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FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2025

# Syria

NOT FREE

**5**  
/100

<b>Political Rights</b>	<b>-3</b> / 40
<b>Civil Liberties</b>	<b>8</b> / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

**1** / 100      **Not Free**

A country or territory's Freedom in the World status depends on its aggregate Political Rights score, on a scale of 0-40, and its aggregate Civil Liberties score, on a scale of 0-60. See the [methodology](#).



## Overview

Since 2011, political rights and civil liberties in Syria have been severely compromised by one of the world's most repressive regimes and by other belligerent forces in a brutal civil war. Under longtime dictator Bashar al-Assad, genuine political opposition was prohibited and freedoms of speech and assembly were harshly suppressed. Corruption, enforced disappearances, military trials, and torture were rampant in government-controlled areas. Residents of contested regions or territory held by nonstate actors were subject to additional abuses, including intense and indiscriminate combat, sieges and interruptions of humanitarian aid, and mass displacement. A military offensive led by the Islamist militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) prompted the Assad regime's sudden collapse in December 2024.

## Key Developments in 2024

- A surprise offensive led by HTS and the Syrian National Army (SNA), a Turkish-backed rebel coalition, swept across the country in late November and early December. The Assad regime's defenses collapsed less than two weeks after the start of the offensive, forcing President Bashar al-Assad to flee the country.
- Following their military victory, HTS and its allies assumed de facto control of the Syrian state under the leadership of HTS head Ahmed al-Sharaa. Within days of entering Damascus, HTS announced the creation of a caretaker government, set to operate until March 2025, and appointed HTS-aligned technocrat Mohammed al-Bashir as prime minister.
- Repeated demonstrations against HTS's local leadership in Idlib early in the year were met with physical force, resulting in injuries to demonstrators as HTS-affiliated authorities attempted to disperse the protests. After the Assad regime's ouster in December, however, extremely large rallies were able to proceed in multiple locations controlled by HTS and its allies.
- Assad's Baath Party had retained its effective monopoly on formal state power in July parliamentary elections, which were marred by violence and manipulation. After the collapse of the regime in December, HTS leaders announced that the parliament would be suspended for at least a three-month period.

# Political Rights

## A. Electoral Process

**A1** 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

0/4

Prior to December 2024, the president, who dominated the executive branch, was empowered to appoint and dismiss the prime minister and cabinet. President Bashar al-Assad had won a fourth seven-year term in 2021, with the government reporting that he received 95.1 percent of the vote. Balloting was conducted under highly repressive conditions and only in government-controlled areas. The millions of Syrians living abroad largely refrained from voting.

The 2021 election featured an uncompetitive slate of candidates: only three aspiring candidates, including Assad, were allowed to participate. Potential opposition challengers were also obstructed by a law requiring candidates to have lived within Syria for 10 years, effectively disqualifying those in exile. Major democratic states denounced the election as illegitimate.

The Assad regime collapsed suddenly in December 2024 following an opposition offensive led by HTS, and Assad fled the country. HTS and its allies subsequently took control of state institutions, and HTS leader Ahmed al-Sharaa became the country's de facto chief executive. The group also unilaterally appointed HTS-aligned technocrat Mohammed al-Bashir as prime minister of a caretaker government that it said would last until March 2025. In late December, al-Sharaa said it would be about four years before elections could be held under a new constitution.

**A2** 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

0/4

Elections for the 250-seat People's Council, Syria's unicameral parliament, were held in July 2024, though only in areas with a regime presence. These elections were affected by the widespread displacement of the population, as well as manipulation, violence, and a lack of transparency. The balloting featured no meaningful competition, as exiled opposition groups did not participate, and the authorities did not tolerate independent political activity in the territory they controlled. The ruling Baath Party and its coalition won 185 seats. The remaining 65 seats went to candidates running as nominal independents, though all were considered government loyalists.

After the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, HTS leadership announced that the parliament would be suspended for a period of at least three months. Based on al-Sharaa's estimate that month, no legislative elections were expected for about four years.

**A3** 0-4 pts

**Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?**

**O / 4**

There was no transparency or accountability surrounding the official electoral process under the Assad regime. The executive authorities, acting through the military-security apparatus, effectively granted or withheld permission to participate in elections in government-held areas. Although some provisional local councils outside government-controlled areas had organized rudimentary elections since the outbreak of civil war in 2011, attacks by progovernment forces and militant groups had made such processes untenable.

