

Syria

Ethnicity in Syria

Historical overview

The ending of the French Mandate in Syria coincided with the Syrian Declaration of Independence in April 1946. Not only the “imperial policy of divide and rule“ (³³⁸¹, 33), but also the ethnic diversity of the region as well as the intense social cleavages characterized the beginnings of the newborn state. In this very unstable context, very soon the military apparatus emerged as a crucial pillar in the political system. Especially minorities, first and foremost Druze and Alawis, regarded a career in the military as their only way to surmount class structures and reach social recognition (cf. ³³⁸², 143; ³³⁸³, 148). As a result, independent Syria became subject to numerous coup d'états led by military officials of different ethnic backgrounds within the first years of its existence. Relative stability came with Hafez al-Assad in 1970 and his Baath-Party that rose to the centre of power in modern Syria (cf. ³³⁸⁴, 109).

³³⁸¹ [Quilliam, 1999]

³³⁸² [Faksh, 1984]

³³⁸³ [Perthes, 1995]

³³⁸⁴ [Hinnebusch, 2001]

Group selection

The group sizes have been compared among and chosen according to the CIA World Fact Book 2014 (³³⁸⁵) and the Harvard University Publication (³³⁸⁶): Sunni Arab 65%, Alawi 13%, Christian 10%, Kurd 8% and Druze 3%. No significant events arose in history that would have changed the population size thus the time period was adjusted to include one single period for 1970-2011. However, the size of Sunni Muslims did change for this period, since these 5 groups are the major ones present and they add up to close 100%. The coding that was present beforehand added up to just a little over 90%. Since there are no other groups that make up 10% of the population, the coding was adjusted to include the population size as 65%.

³³⁸⁵ [CIA, 2014]

³³⁸⁶ [Harvard University, 2014]

Power relations

The Sunni Arabs: With a size of 57% the Sunni Arabs form the biggest ethnic group in Syria. Because of their social and political leadership positions (cf. ³³⁸⁷, 141) they have traditionally rejected military careers as being “not suitable to their status” (³³⁸⁸, 119; cf. ³³⁸⁹, 143). Before military had transformed into the dominant political power organ of the state, Sunni Arabs have enjoyed senior partner status with a few exceptions, such as 1949-1954. During the period of the Arabic Union (1958-1960) the Sunni Arabs are coded as dominant due to the strong promotion of Arab Nationalism. The coup d'état of 1966 led by the Alawi Officer Salah Jadid (cf. ³³⁹⁰, 63) started the “Alawi Capture of Power in Syria” (³³⁹¹), which has then been finalized by the Alawi General Hafez al-Assad in 1970 and is lasting until today. Of course the Sunni Arabs have soon opposed this patronage distribution of the top positions among the Alawis (cf. ³³⁹², 183). In order to appease the Sunni Arab majority, Hafez al-Assad included distinct members of the Sunni Arab community into the regime elite (cf. ³³⁹³, 207). That has “constructed a façade of Sunnis in high positions” (³³⁹⁴, 184). Nevertheless, in this position they do not exercise any relevant power. While his father faced the challenge of demanding Sunnis by strategically assigning them to high positions, Bashar al-Assad, since 2000, has started substituting these people with Alawi counterparts (cf. ³³⁹⁵, 52). Therefore, Sunni Arabs are coded as powerless for the time since 1970 until the cut-off point 2009.

³³⁸⁷ [Faksh, 1984]³³⁸⁸ [Klaff, 1993]³³⁸⁹ [Faksh, 1984]³³⁹⁰ [Van Dam, 1996]³³⁹¹ [Pipes, 1989]

The Alawis: As a heritage of the French Mandate (they had divided both the Alawi north-west and the Druze south-east of Syria into regional substates), the Alawis are coded with regional autonomy from 1946-1948. Before they took over the military apparatus and the Baath-Party, the Alawi Community of Syria “belonged to the poorest and most disadvantaged groups in Syria” (³³⁹⁶, 114; cf. ³³⁹⁷, 133; cf. ³³⁹⁸). The decisive turning point was the coup d'état of 1966 after which 700 Sunni Arab Officers have been replaced with Alawi counterparts. Alawis, previously coded as junior partner, after 1966 as senior partner have in the next step constituted themselves as dominant after the take-over of Hafez al-Assad (cf. ³³⁹⁹, 121).

