

Syria

The Syrian Arab Republic is a multi-ethnic nation (predominantly Arabs, Kurds, Circassians, Chechens, and Turkomans), which was around 75% Sunni, 10%, and the remainder mainly a mix of other Muslim and other religious groups. Many of these groups have been disrupted and displaced in conflict in recent years. The country is in the throes of a civil war with a strong sectarian religious dimension. An estimated 10 million Syrians are displaced from their houses within Syria or fleeing outside the country. Even the limited freedoms granted by its constitution are therefore being violated on a massive scale by all sides in the conflict.

Constitution and government	Education and children's rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
<u>State legislation is largely or entirely derived from religious law or by religious authorities</u>			<u>Expression of core Humanist principles on democracy, freedom and human rights is brutally repressed</u>
<u>The non-religious are barred from some government offices (including posts reserved for particular religions or sects)</u>	<u>Religious or ideological instruction is mandatory in all or most state-funded schools with no secular or humanist alternative</u>	<u>Systemic religious privilege results in significant social discrimination</u> <u>Prohibitive interreligious social control (including interreligious marriage bans)</u> <u>Religious control over family law or legislation on moral matters</u>	<u>Expression of core humanist principles on democracy, freedom or human rights is severely restricted</u>

Legend

Constitution and government

The state is often referred to, and described by the Assad regime, as “secular” prior to the conflict, and there is no official state religion. However, in fact the 2012 constitution requires that the president be Muslim and stipulates that Islamic jurisprudence is a principal source of legislation.

Prior to the civil war, the Syrian constitution, law and other policies provided some limited freedom of religion or belief, but very little freedom of expression, especially with regard to the media. Discrimination based on religion is prohibited according to the law. Salafist (Sunni fundamentalist) organizations are illegal and supporting the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is punishable by death. The government appoints Muslim leaders, in preference of those who support the secular nature of the state.

The government officially recognizes Christianity, Judaism and Islam. All religious groups are required to register and the registration process can be lengthy. Religion is document on birth certificates and other official forms, but not on national ID cards. Apostasy is not directly forbidden,

however, the authorities restrict proselytizing and prohibit conversion of Muslims from Islam. Others may convert to Islam. If a Christian converts to Islam, the presiding Muslim cleric has to inform the convert's diocese. Societal pressure further make conversion, particularly from Islam to Christianity, relatively rare and forces many converts to flee outside of the country.

Government practices

Jewish communities are not allowed to be in contact with Jews in Israel. Anti-Semitic rhetoric exists in state-funded TV and Radio programming, Newspapers and other mass media. The Alawite minority, of which president al-Assad is member, holds a political status disproportionate to its numbers.

The government portrays the opposition in sectarian terms, associates them with terrorist Islamist factions and views religious affiliation as equivalent to political beliefs. Consequently, the authorities and their Shia militia allies targeted Sunni Muslims violently, killed, arrested and abused Sunni Muslims and other religious minority groups. The government undertook judicial prosecution of individuals, related to their religious affiliation, but rarely provided public documentation on the number arrested. At the end of 2014 there were at least 64 Sunni religious clerics killed.

By the end of 2014, the UN estimated that more than 200,000 Syrians had been killed in the civil war. Some of these killings had a sectarian motivation: Muslims killing secularists and Christians, Christians killing Muslims, Shias killing Sunnis.