Kurdish-held areas had a provisional constitution that allowed local elections, but the Democratic Union Party (PYD) exercised ultimate control.

Following the collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024, al-Sharaa told journalists that drafting a new constitution could take up to three years, and that holding elections under the new legal framework could take up to four years.

# B. Political Pluralism and Participation

**B1** 0-4 pts

**Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?**

**O / 4**

Prior to December 2024, a 2011 decree allowed new political parties to register but also imposed significant obstacles to party formation and prohibited parties based on religion, regional affiliation, and other criteria. In practice, all legally recognized political groups and independents were either part of, allied with, or heavily vetted by the Assad regime.

In Kurdish-held areas, politics have been dominated in practice by the most powerful group, the PYD, whose affiliated security forces have frequently detained political opponents.

There was no immediate effort to replace the legal framework for political party formation or campaigning after HTS and its allies took control of Syria in December 2024.

**B2** 0-4 pts

**Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?**

**O / 4**

The Baath Party governed Syria without interruption from the 1960s until December 2024, and was led by Assad or his late father for nearly all of that time. The 2011 decree and 2012 constitutional reforms formally relaxed rules regarding the participation of non-Baathist parties. In practice, the regime maintained a powerful intelligence and security apparatus to monitor and punish opposition movements that could meaningfully challenge Assad's rule.

After the collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024, some observers expressed hope that the HTS-led transitional government would allow opposition forces to meaningfully contest future elections. Others warned that al-Sharaa could move to exclude any opposition and consolidate HTS rule. Al-Sharaa pledged to organize an inclusive “national dialogue” after installing a transitional government in March 2025.

**B3** 0-4 pts

**Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?**

**0 / 4**

In the territory it controlled prior to December 2024, the Assad regime’s security and intelligence forces, militias, and business allies actively suppressed the autonomy of voters and politicians. Foreign actors including the Russian and Iranian regimes and the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah have at various times exerted heavy influence over politics in some areas. In other areas, civilian politics are generally subordinated to locally dominant armed groups, including HTS, the PYD, and SNA forces allied with the Turkish military.

Following the collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024, the HTS-led caretaker government vowed to dissolve militias, including its own, and to integrate former militia fighters into a single national army. Al-Sharaa further declared that all militants would be “subject to the law.”

**B4** 0-4 pts

**Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?**

**0 / 4**

The largely Alawite-led Assad regime historically presented itself as a protector of that and other religious minority populations. In practice, political access depended not on sect but on proximity and loyalty to Assad and his associates. Alawites, Christians, Druze, and members of other smaller sects who were outside Assad’s inner circle were politically disenfranchised. The political elite included

Sunni Muslims, but the country's Sunni majority made up most of the rebel movement and bore the brunt of state repression as a result.

For most of 2024, territory controlled by the opposition was divided among Turkish-backed rebels, Islamist militias, and jihadist militants, with varying implications for ethnic and religious minority groups. In Kurdish-held areas, the PYD nominally ensured political representation for Arabs but has been accused of mistreating non-Kurdish residents. In December 2024, al-Sharaa promised to install a moderate, inclusive government for all Syrians, regardless of sect, but many Syrians and international observers expressed concern that HTS would impose a harsh Sunni Islamist system of government on the country.

Women have equal formal political rights in Syria, and following the July 2024 parliamentary elections, women held 24 of the legislature's 250 seats. Some women were appointed to senior government positions after the new HTS-led government took power in December. However, women have typically been excluded from political decision-making and had little ability to organize independently amid state and militia repression. All leadership positions in Kurdish PYD-held areas are reportedly shared between a man and a woman, though women have limited political autonomy outside PYD-led structures.

## C. Functioning of Government

**C1** 0-4 pts

**Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?**

**0/4**

Under the Assad regime, de facto authority in government-controlled Syria lay with the president—who was not freely elected—and his political, security, and business allies rather than with formal institutions such as the cabinet and parliament. Foreign states including Iran and Russia also wielded considerable influence over regime policy. Opposition forces and Kurdish-led fighters held large swaths of territory with the help of military forces from countries such as Turkey and the United States, respectively.

