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5.8.13. Sweida governorate

1574_map15_mapaction_Sweida_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Map 15: © MapAction, Sweida governorate1574

☐ (a) Administrative division and population estimates

Sweida governorate is divided into three administrative districts, namely Sweida, Shahba, and Salkhad, which are further divided into a total of 12 sub-districts.1575 Its capital is the city of Sweida.1576 As of March 2025, the population of Sweida governorate was 482 982, including residents, IDPs, and returnees from abroad, according to IOM estimates.1577 By comparison, WHO estimated Sweida's population at 446 048 as of the same month.1578 For further background information on Sweida governorate, see section 2.14.1. of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation (October 2024).

☐ (b) Territorial control and main armed actors

As of the end of May 2025, ISW and CTP showed that unidentified opposition groups were in control of large swaths of territory in the west of Sweida governorate, including Sweida city. Most of the governorate's western and north-western edges were under the control of the transitional administration.1579 In early May 2025, northern Sweida's Al-Surah town witnessed the deployment of new forces by the transitional administration in an attempt to push back armed groups acting outside its control.1580 Meanwhile, ISW and CTP mapped as 'Lost Regime Territory'1581 the remaining areas of the governorate located in the desert zone further east.1582

The situation in Sweida has been described as 'highly complex',1583 with around 160 armed groups operating in the governorate,1584 some of them organised in four

distinct operations rooms.1585 The Men of Dignity (Rijal al-Karama) movement was the governorate's most sizeable armed faction.1586 In late February 2025, an armed coalition called the Sweida Military Council was formed by several Druze fighters that apparently included former SAA officers who shifted their support towards the Druze community during the 2023 anti-Assad protests in Sweida.1587 Some have alleged that the council was pursuing separatist motives, although this was denied by the council's leader.1588

There was a lack of full integration of Sweida's factions into the transitional administration's structures,1589 with division among Sweida's armed factions on whether to integrate with the transitional administration in Damascus.1590 While some groups were aligned with it (e.g., Men of Dignity and Ahrar Jabal al-Arab), a less accommodating stance was taken by several armed groups allied with Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri,1591 the spiritual leader of the Syrian Druze community.1592 In March 2025, the transitional MoI and some Druze factions agreed to create locally-led security forces operating under government control,1593 followed by an agreement among prominent Druze leaders in May to reactivate MoI operations in Sweida.1594 A deployment of General Security forces was reported in early May 2025.1595

☐ (c) Security trends

According to analysis by the Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies, the overall security situation remained fragile, characterised by sporadic escalations in violence and fighting with the security forces. The source stated that, as of late April 2025, the intensity of these tensions remained low but carried sectarian overtones, with reports of regionally motivated killings and abductions.1596

Amongst others, the reference period saw armed disputes among residents reportedly causing several civilian casualties in Sweida's western countryside1597 and in Sweida city,1598 while a rocket-propelled grenade attack by unidentified men on the house of the Ahrar Jabal al-Arab faction's leader caused two minor injuries.1599 Light clashes between Bedouin (some of them covertly supported by the transitional administration) and Druze groups continued to flare up sporadically.1600

As clashes erupting between armed Sunni and Druze in the suburbs south of Damascus in late April 2025 spread to Sweida,1601 a series of violent incidents in late April/early May 2025 caused both civilian and non-civilian casualties.1602 On 4 May 2025, coinciding with the start of the transitional administration's implementation of the agreement to activate MoI operations, mutual shelling and clashes were reported in Al-

Tha'la village in the western Sweida countryside. This followed an attack on the village by armed factions from eastern rural Dar'a[1603] who were reportedly affiliated with GSS forces.[1604] Ensuing clashes in the same part of Sweida between two local armed factions resulted in the deaths of two GSS members.[1605] Meanwhile, an armed group attacked the offices of Sweida's governor Mustafa Bakour in late May 2025,[1606] briefly taking him and some of his staff hostage.[1607]

An Israeli airstrike targeting a farm belonging to a local faction member in the Kanaker area in early May 2025 left four people dead.[1608]

Later the same month, ISIL claimed two separate IED attacks in the governorate's desert zone,[1609] targeting vehicles of the MoD in what was described as the first ISIL-claimed attacks against the new transitional administration.[1610] Another IED planted by unidentified militants injured six civilians as it hit an ambulance vehicle.[1611]

☐ (d) Security incidents

Between 9 December 2024 and 31 May 2025, ACLED recorded 92 security incidents in Sweida governorate (see Figure 31). For the period between 1 March and 31 May 2025, ACLED recorded 52 security incidents (defined as battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) in Sweida governorate. Of these, 15 were coded as battles, 24 as explosions/remote violence and 13 as incidents of violence against civilians. The number of security incidents across the governorate reached a peak in May (31 incidents).[1612]

1613_evolution_security_events_Sweida_dec24_may25_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Figure 31: Evolution of security events coded 'battles', 'explosions/remote violence' and 'violence against civilians' in Sweida governorate between March and May 2025, based on ACLED data.[1613]

During the reference period, security incidents were recorded by ACLED in all three districts of the governorate, with the highest number documented in the district of Sweida (37 incidents). By comparison, the fewest incidents were recorded in Salkhad district (two incidents). According to ACLED data, unidentified armed groups were involved as a main actor (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2') in around 54 % of all security incidents recorded in the governorate during the reference period, particularly in incidents coded as violence against civilians. Around 13 % of all security incidents (seven incidents) involved pro-government militia, mostly in incidents that also saw involvement of Druze militia. Around 4 % of all security incidents (two incidents) were

coded as explosions/remote violence involving Israeli military forces.1614

☐ (e) Civilian casualties

In March 2025, the SNHR recorded 2 civilian fatalities in Sweida governorate caused by parties to the conflict or controlling forces in Sweida governorate.1615 In April 2025, SNHR recorded 1 civilian fatality1616 and, in May 2025, 16 civilian fatalities were recorded in the governorate.1617 SNHR attributed responsibility for the civilian fatalities it recorded over this three-month period to unspecified parties (15 deaths, including 12 in May) and Israeli forces (4 deaths, all in May).1618 SNHR does not provide more detailed information on these fatalities. For the period between March and May 2025, UCDP recorded 9 civilian fatalities in Sweida governorate.1619

1620_civilian_fatalities_Sweida_mar_may25_snhr_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Figure 32: Civilian fatalities in Sweida governorate between March and May 2025. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data.1620

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

An explosive remnant of war killed or injured civilians in the Al-Tha'la area in the western Sweida countryside1621 and in the governorate's desert areas.1622 In March 2025, GPC reported that the majority of unexploded ordnance accidents since December 2024 in several governorates, including Sweida, had occurred 'in agricultural settings as people were trying to cultivate land or graze animals'.1623

Information on conflict-related infrastructure damage during the reference period could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

☐ (g) Conflict-induced displacement and return

According to UNHCR estimates, as of 12 June 2025, 70 499 IDPs and 792 individuals who had returned to areas of the governorate from internal displacement since 27 November 2024 were living in the governorate.1624

UNHCR further estimated that, as of 15 May 2025, a total of 2 963 individuals who had returned from abroad since the beginning of 2024 were living in the governorate, the vast majority (2 896) having returned to Sweida district. Since 8 December 2024, 2 246 individuals had returned to Sweida governorate from abroad.1625

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