

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Titel:	Violence targeting Local Officials 2023
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MIDDLE EAST



ACLED

A fighter from the Syria Democratic Forces (SDF) stands with his weapon at the western entrance to Manbij city, in Aleppo Governorate, Syria, June 21, 2016. REUTERS/Rodi Said

MIDDLE EAST

In the Middle East, ACLED records 111 acts of violence directed toward local officials, a reduction of 13% from 2022. Syria (32), Yemen (27), Iraq (17), Turkey (17), and Palestine (8) saw the highest number of events targeting local officials, and accounted for 91% of all events. Iran dropped from fourth place in 2022 to seventh place, with just three events. This follows the decrease in activity relating to the death of Mahsa Amini that began in September 2022. Events perpetrated by unidentified armed groups remained at similar levels, accounting for 44% of all events in 2023 and 43% in 2022.

Despite recording a 22% decrease in the number of events targeting local officials in 2023, **Syria** retained its position as first in the region, making up nearly a third of all events. In a repeat of 2022, violence was largely carried out by unidentified armed groups (18), two-thirds of which occurred in Daraa governorate. The Islamic State (IS) was the most prolific identified actor, perpetrating five attacks on Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (QSD) local officials in Dayr al-Zawr as part of their ongoing insurgency in the region. In total, 12 events were reported in Dayr al-Zawr, compared

to six in the previous year, making it the governorate with the largest increase. In comparison, Aleppo governorate dropped from 12 events in 2022 to two in 2023.

27 events targeting local officials were recorded in **Yemen**, a 13% decrease compared to 2022. Violence against local officials happens in a climate of widespread impunity, with unidentified armed groups reported to be the perpetrators in over half of the reported events (15 out of 27). In the central Taizz governorate, home to at least nine reported events, violence is largely an outcome of the infighting within the governing coalition. In the southern Aden and Abyan governorates, which record four and three events, respectively, competition between the secessionist [Southern Transitional Council](#) (STC) and the [Internationally Recognized Government](#) is a significant driver of violence. In the STC-controlled city of Aden, armed separatists allegedly abducted an advisor to a district director in June. In Abyan, forces loyal to STC also abducted local council members and tribesmen against the backdrop of a counterterrorism drive against [al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula](#).

VIOLENCE TARGETING Local Officials

In **Iraq**, violence also dropped by 39% from 28 recorded events in 2022 to 17 in 2023. The only governorate that saw an increase in events was Thi Qar, which rose from three events in 2022 to seven in 2023. Unidentified armed groups were also responsible for the most events (10), followed by IS and tribal militias. Despite a [relatively peaceful election period in December](#), there was one instance of violence against local officials recorded in Kufa city, Najaf, when unknown militants detonated two IEDs and a sound grenade near three voting stations.

Turkey rose from fifth to joint-third place, recording 17 events in 2023 compared to six in 2022. There was an increase in violence both [before](#) and [after](#) President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was re-elected president on 28 May. In the run-up to the vote, a local council president in the southeastern town of Viransehir and the Republican People's Party (CHP) mayor of Erdek, Balikesir province, were victims of aggression in March. Other opposition officials were subject to intimidation attempts in the weeks preceding the vote, including shots fired into the air next to a vehicle belonging to a local executive of the CHP in Elazig and the storming of a public meeting organized by opposition parties that injured 17 people. On election day, ballot box workers affiliated with Erdogan's Justice Development Party (AKP) assaulted

the CHP mayor of Beylikduzu when he was casting his vote, and in Izmir, unknown persons vandalized a People's Democratic Party (HDP) building with racist words. Separately, the Kurdish People's United Revolutionary Movement (HBDH) carried out at least six attacks against symbols of the government, including a string of bomb explosions targeting municipal buildings in Istanbul, Şanlıurfa, and Van regions on 25 August.

Palestine also moved up one place in 2023, recording eight events compared to five the year prior. The Israeli military destroyed municipality buildings in both Gaza City and Khan Yunis as part of the ground invasion of the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, Israeli settlers carried out at least three distinct attacks on Palestinian local officials, two of which were before the Hamas attacks on 7 October. On 22 March, armed settlers opened fire on a vehicle belonging to the municipality of Salfit, and on 19 August, both Israeli settlers and soldiers assaulted Palestinian workers of the Qaffin municipality. On 22 October, the head of the Kisan village council near Bethlehem was the victim of aggression conducted by armed settlers – an example of the rising Israeli settler violence after 7 October.