³³⁹⁶ [Klaff, 1993]³³⁹⁷ [Faksh, 1984]³³⁹⁸ [Zisser, 1999]³³⁹⁹ [Klaff, 1993]

The Christians: Syrian Christians are predominantly Arabs. Due to the promotion of Arab values by the Ba'ath party and Syrian government, Christians are not targeted as long as they also uphold their Arab ancestry. However, Christians have rarely if ever reached high government positions and do not figure prominently in national politics. According to Ray J. Mouawad (³⁴⁰⁰), writing in the Middle East Quarterly in 2001, "Christians in Syria perceive the actual regime as their protector. Accordingly, Christians find it easy to obtain authorization to repair or build new churches and to pray or have processions in public without harassment". For the time period from 1970 until the cut-off point 2009, Christians are therefore not coded as discriminated, but as powerless.

³⁴⁰⁰ [Mouawad, 2001]

The Kurds: The situation of the Kurds in Syria has tremendously deteriorated since the rise of Arab Nationalism. Before, especially between 1949 and 1954, they have enjoyed an exposed situation, due to the Kurdish Colonel Hossni al-Zaim staging the first of Syria's numerous coup d'états (cf. ³⁴⁰¹, 48). During this exceptional period they are coded as senior partner. In the aftermath of the Arabic Union, Kurds became "marginalized and discriminated against by successive Syrian governments that promoted Arab Nationalism" (³⁴⁰²). The Kurdish part of the population is clearly cut off from power, geographically isolated in the areas bordering Iraq and Turkey and is repressed when demonstrating against its situation. The group is therefore coded as discriminated.

³⁴⁰¹ [Woog, 2009]

³⁴⁰² [Human Rights Watch, 2009]

The Druze: As a heritage of the French Mandate (they had divided both the Alawi north-west and the Druze south-east of Syria into regional substates), the Druze are coded with regional autonomy from 1946-1948. After that, in line with the Alawis, members of the Druze ethnic group have also used the channels of military for social improvement. However, the few Druze Officers that had still been in charge after the coup of 1966 have been replaced by Alawi counterparts in the following coup d'état staged by Hafez al-Assad in 1970. Until that time, they are coded as junior partner except the period of the Arabic Union (with Egypt) from 1958-1960. After 1970 until the cut-off point 2009, like the Christians, the Druze are coded as powerless.

Power relations (2010-2013 Update)

Sunni Arabs: The coding for this ethnic group will be in line with the explanation given above about this group. During the 1990s and up until 2000, the Sunni made up a large part of the Ba'ath party of the Syrian government. However, over the years, especially in those where Bashar Al-Assad was president, the number of Sunni slowly got replaced with Alawites. The Sunni have been a major opposition for the Alawite government as long as they have been in power. This is due to the fact that severe battles were fought in the past to rid Sunnis of power and allow the Alawites to access it. Thus, since then, the political power that this minority has, has been restricted. Thus, the coding will follow the one already established for 1970-2011 as powerless.

When considering the regional autonomy, it is to note that after the start of the civil war, the Sunni have gained quite a bit of autonomy. However, this autonomy is not based on executive power. They have control over several regions and cities due to the civil war, but they cannot affect the legislation or the parliament of the country with their decisions. They are mainly the opposition of the Alawite group during this uprising and are doing everything in their power to overthrow the Syrian government.

Alawites: President Bashar Al-Assad is an alawite. Thus, it marks the political system of the country. With this in mind, it is termed as Dominant, due to the fact that all the other minorities are powerless. This is mainly due to the fact that the parliament, which is not tied to religious background, is made up majorly of members from this minority as well as others. Furthermore, the regime does not treat most of the Alawites fairly, but only a few privileged elites. Thus, a dominance of this ethnic group in the political system cannot be established. In addition to that this minority is the most vulnerable to a change in government since the president is from this minority.