After the HTS-led military offensive toppled the Assad regime in December 2024, it remained unclear whether the new, unelected caretaker government—or the transitional government set to succeed it in early 2025—would be able to consolidate control over the country's disparate militias and their respective territories, or whether any future political structures would feature institutional checks on executive authority.

**C2** 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

0/4

The regime and its allies controlled much of the Syrian economy. The civil war created new opportunities for corruption among the government, loyalist armed forces, and the private sector. Foreign allies benefited from opaque government contracts and trade deals. Basic state services and humanitarian aid were reportedly extended or withheld based on potential recipients' demonstrated political loyalty to the Assad regime. Individuals in government-held territory who sought to expose or criticize official corruption faced reprisals including dismissal from employment and detention.

In March 2024, the US government imposed sanctions on several figures close to the Assad regime for producing and exporting the amphetamine Captagon and redirecting the revenue back to the government.

Corruption has also been widespread in opposition-held areas. Turkish-backed militias have been accused of looting, extortion, and theft. Local administrators and activists have said that little of the international aid reportedly given to opposition representatives abroad reaches them, raising suspicions of graft. Prior to its December 2024 ouster of Assad, HTS had been accused of monopolizing trade in fuel and key services in its territory around Idlib in northwestern Syria, regularly confiscating or destroying goods, and seizing the property of absentee owners, often for redistribution to their own commanders.

**C3** 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

0/4

The Assad regime operated with minimal transparency and public accountability, and conditions worsened during the civil war amid the rise of militias that were nominally loyal to the regime but often free to exploit the population. Regime officials had broad discretion to withhold government information, and they were not obliged to disclose their assets. Independent civil society groups and media outlets were harshly suppressed and could not influence or shed light on state policies.

The formation of a caretaker government by HTS following the collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024 lacked transparency. However, al-Sharaa subsequently undertook significant efforts to bolster communication between the HTS leadership and the Syrian people, and repeatedly acknowledged the importance of inclusive and transparent governance. He promised to hold an inclusive national consultation on Syria's future after establishing transitional institutions, but had not yet done so at year's end.

### **Add Q**

**Is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a culture or tip the political balance in favor of another group?**

**-3**

The Assad regime, Kurdish forces, Turkish-backed opposition militias, and Islamist extremist groups have all sought to alter the ethnic composition of their territories, compelling civilians to seek safety among their respective religious or ethnic communities and contributing to the demographic shifts wrought by the civil war.

Under the Assad regime, Sunni Arab civilians bore the brunt of attacks by the Alawite-led government and loyalist militias. In 2018–19, the regime forcibly displaced as many as 900,000 civilians—most of them Sunni Arabs—from captured opposition areas to Idlib Governorate after bombing and besieging their cities.

In late 2019, the Turkish military launched an offensive into northeastern Syria, aiming to create a buffer zone by pushing out its Kurdish adversaries in the area. Turkish-backed militias were subsequently accused of expropriating land and

homes. According to more recent reports, Turkish forces have continued to impose repressive policies on Kurdish civilians in northeastern Syria, leading to the forced displacement of thousands of people and leaving the Kurdish population as a de facto minority even in some historically Kurdish-majority areas.

Sunni Islamist and jihadist groups often persecute religious minority groups and Muslims whom they accuse of impiety or apostasy. HTS's rise to national power in December 2024 sparked concerns that the group would target religious minorities—including the Alawite community—and entrench sectarian divisions, despite HTS leaders' promises to respect the rights of the country's minority groups.

Kurdish militias have been accused of displacing Arab and Turkmen residents in areas under their control.

## Civil Liberties

### D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

**D1** 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?

1 / 4

Under the Assad regime, the constitution nominally guaranteed freedom of the press, but in practice the media were heavily restricted in government-held areas, and journalists who reported critically about the state were subject to censorship, detention, torture, and death in custody. All media had to obtain permission to operate from the Interior Ministry. Private media in government-controlled territory were generally owned by figures associated with the regime.

Media freedom has varied in territory held by other groups, but local outlets are pressured to support the dominant militant faction in their area. HTS, which took de facto control of the Syrian government in December 2024, has a history of repressing and harassing perceived critics, including journalists, in areas under its control.

