

4.1.3. Political activists, opposition party members and protesters

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, this document has been reviewed and updated. Please consult '[Interim Country Guidance: Syria \(2025\)](#)'

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: April 2024

This sub-profile refers to individuals who would be seen by the government as opposing it, in particular to perceived political activists, protesters, opposition party members, and those who have expressed criticism towards the regime.

COI summary

Political activism in Syria had been kept in check by the government for decades. Although a 2011 decree allowed for the registration of independent political parties, in practice the government enforced it selectively, permitting only pro-government groups to form official parties [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.2, p. 20].

The GoS has been reported to ban 'genuine' political opposition [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 14]. Members of political parties, which are known to support the calls for overthrowing the Assad government, are considered enemies of the state [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.2, p. 20]. In this context, the GoS used its intelligence and security apparatus to 'monitor and punish opposition movements that could meaningfully challenge Assad's rule' and reportedly harassed parties with a Socialist/Communist or Islamist agenda. The GoS was reportedly relatively tolerant towards independent politicians and members of parties labelled as 'domestic' opposition as long as these groups did not call for the overthrow of the Syrian President. Nevertheless, such members of domestic opposition were not completely 'immune' to harassment and arrest [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 14].

Most of the members of the political opposition to the Assad government have either fled Syria, were killed or were in prison [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.2, p. 20]. Opposition activists refrained from forming parties out of fear that the GoS might use party lists to pursue opposition members [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2, p. 23].

Since the beginning of the conflict, the targeting of political activists and protesters who sided with the opposition has been a key element in the GoS's counterinsurgency strategy. Opposition protests in government-held areas were often met with gunfire, mass arrests, and torture and killing of those detained. The GoS forces conducted regular raids to detain political and civil activists [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.2, p. 20]. There were also reports that persons believed to have been involved in opposition-related activities, including protesters, were on the 'wanted lists' [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.1.3, p. 17, 1.3.6, p. 28]. Persons who took part in previous activities, for instance by joining a protest during the early stages of the uprising, were targeted by GoS with arbitrary arrests 'individually in a slow systematic manner' in more recent years, including in 2021

[[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.2, p. 24]. GoS engaged in practices of seizing lands and properties of its opponents, redistributing these assets among members of the security services and local pro-GoS militias [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.3, p. 23]. More recently, protests criticising the economic situation and the Assad regime took place in Sweida and Dar'a governorates, but also in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and the coastal regions of Latakia and Tartous. On certain occasions protests were followed by arrests and detentions as well as raids on the homes of protesters for the purpose of intimidation. In two documented incidents security forces reportedly opened fire at protesters in Sweida who attempted to storm governorate buildings [[COI update 2023](#), 2, p. 10; [Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, pp. 16-17].

In April 2022 GoS issued a new law on cybercrime with imprisonment period up to 15 years and harsher penalties for online criticism against the constitution, the president, or the state [[Security 2022](#), 1.4.1, p. 29]. Various individuals were reportedly arrested based on the Cybercrime Law, including persons who on social media called for the implementation of the Anti-Torture Act in GoS-controlled areas or voiced criticism of living conditions and corruption in GoS-held areas. In the wake of the 6 February 2023 earthquake, sources reported that authorities arrested individuals who had criticised the GoS's aid distribution practices [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, pp. 15-16].

The UNCOI documented in the first half of 2023 cases of arbitrary arrests and detention by GoS forces of activists and of persons who made critical statements against the GoS on social media. [[COI update 2023](#), 2, p.11]

Persons with real or perceived family links to political dissidents and activists were also reportedly arrested and tortured by GoS authorities. GoS also targeted young men suspected of knowing the identities of individuals who were wanted for writing public messages calling for the overthrow of the Assad government, as well as individuals accused of criticising the Iranian presence in the country. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 16]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. detention, torture, killing).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For individuals considered by the government as opposing it, such as political activists, opposition party members, persons who took part in protests, and persons who expressed criticism towards the regime, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.

See other topics concerning persons perceived to be opposing the government:

- [4.1.1. Political dissent and opposition in Syria](#)
- [4.1.2. Members of anti-government armed groups](#)
- *4.1.3. Political activists, opposition party members and protesters*
- [4.1.4. Civilians originating from areas associated with opposition to the government](#)

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