Terrorist Organizations

ISIL's declaration of a so-called "Islamic State" in June 2014 between Syria and Iraq has had deep effects on the situation of religious freedom. Terrorist groups as ISIL and al-Nusra killed, arrested, tortured and kidnapped individuals of most religious groups in the country. They also beheaded individuals they had accused of blasphemy and apostasy. ISIL forced Iraqi Yezidis and Christians to convert, pay a 50,000 Dollar ransom or to be killed. All churches in the city of Raqqa were converted into mosques and the public worship of any other faith than Sunni Islam forbidden. ISIL abducted and tortured hundreds of Kurdish boys. Shia mosques were destroyed and many Shiites converted in order to survive in Raqqa. Al-Nusra operated many bombings and suicide attacks across the country. ISIL captured thousands of Yezidi women and girls in Iraq as slaves and sexually assaulted many of them. Armed groups linked to al-Nusra replaced governmental courts by Sharia councils in different regions, authorizing public execution and torture of minorities such as Alawites. ISIL established a "Hisba" police force, based on the Islamic Hisba principle ("command right and forbid wrong"), to enforce a strict morality code. Violations as smoking, possessing alcohol, having tattoos, listening to music, not attending Friday prayers, dressing improperly, or not fasting during Ramadan are punished with public beatings. ISIL also established an all-female police force "al-Khansaa", to control the moral code among women. The terrorist organizations further systematically destroyed cultural heritage, archaeological and religious sites. ISIL and al-Nusra have received financial support from individuals from Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

Opposition

Beside the terrorist groups, many armed local militias contributed to sectarian violence and bombings. The Alawite population, accused of being favored by the government, becomes often the target of opposition attacks. The different religious groups are segregating into sectarian-based districts or towns.

Sunni Muslims consider Alawites and Shiites generally as allies of the al-Assad regime, while many

Shiites, Alawites, Christians and other minority groups fear that they will be killed by extremist Sunni groups if the government falls.

Education and children's rights

All state schools are officially government-run and non-sectarian, although in practice the Christian and Druze communities operate some schools. There is mandatory religious instruction in public schools for all religious groups, with government-approved teachers and curriculums. Religious instruction is provided for Islam and Christianity only, and courses are divided into separate classes for Muslim and Christian students. Other religious minority groups can choose between the both or attend private schools. Although Arabic is the official school language, the authorities allow in some schools courses in Armenian, Hebrew, Syriac (Aramaic), and Chaldean.

In ISIL controlled territory the school curricula was altered. Several basic academic subjects were banned, for example chemistry, and some schools were used to train minor boys for "jihad". The schools teach according to ISIL's ideological priorities.

Since 2011 several million children have been forced to leave school.

Family, community and society

For issues of personal status, or family law, the government requires citizens to be affiliated nominally with Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. The government allows these recognized groups to use their own religious laws in matter of family law. Consequently, members of religious groups are subject to their respective religious laws concerning marriage and divorce. Religious affiliation is required on birth certificates and legal documentation when marrying. In the case of interreligious disputes, Islamic law takes precedence. According to Amnesty International many religious courts that deal with family affairs have stopped operating due to the current situation.

Sharia is the basis of inheritance law for all citizens, except Christians. Women inherit usually the half of male heirs and consequently in practice, male relatives have to provide financial support to their female relatives who inherit less. A Christian woman married to a Muslim man can not inherit from her deceased husband.

The religious family law discriminates women, although the constitution grants equal rights to all its citizens (Article 25). A Muslim woman cannot marry a Christian man, but a Muslim man can marry a Christian or Jewish woman. Women need the consent of their male guardian in order to marry. Many marriages are arranged and women can face societal or financial pressure to agree. Adultery is a criminal offence for both sexes, but the punishment is twice as high for women as for men. The law allows men to marry up to four wives without the consent of the first wife. Men can repudiate their wives, women can obtain a divorce with the Islamic principle of "khula", if they agree to renounce their dowry. Domestic violence and spousal rape are not criminalized. In addition, raped women may face violence of their own family for shaming the family's honour. Abortion is only legal, if the pregnant woman's life is in danger.

[<genderindex.org/country/syrian-arab-republic>](http://genderindex.org/country/syrian-arab-republic)

Violence against women such as rape is used as a weapon of war in the current situation. In the refugee camps domestic violence and sexual exploitation is reportedly on the increase.

Testimonies

"I was an atheist before the Syrian revolution. It did not affect my life in a direct way, although I was criticized by anyone who knew about my thoughts, particularly some friends and my not-close-relatives. But after the revolution the situation worsened: the Syrian militants now kill or kidnap every atheist they find. I am glad to live abroad now."

— Leen