During most of 2024, journalists faced physical danger across Syria, especially from regime forces and extremist groups. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 148 journalists and media workers were killed in connection with their work between 2011 and 2024. Ten journalists remained missing as of December 2024.

After the Assad regime was overthrown in December 2024, at least one detained journalist was released. Previously exiled Syrian journalists and foreign reporters were increasingly able to report in Syria that month, including in areas formerly held by the regime. Several news stories focused on journalists' newfound ability to access information about and report on regime crimes, such as those that took place at the notorious Sednaya prison complex. Media freedom organizations called on the new Syrian government to instate and uphold protections for journalistic independence and to guarantee journalists' safety.

*Score Change: The score improved from 0 to 1 because after the Assad regime was ousted in December, de facto authorities in previously regime-controlled areas allowed greater freedom and access for independent and foreign journalists.*

**D2** 0-4 pts

**Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?**

**2/4**

Under the Assad regime, the constitution mandated that the president be a Muslim. There was no state religion, and the regime generally allowed different confessional groups to practice their faiths if their religious activities were not deemed politically subversive. The government monitored mosques and controlled the appointment of Muslim religious leaders. Jehovah's Witnesses were banned, proselytizing was restricted, and converting Muslims to other faiths was prohibited. Extremist groups threatened freedom of worship for residents in their territory. The Islamic State (IS) militant group, which remained active in 2024, seeks to punish religious activity that does not conform to its understanding of Sunni Islam.

Following the collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024, observers expressed concern that the new HTS-led government might persecute religious minorities or Muslims seen as impious, as the militant group had done in the

past. However, HTS leaders pledged to respect religious minorities, repeatedly promising to build a moderate, inclusive state. At year's end, the caretaker government had not imposed undue religious restrictions on the population; for example, the sale and consumption of alcohol was permitted, and women were not subjected to restrictive dress codes.

**D3** 0-4 pts

**Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?**

**0/4**

Academic freedom was severely restricted under the Assad regime. University professors in government-held areas were dismissed or imprisoned for expressing dissent, and some were killed for supporting regime opponents. Combatants on all sides have regularly attacked or commandeered schools. Groups including the PYD and Islamist militants have set up education systems in their territories that feature pervasive political indoctrination.

**D4** 0-4 pts

**Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?**

**1/4**

The Assad regime engaged in heavy surveillance of private and online discussion and harshly punished dissent in areas it controlled, though it employed its surveillance tools inconsistently in recent years amid deepening criticism from traditionally loyal segments of the population. According to initial reports, freedom of expression in previously government-held areas improved markedly after the December 2024 fall of the Assad regime.

The environment has been somewhat more open in areas where neither the Assad government nor an extremist group had a dominant presence, though the PYD and some armed opposition factions have allegedly suppressed freedom of speech.

# E. Associational and Organizational Rights

**E1** 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

1/4

Freedom of assembly was severely restricted under the Assad regime. Opposition protests in government-held areas were frequently met with gunfire, mass arrests, and torture of those detained. Jihadist groups, the PYD, and some rebel factions have also used force to quash civilian dissent and demonstrations.

Hundreds of protesters in northwestern Syria repeatedly demonstrated against HTS, which ruled the area, in early 2024, calling for the ouster of al-Sharaa and the release of political prisoners. HTS was somewhat responsive to protesters, releasing hundreds of detainees. However, the group also fired weapons and physically assaulted protesters in order to forcibly disperse demonstrations, resulting in injuries to participants.

Extremely large rallies and public assemblies—both planned and spontaneous—were held across Syria by those celebrating the December 2024 fall of the Assad regime. Other large demonstrations calling for secularism and criticizing HTS were also held that month. While such gatherings would not have been possible under the Assad regime, HTS and the HTS-led caretaker government largely declined to intervene. No new legal protections for freedom of assembly appeared to be in place by year's end.

*Score Change: The score improved from 0 to 1 because after the fall of the Assad regime, mass demonstrations were able to proceed in areas that had previously featured tight restrictions.*

**E2** 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work?

0/4

The Assad regime generally denied registration to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with reformist or human rights missions and regularly conducted raids and searches to detain civic and political activists. Grassroots civil society networks that monitor human rights abuses faced violence, intimidation, and detention by armed groups and often had to operate secretly.

