

FRACTURED NATION: SYRIA'S FRAGILE POST-WAR REALITY



Syria emerged from fourteen years of brutal civil war with a speed matched only by its fragility. In January 2025, Hayat Tahrir alSham (HTS)—the organization formerly known as the Nusra Front—launched a lightning offensive that shattered Bashar alAssad’s grip on power. Under an interim government led by Ahmad alSharaa, HTS fighters faced no opposition from Russia, Iran, or Hezbollah, all of which had withheld their customary air and ground support for the regime. They swept through the coastal cities and reclaimed the fertile plains that once sustained Syria’s economy. Within weeks, alSharaa’s militias had reestablished control over Damascus, Homs, and Latakia, pushed into the interior, and reopened vital oil fields and Mediterranean ports to international aid convoys.

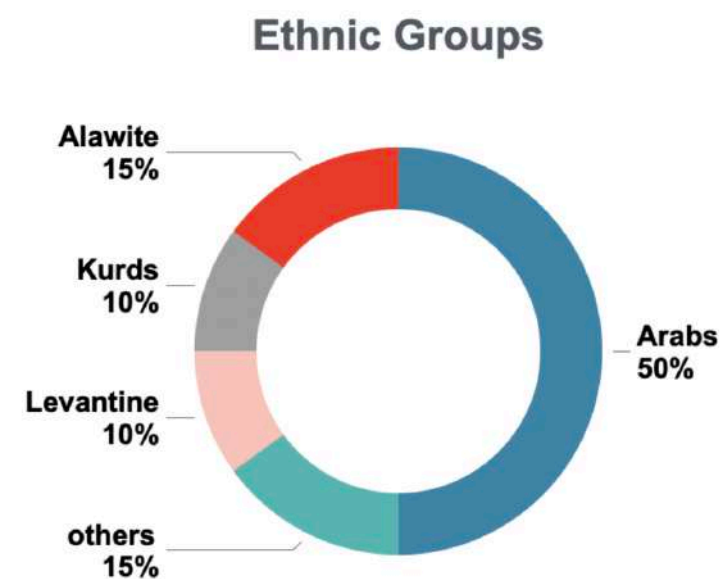
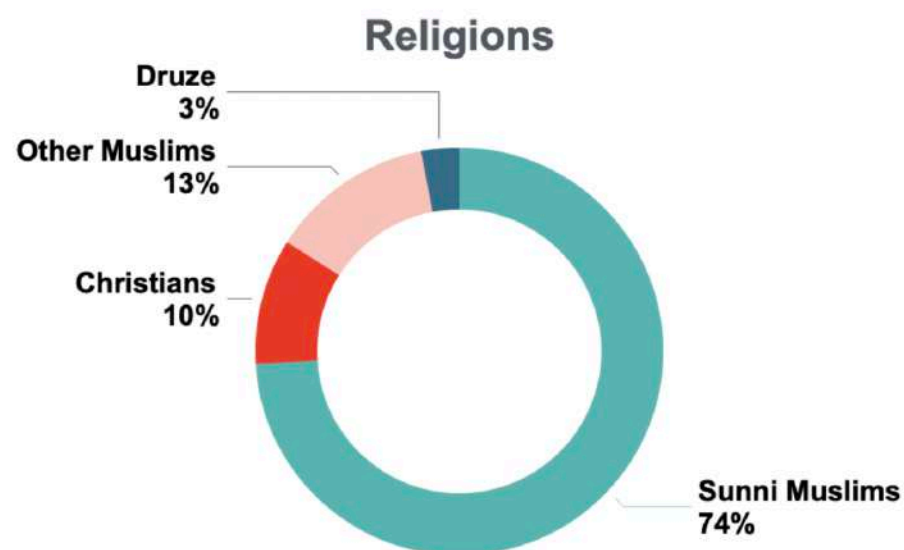
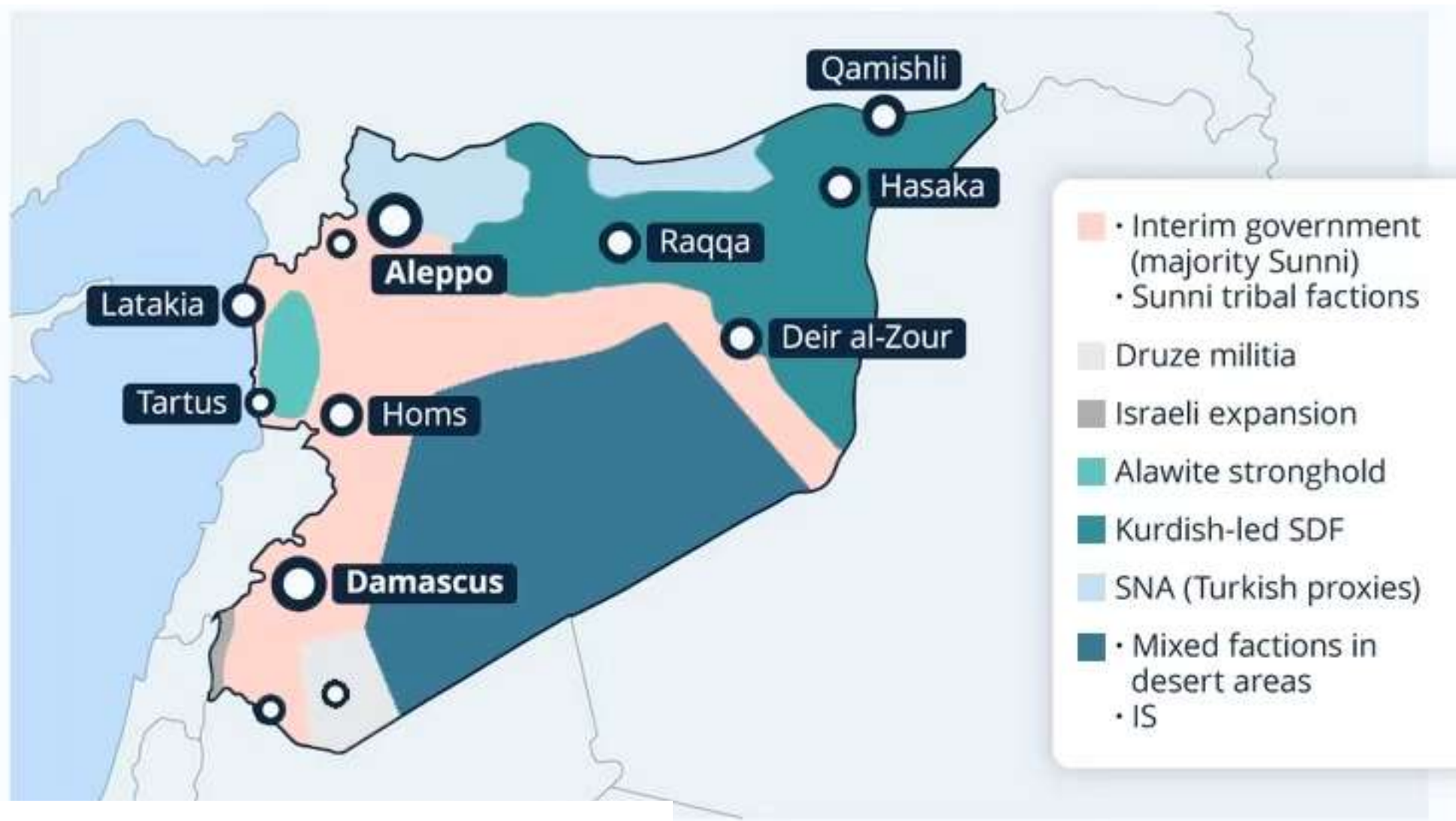
Beyond the network of highways that thread through Syria’s western provinces lies a fragmented landscape of rival authorities that defy Damascus. In the northeast, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces exercise de facto autonomy from Raqqa to Qamishli, overseeing courts, schools, and oil fields with the quiet backing of American advisers. Along the Turkish border, Ankara’s so-called “safe zones” have solidified into fortified enclaves, guarded by more than twenty thousand Turkish troops and allied militias. Stretching from Azaz near Aleppo to Tadmur on the desert’s edge, Turkish bases and checkpoints effectively divide the north—undermining Kurdish ambitions and complicating any prospect of national reunification.