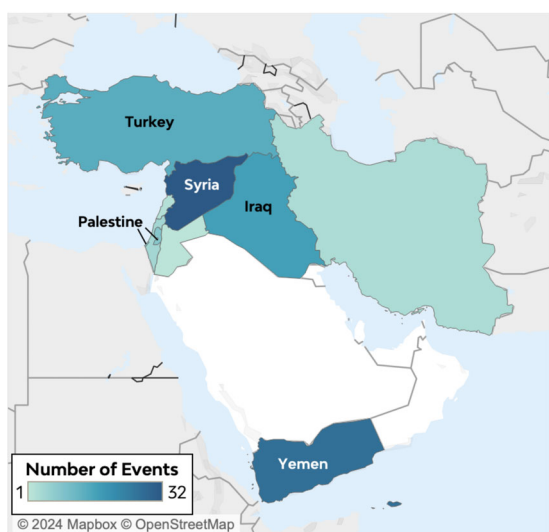
MIDDLE EAST

SITUATION IN 2023

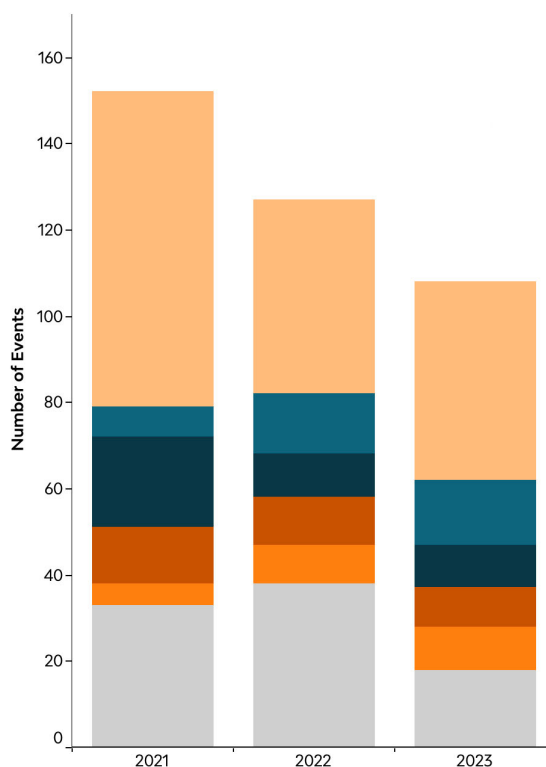
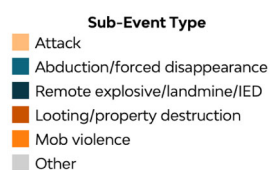
**111** events*recorded in 2023***13%** decrease*compared to 2022*

Top 5 countries with most events

1.	Syria	32
2.	Yemen	27
3.	Iraq	17
4.	Turkey	17
5.	Palestine	8



EVOLUTION SINCE 2021

Forms of Violence Used Against
Local Officials: 2021 – 2023

SYRIA: Attacks attempt to subvert regional control

Local governance continues to be highly contested in Syria. Attempts by the Islamic State (IS) and other armed groups to weaken the regime of Bashar al-Assad and other rebel-held administrations make Syria the country with the highest number of violent events targeting local officials in the Middle East, with 32 events recorded in 2023 alone. At least 266 events took place in Syria between 2018 and 2023.