After the collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024, there was an initial opening of civic space in formerly government-held areas, suggesting that NGOs might be able to operate more freely under the caretaker government and its successors.

**E3** 0-4 pts

**Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?**

**0/4**

At least until December 2024, professional syndicates in state-held areas were controlled by the Baath Party, and all labor unions had to belong to the General Federation of Trade Unions, a nominally independent grouping that the government used to control union activity. The war's economic and political pressures made ordinary labor relations virtually impossible across the country.

## **F. Rule of Law**

**F1** 0-4 pts

**Is there an independent judiciary?**

**0/4**

Under the Assad regime, the constitution forbade government interference in the civil judiciary, but judges and prosecutors were essentially required to belong to the Baath Party and were in practice beholden to the political leadership.

HTS, which led the caretaker government after defeating the Assad regime in December 2024, had a history of running legal and judicial institutions in territories under its control. These institutions were not considered impartial or independent from the de facto political leadership. At the end of 2024, the future

structure and operational autonomy of the judiciary under the HTS-led government remained unclear.

**F2** 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?

0/4

Under the Assad regime, military officers could try civilians in both conventional military courts and field courts, which lacked due process guarantees. Civilians could appeal military court decisions to the military chamber of the Court of Cassation, though its judges were ultimately subordinate to the military. The general breakdown of state authority and the proliferation of militias in much of the country has led to arbitrary detentions, summary justice, and extrajudicial penalties by all sides during the civil war.

Extremist groups—including HTS—have imposed harsh punishments for perceived religious offenses by civilians, without protecting the due process rights of defendants. Due process guarantees under the new government had yet to be established at the end of 2024.

**F3** 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

1/4

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an estimated 617,000 people were killed in the civil war between 2011 and the ouster of the Assad regime in December 2024. Both insurgents and the regime frequently targeted civilians, including through indiscriminate bombardment and extrajudicial killings. The regime has been accused of repeatedly using chemical weapons on civilian targets; it also detained and tortured tens of thousands of people during the war, with many dying or disappearing in custody.

Since losing control of its last population center in 2019, IS has used guerrilla and terrorist tactics to attack various security forces and local civilian leaders. Turkish military operations in the north have displaced tens of thousands of people. In Daraa Governorate in the south, violence involving regime forces and local

insurgents continued during 2024. In April, progovernment forces executed several civilians in the southern city of Al-Sanamayn.

Violence involving foreign military forces increased in 2024. In January, the Jordanian military launched a series of air strikes into southeastern Syria, reportedly targeting weapons and drug traffickers. Several civilians were killed, and thousands were temporarily displaced. In June, Israeli forces launched air and artillery strikes against Iranian-aligned militias and equipment in regime-held areas, killing both fighters and civilians. Israeli forces also occupied territory near the Golan Heights and carried out hundreds of air strikes against Syrian military targets after the fall of the Assad regime in December, with the stated goal of keeping Syrian military assets out of the hands of extremist groups.

The Assad regime collapsed in the face of a surprise offensive led by HTS and the SNA. New evidence of the regime's brutality emerged as the rebel forces captured its sprawling network of prisons, freeing thousands of people who had been arbitrarily detained and allowing relatives to search for the remains of the tens of thousands of others who had been forcibly disappeared, tortured, and killed in the prison system. Al-Sharaa promised to dissolve the Assad regime's security forces and hold those accused of torture and other crimes accountable.

*Score Change: The score improved from 0 to 1 because the collapse of the Assad regime resulted in the liberation and abandonment of its vast prison system, in which political prisoners and many other victims of arbitrary detention had been subjected to severe, often lethal torture and abuse.*

**F4** 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

0/4

Under the Assad regime, people with ties to the ruling elite received preferential legal treatment and were disproportionately Alawite, though Alawites without such connections were less likely to benefit. Similarly, the armed opposition was overwhelmingly Sunni Arab, and Sunnis without ties to the regime were consequently likely to face discrimination by the state.

The Kurdish minority population has faced decades of state discrimination, including restrictions by the Assad regime on the Kurdish language and persecution of Kurdish activists, though conditions for Kurds have improved dramatically in areas controlled by Kurdish militias since 2011.

