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1.3.2. Alawites

Following its assumption of power, HTS emphasised its commitment to integrating Alawites into Syria's governance and engaged in discussions with local Alawite representatives. HTS officials reiterated that accountability for crimes committed under the Assad government would be pursued through the formal judicial system.185 Despite these assurances, Alawites remain largely excluded from the new political and military structures, with no plan for integrating discharged soldiers into the new army due to lingering wartime divisions. Public distrust toward former regime officers and officials further hinders their reintegration. Economic insecurity is a major challenge, with mass public-sector layoffs particularly affecting Alawites, including former security officers and their families, many of whom have also lost state-provided housing.186

Significant concerns persist regarding the treatment of Alawite communities, particularly in regions such as Homs, Hama, and the coastal governorates. In the city of Homs, men in military uniforms established checkpoints at the entrances to Alawite-majority neighbourhoods, heightening fears among residents. Reports indicate that young men, including former soldiers and conscripts who had surrendered their weapons, were detained. Men at one checkpoint allegedly engaged in sectarian profiling before the checkpoint was dismantled following complaints. Shihadi Mayhoub, a former lawmaker, said he documented over 600 arrests in the Zahra district (Homs governorate) by January 2025 and more than 1 380 across Homs city, with the majority of detainees reported to be civilians and conscripts, alongside retired military officers. The SOHR estimated that at least 1 800 individuals, predominantly Alawites, had been detained in Homs city and its governorate. Furthermore, violence targeting Alawites increased nationwide, with 150 killings reported, particularly in Homs and Hama.187

Meanwhile, unidentified extremist factions exacerbated fears by circulating calls for violence against Alawites, including videos advocating indiscriminate attacks. Targeted killings of Alawites linked to the former government were reported in coastal regions, while armed groups wearing military uniforms resembling those of HTS or other opposition factions raided over 20 Alawite villages in rural Hama, causing displacement, theft, and fatalities.188

Reports of harassment, abductions, and killings of Alawites increased after Assad's fall, with social media content, albeit unverified, accusing HTS fighters of the violence. A former Syrian soldier reported being detained and beaten at an HTS checkpoint near Khirbet al-Ma'zah,

Tartous governorate, while traveling to seek amnesty, claiming he was specifically targeted for his Alawite background and subjected to five hours of physical abuse before being released. The UN worked to verify such claims in an effort to prevent further sectarian escalation, while SOHR estimated 150 Alawite killings within a month by unnamed perpetrators.189

Zahra, a neighbourhood in Homs with a significant Alawite population, saw increased insecurity, with residents adhering to an informal curfew due to the presence of HTS forces. The HTS implemented security measures in the area, including checkpoints and house-to-house raids targeting individuals it identified as remnants of the former government. Reports from residents described forced evacuations, profiling based on identification documents, and instances of violence, arrests, physical assaults and gunfire.190

At the end of January, SOHR reported several instances of groups of gunmen, some of whom claimed to be affiliated with the MOA, attacking and killing civilians for political and sectarian reasons.191 Particularly, communities in the Homs countryside with predominantly Alawite and Shiite populations experienced a sharp escalation in abuses, criminal acts, and extrajudicial killings of civilians.192 Gunmen shot and killed civilians in a village in the north west of Hama governorate, which is primarily inhabited by Alawites.193 According to the authorities, among those killed in the attack were former officers and soldiers.194

At the beginning of February, further attacks against Alawites were reported. The new authorities launched investigations into unlawful killings, while concurrently announcing security operations against loyalists of the previous government. Interim President Ahmad Al-Sharaa emphasised the need to maintain civil peace, warning of the dangers of deepening sectarian divisions.195

Expert on Syrian security issues Gregory Waters highlighted considerable variation in conditions across former government strongholds such as Tartous, Latakia, Homs, and Hama. While instances of sectarian intimidation and harassment by security forces were reported, some Alawites in these regions described interactions with authorities as polite and respectful. According to Waters, documented violations appeared to stem more from unprofessional conduct during arrests than from explicit sectarian targeting, with many of the committed crimes being attributed to gangs and civilians with no affiliation to the transitional administration. He further noted that human rights violations were sometimes taking place in the context of volatile security situation or a security vacuum as well as in response to specific incidents, such as when former government militia fighters launched an ambush against security forces in the rural areas of Tartous at the end of December. The forces consequently started an operation – including home raids, the erecting of checkpoints and shoot-outs, against villages suspected of hosting the fighters, such as Khirbet Maazah, which was home to numerous former government militia fighters and a high-ranking prison official accused of involvement in the killing of hundreds of detainees. Waters considers that numerous crimes were perpetrated by

gangs and civilians unaffiliated with the new administration, while certain lower-ranking soldiers and local leaders took part in sectarian-motivated intimidation and abductions of Alawite civilians.196

In early March, clashes between pro-Assad groups and security forces in Latakia, Tartous and Hama governorate, led to hundreds of civilians being killed, most of whom were Alawites.197 This included summary executions carried out by forces linked to the caretaker government.198 For more information see section 4.1.2.

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