Zahlout, an anti-Assad regime activist and member of the Alawite community who lost three brothers to sectarian violence, and promised an investigative committee and justice. Zahlout addressed Syrians, calling for healing and justice, and also posted the following on Facebook:

“President Ahmed Al-Sharaa called me today to offer his condolences, and in his call he expressed his condolences to my family and to all the families of the victims, and he promised to hold the perpetrators accountable through an investigation committee that includes a group of judges. I express my support for the committee and we are awaiting the conclusion of its investigation and we are ready to cooperate and provide our testimonies so that justice can take its course and the law can prevail in our country and on our land.”<sup>269</sup>

13.4.14 The same report added:

‘Further steps were taken by the Syrian government and GSS [General Security Services]:

‘In Homs, general security forces formed lines to protect Alawite neighbourhoods from sectarian violence as provocateurs attempted to take

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<sup>267</sup> BBC, [Syria says operation against Assad loyalists over after deadly violence](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>268</sup> Middle East Eye, [A weekend from hell in coastal Syria](#), 10 March 2025

<sup>269</sup> Vizier, [Assadist Insurgents Fail at Counterrevolution Attempt in Syria](#), 12 March 2025

advantage of the situation. For months, the GSS has patrolled these neighbourhoods to keep the peace.

‘GSS have strengthened their presence and are patrolling neighbourhoods to prevent looters from taking advantage of the chaos.

‘Families are being evacuated from areas where Assadist insurgents are operating to ensure their safety.

‘On request from dignitaries in Suweyda, students from the province who were studying at Latakia University were evacuated by GSS and escorted to Suweyda.

‘The leader of the military operations room, Colonel Hassan Abdul-Ghani, has toured Alawite districts to provide reassurance to civilians and asked them to report crimes so the government can hold them to account.’<sup>270</sup>

- 13.4.15 On 13 March 2025, SJAC reported published an ‘Analysis of Atrocities Committed in Latakia and Tartous’. The analysis outlined Al-Sharaa’s response:

‘Al-Sharaa has taken some public steps towards accountability for the violations, although SJAC assesses that these steps will have limited impact without some modifications. In his speech on March 9 [2025], Al-Sharaa claimed that anyone “whose hands were stained with blood” would be held accountable and that no one would be above the law. He also announced the formation of a 7-person fact-finding committee to investigate the events that took place on the coast. The group is tasked with submitting a report to the President within 30 days. In a March 11 [2025] press conference, committee spokesman Yasser Al-Farhan promised to submit the investigation results to the judiciary, including a list of likely perpetrators. SJAC notes that the Syrian judiciary is not currently functioning and is, therefore, ill-equipped to facilitate accountability for these violations.’<sup>271</sup>

- 13.4.16 On 18 March 2025, the Syria Report – ‘an English-language publication covering Syrian economic and political economy affairs since 2001’<sup>272</sup> – reported that ‘As of the time this report was prepared, while the government had set up an investigation committee and arrested some fighters who filmed themselves committing massacres, no official or military body within the new transitional administration had issued any statement regarding plans for compensation, reconstruction of the affected areas, or resettlement of those who lost their homes.’<sup>273</sup>

- 13.4.17 On 24 March 2025 SOHR reported:

‘The decision of the formation of a fact-finding committee to investigate the latest developments which started on March 6 [2025] comes as a step to bring justice to the innocent civilians who were killed ... on March 7 [2025]...

‘With the committee’s work being in progress, residents and activists in the Syrian coast communicated with the Syrian Observatory and expressed their mistrust of the fact-finding committee and the outcomes of its investigations, amid accusations against the committee’s members of corruption, as they

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<sup>270</sup> Vizier, [Assadist Insurgents Fail at Counterrevolution Attempt in Syria](#), 12 March 2025

<sup>271</sup> SJAC, [SJAC’s Analysis of Atrocities Committed in Latakia and Tartous](#), 13 March 2025

<sup>272</sup> The Syria Report, [About Us](#), no date

<sup>273</sup> The Syria Report, [Systematic Looting, Burning and Bulldozing ... the Syrian Coast](#), 18 March 2025

previously described mass executions as individual acts and denied massacres...

‘For nearly two weeks, since the formation of the committee, the committee’s members have neither visited the areas which experienced the largest massacres ever against civilians of Alawite community in the Syrian coast nor met with the families of victims...

‘In the past few days, SOHR activists documented several attempts to obliterate evidence of the committed massacres and falsify facts through putting the bodies of victims in military uniform and placing weapons near the bodies to mislead media outlets and the members of the fact-finding committee, portraying that those persons were regime affiliates and they were killed during clashes with security forces. This is the same technique used previously by the former regime which used to cover its crimes and blame terrorist groups of committing them.’<sup>274</sup>

13.4.18 On 11 April 2025, Al Jazeera reported that:

‘Syria’s interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa has extended the deadline for a committee to produce a report into the killings of hundreds of civilians on the country’s western coast last month ...

‘In a decree published late on Thursday [10 April 2025], the Syrian president said the committee had requested more time to complete its work and that he would grant it a non-renewable three-month extension ...

‘Firas, a 43-year-old Alawite who only gave his first name out of fear of retribution, told Reuters that the extension was an attempt to “stall and buy more time” and that he felt little hope the committee’s work would lead to real accountability.

‘In a statement on Friday [11 April 2025], the committee’s spokesperson, Yasser Farhan, said it recorded 41 sites where killings took place, each forming the basis for a separate case and requiring more time to gather evidence.’<sup>275</sup>

13.4.19 On 4 May 2025, the BBC reported that ‘A special committee is currently investigating both the initial 6 March attack by insurgents, and the violence by pro-government forces that followed. The BBC understands some 30 people have been arrested.’<sup>276</sup>

13.4.20 See also section 1.3.2 of the European Union Asylum Agency’s (EUAA) March 2025 [COI Report - Syria: Country Focus](#). However, refer to the relevant footnote(s) as that report and this note have used the same or similar sources and reports in places.

[Back to Contents](#)

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<sup>274</sup> SOHR, [Amid growing public discontent .... No progress achieved ....](#), 24 March 2025

<sup>275</sup> Al Jazeera, [Syria’s al-Sharaa extends deadline for investigation into coastal killings](#), 11 April 2025

<sup>276</sup> BBC, [Syrian security forces monitored armed civilians who killed Alawites...](#), 4 May 2025



# Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2024. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Commentary may be provided on source(s) and information to help readers understand the meaning and limits of the COI.

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

# Terms of Reference

The 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) provides a broad outline of the issues relevant to the scope of this note and forms the basis for the [country information](#).

The following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Limits on reporting, disinformation and misinformation
- Geography and demography
  - Numbers and locations of Alawites in Syria – nationally and where the larger/est communities are based
  - Changes over time
- Situation for Alawites in Syria, distinguishing (wherever possible) between ...
  - pre- and post- fall of Assad
  - non-state and HTS
  - areas outside of HTS control
  - confirmed/verified/reasonable versus subjective fears versus disinformation and misinformation
- Adequacy of protection offered by HTS to issues or threats from non-state actors

[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

# Version control and feedback

## Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **1.0**
- valid from **14 July 2025**

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### Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

### Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

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[Back to Contents](#)

## Changes from last version of this note

First version.

[Back to Contents](#)

## Feedback to the Home Office

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

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The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support them in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

[Back to Contents](#)