| FLYGTNINGENÆVNET |

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2013 Scores

Status: Not Free
Freedom Rating: 7.0
Civil Liberties: 7
Political Rights: 7

Trend Arrow ↓

Syria received a downward trend arrow due to rising sectarian violence and displacement, including targeted attacks on Sunni Muslim populations that oppose the regime.

Overview

The civil war that gripped Syria in 2011 continued in 2012, devastating the country and leading to widespread displacement and regional instability. More than 45,000 people were believed to have been killed – many of them civilians – in the conflict by the end of 2012, and thousands of others were injured, missing, or arrested. More than 470,000 Syrian refugees were registered with the United Nations in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, while tens of thousands more crossed borders without registering. In addition, over 2.5 million Syrians inside the country required aid, including over 1.5 million internally displaced persons. International efforts to broker a cease-fire or political agreement between the regime and opposition forces failed, and the war took on an increasingly sectarian tone.

The modern state of Syria was established as a League of Nations mandate under French control after World War I and gained formal independence in 1946. Periods of military and elected civilian rule alternated until the Arab Socialist Baath Party seized power in a 1963 coup, transforming Syria into a one-party state governed under emergency law. During the 1960s, power shifted from the party's civilian ideologues to army officers, most of whom were Alawites (adherents of a heterodox Islamic sect that makes up 12 percent of the population). This trend culminated in General Hafez al-Assad's rise to power in 1970.

The regime cultivated a base of support that spanned sectarian and ethnic divisions, but relied on Alawite domination of the security establishment and the forcible suppression of dissent. In 1982, government forces stormed the city of Hama to crush a rebellion by the opposition Muslim Brotherhood, killing as many as 20,000 insurgents and civilians.