Beneath these rival centers of power, Syria’s social fabric unfolds as a mosaic of sects and ethnicities, each strand taut with memories of grievance and survival. Sunnis—whom HTS under alSharaa chiefly claims to speak for—comprise about

threequarters of the populace, while the Alawites, once the regime’s backbone, have shrunk to roughly fifteen percent, largely confined to Latakia and Tartus. Orthodox, Uniate, and Nestorian Christians, making up around ten percent, cling to enclaves in Homs and Damascus, their ancient churches increasingly ringed by militia checkpoints.

The Druze—some seven hundred thousand strong, just over three percent of Syrians—dominate the As Suwayda governorate, with kin communities in Damascus, Beirut, and the Israelioccupied Golan Heights. Kurds, Armenians, and Turkmen sustain distinct cultural identities and armed militias that at times cooperate with Damascus and one another, and at others contest both.

This fragile evenness has repeatedly fractured into altercations. In early March 2025, a week of fierce clashes erupted in the Alawite heartlands of Latakia, Tartus, and Hama, leaving more than a thousand dead—many of them civilians caught in the crossfire—after proAssad fighters shelled checkpoints held by interim government loyalists. Footage of forced disappearances and revenge killings spread on Telegram channels, and videos purporting to show masked gunmen executing captives only deepened communal mistrust. AlSharaa publicly denounced the violence and promised swift justice, but his assurances rang hollow to families long terrorized by both Assad’s secret police and HTS patrols.



Source: The World Facebook (CIA)

Sectarian tensions flared again in mid-July 2025 along the Damascus–Suwayda highway when Bedouin tribesmen ambushed a Druze vegetable merchant, robbed him of his produce, subjected him to sectarian taunts, and abandoned him by the roadside in critical condition. In retaliation, Druze self-defense units rounded up suspects, detained dozens, and raided tribal compounds.

Two days after the clashes erupted, al-Sharaa deployed forces aligned with the new Syrian government—backed by tanks, armored personnel carriers, and rocket launchers—ostensibly to halt the violence. Instead, these units sided with Bedouin fighters and committed atrocities, including the humiliation of Druze elders, looting, sexual violence, and mass executions of civilians. Independent monitors documented more than five hundred fatalities—some estimates as high as one thousand—over four days of reprisal killings, kidnappings, and house-to-house searches. The massacre of a dozen unarmed Druze guests at a wedding reception hall, shot execution-style, underscored the ruthlessness of communal vendettas.

As Suwayda, the capital of the governorate and home to Syria's largest Druze population, has been a flashpoint since al-Sharaa pledged to safeguard minority rights. Attempts in April 2025 to integrate non-Sunni militias into the security forces collapsed amid violent clashes that claimed over a hundred lives before a ceasefire was declared in May. Renewed tensions were fueled by the government's bid to reassert control and by reports of Bedouin alliances with government troops. Druze leaders insist on preserving local governance and security control, demanding that any integration into national structures be contingent on formal guarantees of community representation, oversight of security forces, and recourse through fact-finding committees. A framework agreement signed on July 16 reflected these demands, stipulating investigative

bodies to probe abuses and mechanisms to safeguard Druze political participation before restoring full government authority.

Alarmed by the threat to its Druze minority—and haunted by memories of crossborder raids—Israel's Air Force launched strikes on Syrian military positions around As Suwayda and the Defense Ministry in Damascus, killing several officers. Jerusalem defended its actions as necessary to safeguard the Golan frontier, which Damascus condemned as brazen aggression. Within Syria's Druze community, opinions remain sharply divided: some denounce any rapprochement with Tel Aviv as betrayal, while others privately welcome Israeli intervention as a bulwark against both Baathist and Islamist abuses.

Meanwhile, the Turkish presence in the north has solidified into a semipermanent occupation. Ankara trains local militias from Azaz to Jarabulus, administers courts in Afrin, and has begun issuing Turkish passports to select families—moves it says will facilitate the return of refugees, but which critics argue amount to demographic engineering. Despite Ankara's pledges to respect Syria's territorial integrity, its longterm footprint effectively carves out a buffer zone that curtails Kurdish autonomy and binds rebel factions to Turkish interests.

As foreign patronage competes with tribal and sectarian loyalties, reconstruction grants from Gulf states and pledges of Chinese investment sit alongside Russian plans to rebuild airbases and Iranian offers to refurbish rail links—all hinging on a political settlement inclusive enough to protect minority rights. Unless the newly created government can broker a genuinely national dialogue, enforce militia disarmament, and guarantee the safe return of the displaced, the hope of a reunited Syrian state risks giving way to an assortment of quasistates, each tethered to competing external patrons.

The prospect of Syria's fragmentation carries consequences far beyond its borders. In Iraq, persistent instability along the western frontier jeopardizes national security and weakens efforts to safeguard territorial integrity. In Türkiye, a sense of dwindling influence—especially as Israel widens its operational reach—has likely driven Ankara to recalibrate its strategic posture. Jordan, which shares a border with Syria, is participating in threeway talks with Damascus and Washington amid fears of militant spillover. It also worries that largescale displacement could trigger devastating economic hardship.

An aerial night view of a city, likely New York City, with numerous skyscrapers and streetlights. Overlaid on the image are several glowing white nodes connected by thin white lines, forming a network that spans across the cityscape. The text "Risk Intelligence that Keeps You Safe" is centered in a large, white, sans-serif font.

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