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1.5. Implementation of Islamic rules

The constitutional declaration stipulates that Islam is the religion of the president and Islamic jurisprudence the primary source of legislation.145 This marks a notable shift from the previous constitution, which considered Islamic law as ‘a main source’ of legislation.146

The president established a new Fatwa Council tasked with assessing whether legislation conforms to Islamic law. Comprised entirely of Sunni members, the 14-person council includes only a few members directly affiliated with HTS, while others have looser ties and more diverse religious leanings.147 It is led by Grand Mufti Osama Rifai, a vocal critic of HTS in the past.148 Observers suggested that HTS is more focused on containing radical dissent and managing religious discourse than on imposing strict Salafi doctrine.149

Reports emerged in January 2025 indicating that the new authorities were using Islamic teachings to train a fledgling police force.150 This move, according to senior police officers, aimed to instil a sense of morality among recruits and is not intended to be imposed on the general population.151

During the month of Ramadan, Syria’s interim Ministry of Religious Endowments has reportedly ordered the closure of restaurants, cafés, and street food vendors during daylight hours. Despite no official order issued by the government in this regard, public eating or drinking would reportedly be punished with up to three months in jail.152 According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), the authorities carried out arrests of individuals accused of publicly breaking the fast during Ramadan, particularly in Hama city.153 No further information was provided and the information could not be corroborated from other sources.

While no new laws were introduced to formally restrict social life154, there were reports of attempts by individuals to enforce Islamic norms in practice, such as flyers being distributed on buses and in Umayyad Mosque in Damascus calling on women to wear full-face veils, and preachers advocating for Islam in Christian neighbourhoods of the capital.155 In June, the interim government issued a directive requiring women to wear full body swimwear at public beaches and swimming pools.156 Men are also required to wear a shirt when not swimming and are prohibited from being bare-chested outside designated swimming areas.157 Private beaches and tourist establishments are exempt from the directive. The government clarified that the

directive was intended as guidance only and that no legal penalties would be imposed for non-compliance.158

According to International Crisis Group, some local officials have independently implemented restrictions on women's presence in public and professional spaces, including gender segregation in buses, hospitals, and courts. However, these measures were often reversed by authorities following public backlash.159

Two violent attacks on nightclubs in and around Damascus160 in early May sparked widespread fear, as armed assailants stormed multiple venues, assaulted patrons, and forcibly shut down establishments. One woman was killed during the assaults, and rising incidents targeting mixed-gender entertainment venues serving alcohol have raised concerns of growing influence from Islamist armed groups.161 While the authorities announced arrests after the incident,162 public scepticism reportedly remained high due to the administration's silence and the conservative leanings of several key figures in the government..163

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