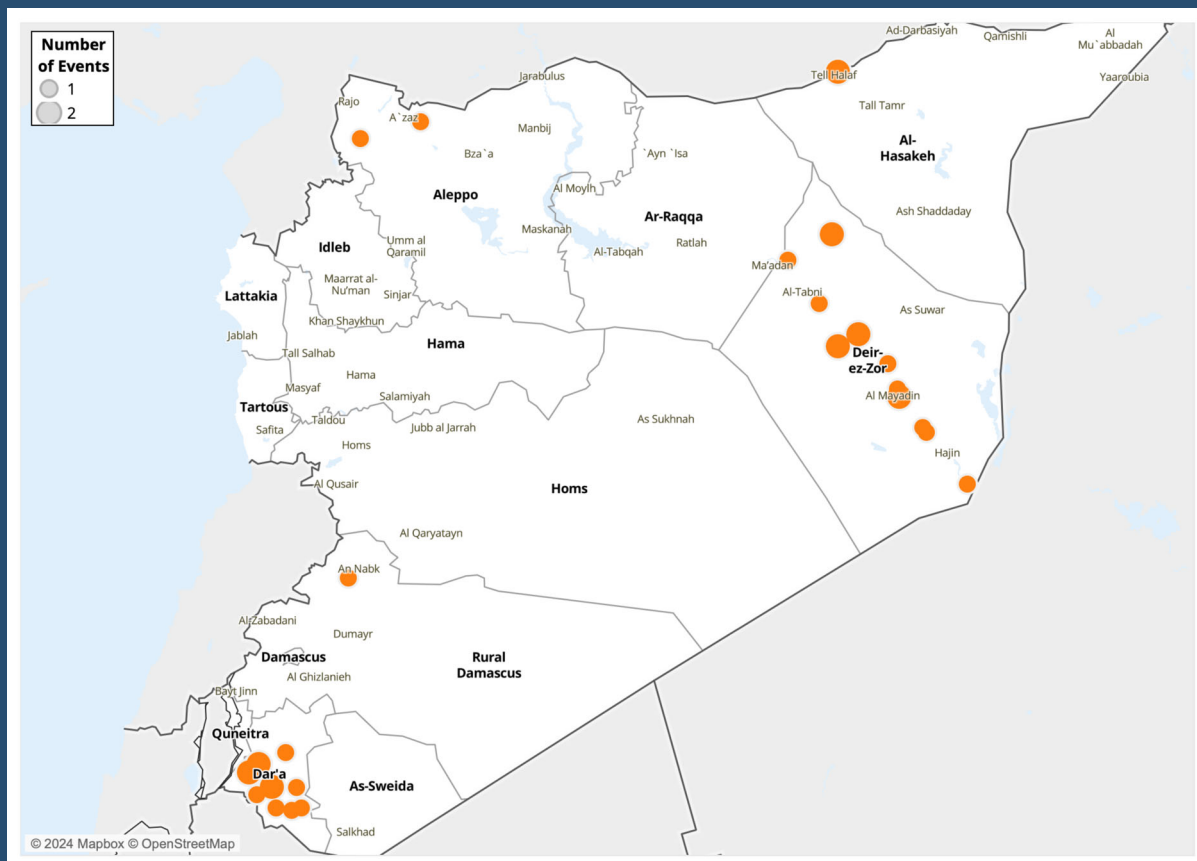
The eastern governorate of **Dayr al-Zawr** accounts for approximately 47% of all attacks on local officials recorded in Syria. The region, once partially under the control of IS, is now split between the Syrian government and the breakaway administration under the authority of the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (QSD). IS militants were allegedly involved in five distinct attacks on QSD officials in the countryside of Dayr al-Zawr, killing at least three council members. These actions suggest an attempt by IS to destabilize the local administration, while the detention of an IS member serving as a commissar in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria points to the group's penetration in the region. Other attacks reportedly occurred at the hands of unidentified armed groups and Iranian-backed militias.

The regime-held governorate of **Daraa** is another hotbed of violence against local officials, with 12 events recorded in 2023 and 71 total between 2018 and 2023. Unlike in Dayr al-Zawr, attacks against local administrators in Daraa remain largely unclaimed. Once an opposition stronghold, Daraa fell under the control of the Syrian government in 2018. A string of assassinations has since targeted officials who are suspected of collaboration with either the regime or the opposition.¹ Other interpretations point to an internecine fighting between different branches of the Syrian regime vying for influence. These dynamics are evident in the town of al-Naymah, whose mayor was killed by unidentified gunmen in September 2023. The two previous mayors were also assassinated in 2021 and 2022.²

¹ Horan Free League, 'Human rights report: Continuing bleeding in Daraa 2023', 5 January 2024

² North Press Agency, 'For The Third Year In A Row, The Third Mayor Was Killed In Daraa', 12 September 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING
Local Officials



Violence Targeting Local Officials in Syria: 2023