

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Sectarian violence threatens Syria's chance at stability

9-11 minutes

By the numbers

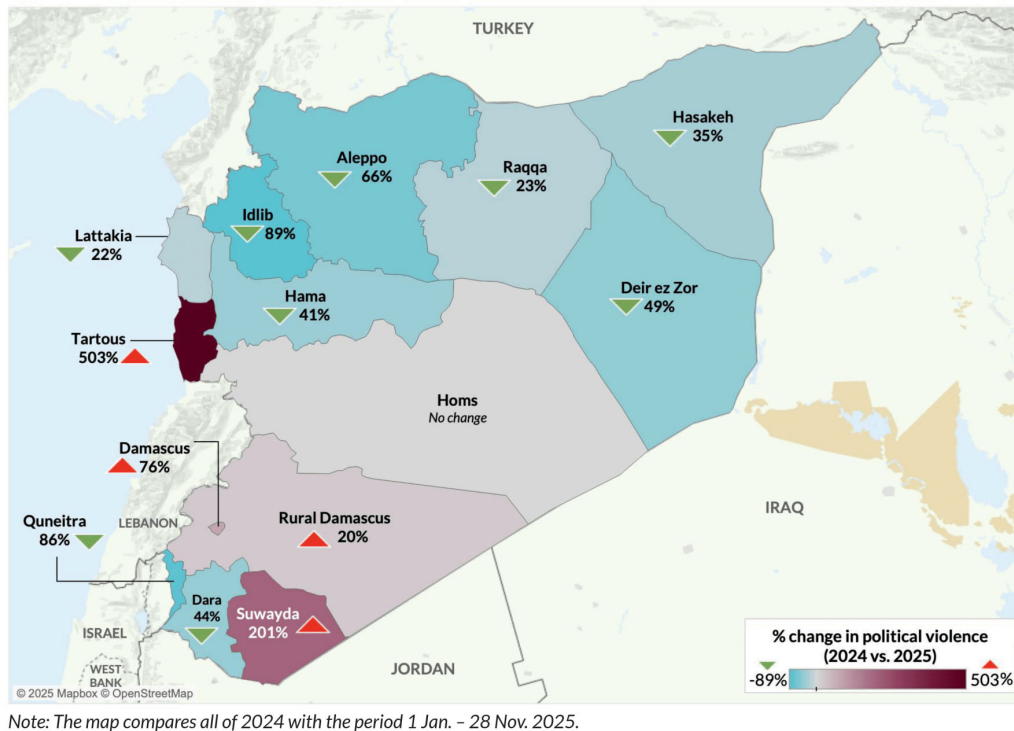
From 1 January to 28 November 2025:

- **Over 4,670** civilians were killed in direct targeting across Syria.
- ACLED records **44%** fewer violent events compared to the first 11 months of 2024.
- Israel conducted **over 150** air and artillery strikes in Syria.

2025 was a watershed year for Syria. After the blitzkrieg that ended the 53-year-long rule of the Assad family, Ahmed al-Sharaa, leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), installed himself as Syria's transitional president. He spearheaded efforts to bolster Syria's international position and dismantle the sanctions regime, while restoring calm in a country devastated by 13 years of civil war. The results are mixed.

Overall violence dropped by 44% compared to 2024, a remarkable achievement despite a fragmented political landscape and a turbulent regional environment. However, this decrease was not spread evenly (*see map below*), and a combination of political competition, sectarian violence, and foreign meddling — which collectively resulted in at least 7,692 conflict-related deaths — attests to the fragility of Syria's transition.

Changes in political violence in Syria 2025 vs. 2024



Across much of the country, everyday violence declined largely because the transitional administration succeeded in consolidating authority within areas it controls. With the fall of the Assad regime, it reorganized the security apparatus by consolidating rebel forces and former HTS units into a formal command hierarchy, deployed across northern and central Syria. In provinces such as Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, and Raqqa, armed groups that are now integrated under the transitional government's security structure have taken up territorial defense, focused on local policing.

This stabilization, however, did not extend to minority-dominant areas where the state struggled to impose its authority. In al-Suwayda and the coastal region, Druze and Alawite factions rejected the transitional security and administrative order. Violent clashes broke out between forces aligned with Syria's new army and armed groups linked to minority communities and former Assad regime elements, occasionally escalating in mass killings along sectarian lines. Five provinces home to violent clashes with, and killings of, Druze and Alawite communities — Latakia, al-Suwayda, Tartous, Hama, and Homs — account for over 4,600 reported fatalities, 60% of those recorded nationwide. These incidents turned previously quiet provinces into deadly flashpoints and underscore the new administration's difficulty in reining in hard-line factions and preventing escalatory reprisals.