Women face legal and social inequities, including in social benefits and a severe gap in labor force participation. Policies to safeguard women's rights are reportedly not implemented, and a deterioration of law and order has exposed women to multiple abuses, especially at the hands of extremist groups that impose their own interpretations of religious law. In January 2024, local media reported on a proposed morality law in HTS-controlled Idlib. If enforced, the law would have restricted women's freedom of movement and employment, among other harmful effects, and would have established a dedicated morality police with the authority to arrest and detain people for certain violations. The HTS authorities in Idlib were reportedly compelled to redraft the measure along more moderate lines following a public outcry.

Syrian law under the Assad regime discriminated against LGBT+ people. According to the 1949 penal code, "unnatural sexual intercourse" was punishable with up to three years in prison. Individuals suspected of same-sex relations are at risk of execution by extremist groups.

## G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

**G1** 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?**

**1/4**

For much of 2024, ongoing combat and the proliferation of regime and militia checkpoints severely restricted freedom of movement. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that there were more than seven million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Syria as of December 2024. Approximately six million Syrians have sought refuge abroad. Some had begun returning to their homes in areas where fighting had subsided prior to December

2024, though new violence and displacements continued throughout the year, with the offensive by armed opposition groups in November and early December displacing an estimated one million people.

In the weeks after the collapse of the Assad regime, an estimated 115,000 Syrian refugees returned to the country, mostly from neighboring states. IDPs also had greater opportunities to travel to their places of origin as barriers to internal movement were lifted.

*Score Change: The score improved from 0 to 1 because over 100,000 refugees returned from abroad and some barriers to internal travel were removed after the fall of the Assad regime.*

**G2** 0-4 pts

**Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?**

**0 / 4**

Property rights were routinely disregarded throughout the civil war. Businesses were frequently required to bribe officials to operate and complete bureaucratic procedures. Access to markets dominated by regime members or allies was restricted. Militias have extorted businesses and confiscated private property to varying degrees.

Under the Assad regime, Law No. 10 of 2018 allowed the state to designate areas for reconstruction and redevelopment by decree; individuals who could not meet a number of criteria to prove ownership of affected property risked losing it without compensation.

Prior to December 2024, personal status laws based on Sharia (Islamic law) discriminated against women on inheritance matters. Societal practices further discourage land ownership by women. At year's end, it remained unclear whether the HTS-led government would maintain or seek to alter these laws and practices.

**G3** 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence,**

**1 / 4**

## and control over appearance?

Under the Assad regime, the penal code allowed rapists to avoid punishment by marrying their victims. In 2020, the People's Council repealed another provision of the penal code that had allowed perpetrators of "honor crimes" to receive reduced sentences, with the law no longer distinguishing between honor crimes and murders with other motives. Women could not pass citizenship on to their children.

Personal status laws for Muslims put women at a disadvantage regarding marriage, divorce, and child custody. Under Assad-era regulations, church law governs personal status issues for Christians, in some cases barring divorce. Early and forced marriages are a problem, with displaced families in particular marrying off young daughters as a perceived safeguard against endemic sexual violence or due to economic pressure.

Personal social freedoms for women have been uneven across the country, ranging from onerous codes of dress and behavior in extremist-held areas to formal equality under the PYD in Kurdish-held areas. However, the 2019 defeat of IS and a decline in the scale of fighting over time has reduced the population's exposure to the most egregious violations.

After HTS took control of the state in December 2024, many expressed fears that the group would impose harsh restrictions affecting personal autonomy, especially for women and minority group. At year's end, however, HTS leaders had not implemented such rules.

**G4** 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?**

**0 / 4**

Many armed groups forcibly conscript or use child soldiers. Children are also subject to forced labor in the context of severe economic hardship. IDPs and refugees are especially vulnerable to sexual and labor exploitation and human trafficking, as access to employment and investment is often dependent on personal, political, or communal affiliations.



### On Syria

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### *Country Facts*

#### Population

**22,130,000**

#### Global Freedom Score

**5/100**    **Not Free**

#### Internet Freedom Score

**17/100**    **Not Free**

### *Other Years*

2024

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