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5.8.11. Rural Damascus governorate

1436_map14_mapaction_Rural_Damascus_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Map 13. MapAction, Rural Damascus governorate[1436]

☐ (a) Administrative division and population estimates

Rural Damascus (or Rif Dimasq) governorate is divided into nine administrative districts, namely Al-Qutayfah, Al-Nabk, Al-Tall, Al-Zabdani, Darayya, Duma, Qatana, Rural Damascus and Yabroud, which are further divided into a total of 36 sub-districts.[1437] Its capital is the city of Damascus, which is a governorate in its own right.[1438] As of March 2025, IOM estimated the governorate's population at 5 120 422, including residents, IDPs, and returnees from abroad[1439] and the WHO estimated it at 3 395 491.[1440] For further background information on Rural Damascus governorate, see section 2.11.1. of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation (October 2024).

☐ (b) Territorial control and main armed actors

As of late May 2025, the northern and north-western part of Rural Damascus governorate bordering Homs's governorate to the north, Dar'a governorate to the south and Lebanon to the west was mapped by the ISW and CTP as being under the control of the transitional administration. However, there were several pockets around Damascus city where pro-Assad remnants maintained a presence, including near the cities Harasta and Al-Misraba, as well as Najha and near Damascus University. The southern and eastern parts of the governorate bordering Sweida governorate to the south, and Homs governorate and Jordan to the east were mapped as 'Lost Regime Territory'[1441].[1442]

Non-state armed groups in the governorate whose activities or presence were reported during the reference period include Druze militias such as the Men of Dignity Movement,1443 including in the cities Jaramana1444 and Sahnaya.1445 Other non-state armed groups present or active in the reference period were remnants of the Lebanese Hezbollah1446 and the Syrian Popular Resistance,1447 an armed group opposing the transitional government.1448 ISW and CTP in late April also mention activities of a 'Salafijihadi group ideologically close to the Islamic State […] and hostile to the transitional government' in Sahnaya.1449

Furthermore, aerial activity of military forces of Israel was reported in the reference period,1450 including in the city Sahnaya.1451 For further information on territorial control and main armed actors in the period between November 2024 and February 2025, see section 4. of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Country Focus (March 2025).

☐ (c) Security trends

In early March 2025, clashes erupted between members of the Jaramana Shield Brigade,1452 a local Druze militia, and security forces in Jaramana city, killing at least one officer.1453 Another outbreak of violence in Jaramana at the end of April 2025 between Sunni and Druze armed men1454 reportedly resulted in at least 30 fatalities, including security forces who were attacked when intervening to end the fighting, according to the Syrian Ministry of Interior.1455 Fighting started with an attack by an unidentified armed group on a GSS checkpoint at the entrance of Jaramana city on 29 April 2025,1456 and was reportedly sparked by an audio clip circulating on social media that allegedly featured a Druze cleric making Islamophobic remarks. In a video clip, the cleric later rejected any connection to the audio recording.1457 Fighting ended the same day after an agreement was reached between government and Jaramana community representatives.1458 However, new clashes erupted the following day in Ashrafiah Sahnaya, a town south-west of Damascus1459 with a Druze majority.1460 According to Etana Syria, members of the Liwa' al-Zubair (the Zubair Brigade), a group of fighters based in Rural Damascus and with historical links to Deir Ez-Zor, attacked Druze groups, who in some cases received support from Druze fighters arriving from Sweida.1461 More than 100 people, including both civilians and militia members, were reportedly killed in these clashes.1462 An agreement was eventually negotiated between the transitional government and community and religious leaders aimed to de-escalate the situation, although implementation was reportedly challenging, according to an analysis by the Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies.1463

The same source pointed to an increase in security incidents such as kidnappings and armed attacks in and around Damascus governorate in April 2025, thus revealing existing security challenges especially in the governorate's outskirts. Security forces reportedly responded with the establishment of checkpoints, raids and other targeted interventions.1464

Israeli forces launched airstrikes on targets in Rural Damascus during the reporting period,1465 including on security forces in Sahnaya on 30 April 2025, claiming to prevent attacks on the Druze community.1466

In May 2025, government officials announced the arrest of several ISIL suspects operating in Western Ghouta,1467 as well as the seizure of arms, including ammunition, explosives and air defence systems.1468

According to a Syrian journalist interviewed by DIS in May, acts of revenge persist against individuals suspected of ties to the former government, particularly in al-Tal. These incidents are reportedly carried out by former opposition fighters who were previously relocated to northern Syria by the Assad regime and have since returned. 1469 During the reference period, SNHR reported on incidents involving civilian casualties, including the killing of two men and injuring of a third by unknown gunmen who fired at their car,1470 and the abduction of a physician on his way home from work.1471 Moreover, sources reported on the discovery of bodies of civilians killed by unknown perpetrators.1472 An arson and bomb attack on a church in Boudan city in April 2025 by unknown perpetrators caused only limited material damage; no one was injured in the attack.1473