The Islamic State (IS) also returned to familiar patterns as a resilient insurgent force operating out of the northeast and the central Badia. After its resurgence in 2024, the group's activity dropped to a relatively moderate intensity in 2025. Most attacks were concentrated in areas held by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) or along the desert routes they patrol, ranging from strikes on security posts and prison

breaks. Despite joint Syrian-SDF raids and the arrest of numerous suspects, IS continued to adjust its tactics and looked for openings created by weak local governance, particularly around overcrowded detention sites and camps.

Where the new government struggled to extend authority or restore basic services, external actors stepped in to shape the security landscape. [Israel](#) continued to expand its military operations with [airstrikes](#) targeting military infrastructure and incursions across the country but especially in the southern corridor as it expanded beyond the agreed-upon 1974 buffer zone. In the north, Turkey increased military pressure on SDF-controlled zones while simultaneously brokering local arrangements.

Syria appears more stable on the surface, but the foundation of that stability is still shaky. The pattern of violence over the past year tells the story clearly: Incidents dropped from more than 1,000 in January to under 400 by October, yet the decline wasn't steady (*see graph below*). Instead, periods of calm were repeatedly interrupted by episodes of deadly violence. These fluctuations show that although the transitional administration has extended its reach in several regions, its capacity to govern and enforce security remains inconsistent.

Will Syria's tenuous equilibrium hold in 2026?

The uneven patterns of violence in 2025 will shape the pressures Syria will face in the coming year. First, the new administration continues to pursue reforms to its security apparatus. Via tightened command structures, integration of rebel forces and units, and the overhaul of policing and local security committees, the new administration seeks to secure places like Idlib and western Aleppo. These steps are part of efforts to maintain order and security, a precondition for Syria's reengagement with foreign partners. So far, these changes have contributed to a drop in violence across parts of the north. But if the reforms stall, they could leave behind a patchwork of groups with fragmented loyalties and an even higher risk of future contestation.

Second, Syria's renewed diplomatic engagement beyond its borders is reshaping the security landscape. President Sharaa's removal from terrorism lists, the government's growing cooperation with United States forces against IS, and discussions about Syria joining the anti-IS coalition point to major geopolitical shifts. Coordination with Turkey in 2025 has contributed to improving security in Kurdish provinces in the northeast. With US support, a deal brokered in October 2025 allows SDF units to integrate into the new Syrian army as intact formations, maintaining relative autonomy and internal command structures. How smoothly this integration is pursued will determine stability in the northeast in 2026.

Parallel talks with Lebanon and Iraq seek to tighten border control and curb smuggling routes. The most consequential track, however, is the US-mediated channel between Syria and Israel. If those talks progress, Israeli strikes may decrease and the security situation along the Golan could begin to settle. But stalled or failed negotiations could trigger new escalations, particularly in al-Suwayda and Daraa.

Third, macroeconomic stabilization is allowing Syria to open up to international financial markets. European Union and US sanctions relief, renewed interest from Gulf states, and early conversations with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund suggest that Syria might receive financial support in 2026. Economic support would help the transitional government improve its capacity to govern, stabilize salaries, repair basic services, and reduce its reliance on informal taxation or armed intermediaries. Yet without transparent management, new resources could easily strengthen existing patronage networks or fuel competition among local elites, risking a return to violence.

Fourth, sectarian tensions in minority areas remain highly volatile. The participation of factions affiliated with the transitional authority in violence against civilians in al-Suwayda and Tartous left deep trauma and eroded trust. Limited accountability or reconciliation has been pursued to address these events. Investigations led by the new administration downplayed sectarian motives and failed to enforce discipline over perpetrators, raising concerns about the administration's leverage over hard-line factions. As has happened often during the past year, relative calm can mask grievances that later erupt in deadlier violence. If these issues remain unresolved, Druze and Alawite communities may turn toward self-defense groups, foreign support, or increased calls for autonomous governance.

A resurgence of IS hangs over all of these dynamics. The group has entrenched itself in the northeast and is looking to exploit weaknesses in the emerging security order. Should US troops withdraw, or if cooperation between Syrian forces and the SDF fray, IS is likely to shift toward high-impact operations: targeted killings, sabotage of infrastructure, and further attempts to free detainees. Security raids in late 2025 suggest that Syrian intelligence is becoming more effective, but the group still has the capacity to mount symbolic attacks and carry out assassination attempts against senior officials, keeping the threat very much alive.

*Visual produced by **Ana Marco**.*

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