In light of the civil war that has emerged it was stated that the "activists have accused the government of employing heavily armed men derived from the Alawite community, as well as other minorities such as the Druze, to fight alongside regular army and security units. Commonly referred to by the opposition as "Shabbihah", or thugs in colloquial Syrian Arabic, they have been accused of intimidating, beating and killing protesters."

Christians: Over the history of the Syrian Republic, Christians have held several senior positions in government. In fact, "the Syrian political opposition does not draw a distinction between Christians and Muslims, and its leaders embrace different faiths. The current chairman of the National Syrian Council is a Christian, George Sabra, and the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces includes several Christian leaders. The leading figure in the Democratic Forum is also Christian. There are many Christians in leadership positions in the National Coordination Committees." However, these positions are none that give executive power to these individuals, even if they are seen as part of the legal system. Thus, this minority is termed powerless, since executive decisions cannot be made. Minority groups usually do not have influence in the Assad-regime due to the fact that it is said that this influence is usually very thinly based on some close allies and family members of the regime.

Kurds: According to BBC, this minority enjoys communal power in specific regions in Syria; however, this power is not executive. It has no influence on the president in any way, nor on the parliament of the country. In addition to this, it is still seen as a discriminated group within the country. However, there are parties within Syria that represent this minority: the Kurdish National Council (KNC) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD). These are the most powerful Kurdish parties present in Syria. Even though these two groups are allies, they are distrustful of each other. It is important to note however, that even though they have two political parties, the Kurds are seen powerless when it comes to having executive power in the government. None of the main officials in the executive branch are considered Kurds. In addition to this, it is important to note that the government has granted all Kurds in Syria citizenship in 2011 in the hope that they will support the Al-Assad regime. Thus, the classification will be made that the Kurds were discriminated by the government before 2011, while after this they are termed powerless.

Druze: This minority group has been sought out by the president in 2011 after the leader of the Druze, Walid Jumblatt, berated the Druze in Syria for not being more supportive of the protests. "Shame on the Druze of Syria; they have always been at the forefront of all revolutions," he stated. Additionally, it is to be noted that the Druze have regional power in the area named Suwaida in the south of Syria; however this power is not on an executive level of making decisions. It is more power over the community and their everyday life, but not on decisions made in parliament or by the president. President Bashar Al-Assad travelled to Suwaida in order to speak with the elders of the Druze in order to persuade them to be on his side of the civil war. This has proven to be successful as the majority of the minority has supported the regime. Thus, the coding that is issued to this minority is powerless, since it is the case that they are

not openly discriminated against; nevertheless, they do not have a strong voice in the government either. Thus their classification will be coded as powerless without regional autonomy.

Population Decline: In addition to all this information, it is to be noted that this civil war has already lead to over 100,000 deaths of people with the emigration of almost 2 million. This affects the population percentages of the different ethnic minorities in the country, however there is little evidence as to how many have fled or have been killed from each minority. What is known is that in May 2013, SOHR stated that out of 94,000 killed during the war, at least 41,000 were Alawites. Furthermore, the Christian population of Homs had dropped from a pre-conflict total of 160,000 down to about 1,000. It is not known, however, if these people have died, are internally displaced or have left the country. Thus, new size projection of each minority between 2011 and 2013 cannot be established.

Otherwise, the population of the minorities has not changed much over the past decades. The coding above has been made based on an article written by the Harvard institute of Politics.

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Political status of ethnic groups in Syria

From 1946 until 1948

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Sunni Arabs	0.65	SENIOR PARTNER
Alawi	0.13	POWERLESS
Christians	0.1	JUNIOR PARTNER
Kurds	0.08	JUNIOR PARTNER
Druze	0.03	POWERLESS

From 1949 until 1954

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Sunni Arabs	0.65	JUNIOR PARTNER
Alawi	0.13	JUNIOR PARTNER
Christians	0.1	JUNIOR PARTNER
Kurds	0.08	SENIOR PARTNER
Druze	0.03	JUNIOR PARTNER

From 1955 until 1957

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Sunni Arabs	0.65	SENIOR PARTNER
Alawi	0.13	JUNIOR PARTNER
Christians	0.1	JUNIOR PARTNER
Kurds	0.08	JUNIOR PARTNER
Druze	0.03	JUNIOR PARTNER

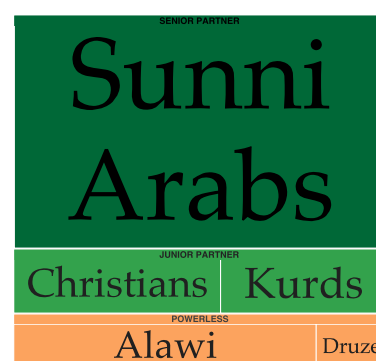


Figure 720: Political status of ethnic groups in Syria during 1946-1948.