☐ (d) Security incidents

Between 9 December 2024 and 31 May 2025, ACLED recorded 173 security incidents in Rural Damascus governorate (see Figure 27). For the period between 1 March 2025 and 31 May 2025, ACLED recorded 82 security incidents (defined as battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) in Rural Damascus governorate. Of these, 38 were coded as incidents of violence against civilians, 28 as explosions/remote violence and 16 as battles.1474

1475_evolution_security_events_Rural_Damascus_dec24_may25_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Figure 27: Evolution of security events coded 'battles', 'explosions/remote violence' and 'violence against civilians' in Rural Damascus governorate between 9 December 2024 and 31 May 2025, based on ACLED data.1475

During the reference period, security incidents were recorded by ACLED in eight districts of the governorate, with the highest number documented in the district of Rural Damascus (32 incidents), followed by Duma (16 incidents). The fewest incidents were recorded in Al-Nabk and Al-Qutayfah district (1 incident each). According to ACLED data, unidentified armed groups were the main actor involved in around 50 % of all recorded security incidents (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2') during the reference period, particularly in incidents coded as violence against civilians. Many of these incidents involved the explosion of remnants of war left behind from the conflict and planted by unknown perpetrators. Military forces of the transitional government were involved in around 23 % of all security incidents, most of which were coded as explosions/remote violence involving aerial attacks by Israeli forces on transitional government military positions. Police forces of the transitional government were involved in around 18 % of security incidents in Rural Damascus governorate, particularly incidents coded as battles. Military forces of Israel were involved in around 17 % of all security incidents, all of which were coded as explosions/remote violence involving air or drone strikes.1476

☐ (e) Civilian casualties

In March 2025, the SNHR recorded 11 civilian fatalities in Rural Damascus governorate, 1477 in April 2025, it recorded one civilian fatality,1478 and in May 2025, 12 civilian fatalities were recorded in the governorate. With regard to the violent events in Rural Damascus (including Jaramana, Ashrafiah Sahnaya and Sahnaya) and Sweida governorates in the period from 29 April to 4 May 2025, the SNHR noted in its report for May 2025 that the death of at least 111 individuals had been recorded, including civilians, security forces and local armed fighters. Only the civilian casualties were reflected in the monthly report, while the group's investigations into the remaining killings were ongoing and a separate report on the events was being prepared.1479 For the period between March and May 2025, UCDP recorded 48 civilian fatalities in Rural Damascus governorate.1480

1482_civilian_fatalities_Rural_Damascus_mar_may25_snhr_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Figure 28: Civilian fatalities in Rural Damascus governorate between March and May 2025.1481 **Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data.**1482

☐ (f) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

MSF described large-scale destruction in Daraya, a suburb of Damascus, with parts of the town ‘flattened’, its hospital ‘heavily damaged’ and only one functioning health centre in town, which was able to expand its services due to MSF’s support.1483 The MAG indicated that some neighbourhoods in Damascus suburbs like Harasta, Irbin and Jouba, were reduced to rubble and almost certainly heavily contaminated with unexploded ordnances, and therefore remained habitable.1484

The GPC pointed to electricity shortages in Rural Damascus,1485 and Enab Baladi quoted a resident of Misraba town saying that electricity was available only for 2 to 3 hours per day, with some areas facing blackouts of 2 to 3 days due to old and worn-out cables.1486 The same source quoted an official pointing out the war-related destruction of drinking water networks across the governorate and the challenges in maintaining and repairing them with about 1 500 of 4 000 water pumps out of services.1487 Residents faced irregular water supplies and relied on buying water from water trucks or in shops.1488 A returnee in Harasta town similarly mentioned destroyed homes, lack of water and electricity as well as overcrowded schools as challenges.1489

The Syrian Civil Defence reportedly stated that Rural Damascus was among the areas where most incidents involving war remnants occurred.1490 The GPC noted that the majority of accidents involving UXOs since December 2024 took place in the agricultural sector, especially in areas where mine clearance experts had ‘limited access’, such as Rural Damascus.1491 A 13 year old boy was reportedly injured in a landmine explosion while he was herding sheep in an area east of Al-Dumayr city in May 2025.1492

☐ (g) Conflict-induced displacement and return

According to UNHCR estimates, as of 12 June 2025, there were 977 532 IDPs living in the governorate and 109 779 individuals who had returned to areas of the governorate from internal displacement since 27 November 2024.1493 According to the UNOCHA, 15 000 individuals were displaced from Rural Damascus governorate between 30 April and 6 May 2025 due to the violent incidents in areas with a Druze majority.1494

UNHCR further estimated that a total 100 705 returnees who had returned from abroad since the beginning of 2024 were living in the governorate by 15 May 2025, with the vast majority (34 625) returning to Al-Nabk district, followed by Duma (12 850). Since 8 December 2024, 60 135 individuals had returned to Rural Damascus governorate from abroad.1495

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