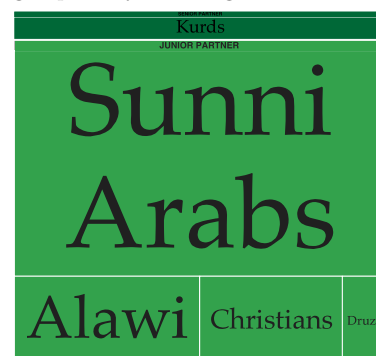


Figure 721: Political status of ethnic groups in Syria during 1949-1954.

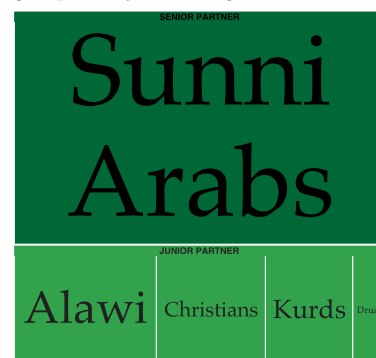


Figure 722: Political status of ethnic groups in Syria during 1955-1957.

From 1958 until 1960

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Sunni Arabs	0.65	DOMINANT
Alawi	0.13	POWERLESS
Christians	0.1	POWERLESS
Kurds	0.08	POWERLESS
Druze	0.03	POWERLESS

From 1961 until 1965

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Sunni Arabs	0.65	SENIOR PARTNER
Alawi	0.13	JUNIOR PARTNER
Christians	0.1	JUNIOR PARTNER
Kurds	0.08	DISCRIMINATED
Druze	0.03	JUNIOR PARTNER

From 1966 until 1969

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Sunni Arabs	0.65	JUNIOR PARTNER
Alawi	0.13	SENIOR PARTNER
Christians	0.1	JUNIOR PARTNER
Kurds	0.08	DISCRIMINATED
Druze	0.03	JUNIOR PARTNER

From 1970 until 2011

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Sunni Arabs	0.65	POWERLESS
Alawi	0.13	DOMINANT
Christians	0.1	POWERLESS
Kurds	0.08	DISCRIMINATED
Druze	0.03	POWERLESS

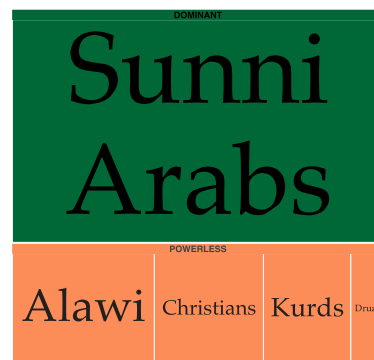


Figure 723: Political status of ethnic groups in Syria during 1958-1960.

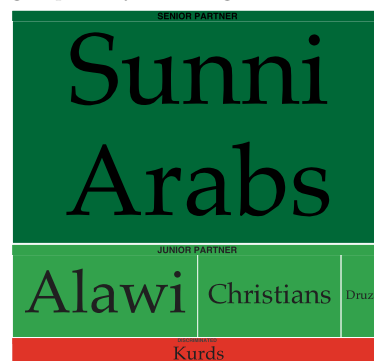


Figure 724: Political status of ethnic groups in Syria during 1961-1965.

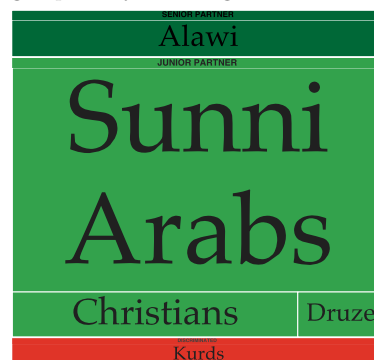


Figure 725: Political status of ethnic groups in Syria during 1966-1969.

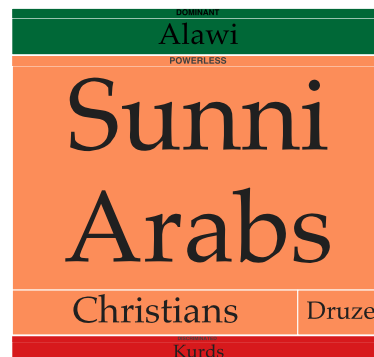


Figure 726: Political status of ethnic groups in Syria during 1970-2011.

From 2012 until 2013

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Sunni Arabs	0.65	POWERLESS
Alawi	0.13	DOMINANT
Christians	0.1	POWERLESS
Kurds	0.08	POWERLESS
Druze	0.03	POWERLESS

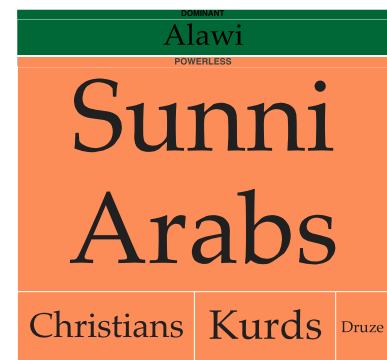


Figure 727: Political status of ethnic groups in Syria during 2012-2013.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Syria

From 1946 until 2013

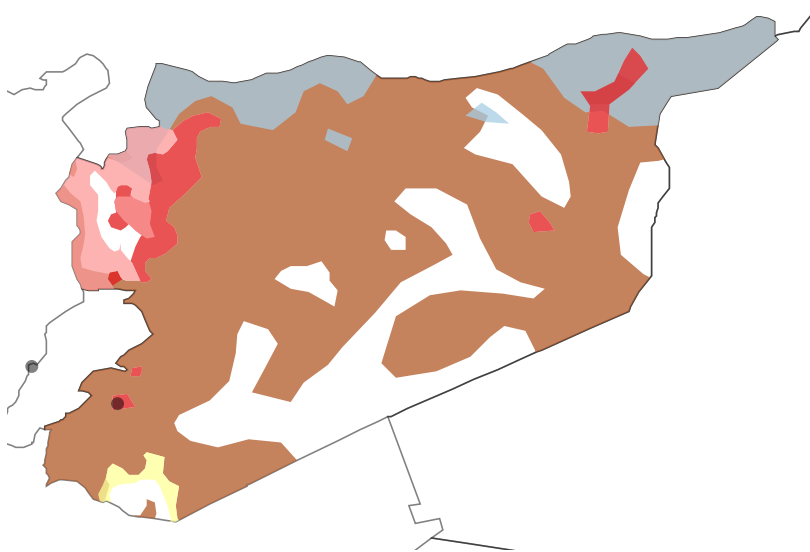


Figure 728: Map of ethnic groups in Syria during 2012-2013.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Sunni Arabs	134 842	Regional & urban
■ Kurds	22 009	Regionally based
■ Christians	8 230	Regional & urban
■ Alawi	7 649	Regionally based
■ Druze	1 640	Regional & urban

Table 211: List of ethnic groups in Syria during 1946-2013.

Conflicts in Syria

Starting on 1948-04-15

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Egypt	Government of Israel		1948-04-15			
Government of Iraq	Government of Israel		1948-04-15			
Government of Jordan	Government of Israel		1948-04-15			
Government of Lebanon	Government of Israel		1948-04-15			
Government of Syria	Government of Israel		1948-04-15			

Starting on 1966-02-23

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Syria	Military faction (forces loyal to Nureddin Atassi and Youssef Zeayen)		1966-02-23			
Government of Syria	Muslim Brotherhood	Sunni Arabs	1979-06-16	Explicit	Yes	No
Government of Syria	Syrian insurgents	Kurds	2011-09-19			Split
Government of Syria	Syrian insurgents	Sunni Arabs	2011-09-19	Explicit	Yes	Yes

Starting on 1967-06-05

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Israel	Government of Syria		1967-06-05			