

The Syrian Regime's 2024 Parliamentary Elections Are Illegitimate and Predetermined by the Regime's Security Apparatus

The People's Assembly of Syria is Nothing More than Another Instrument of Oppression and Control Used to Crush Syrians' Rights



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The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyzes in Syria.

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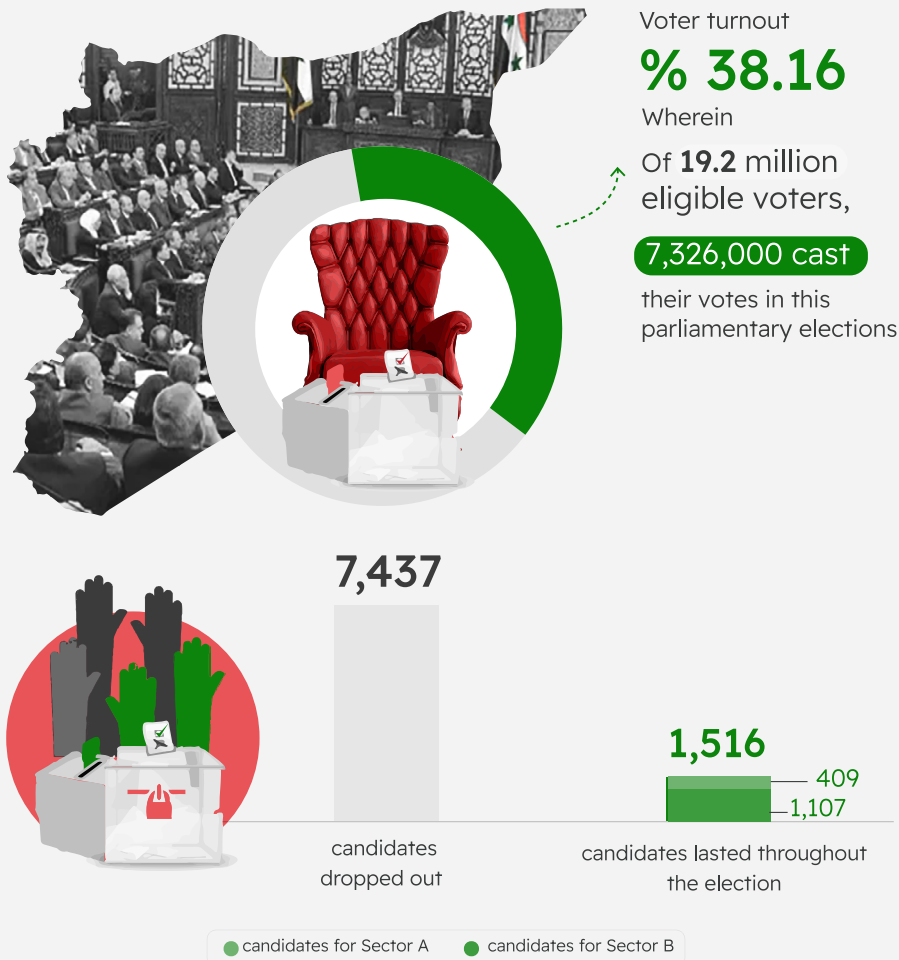
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I. Introduction

On Monday, July 15, 2024, the Syrian regime held elections in areas under its control to select the members of the People's Assembly of Syria for its fourth term. [The elections were held pursuant to Legislative Decree No. 99 promulgated by Syrian regime head Bashar Assad](#) on May 11, 2024, in accordance with Article 62 of the Syrian Constitution and the Law on General Elections of 2014 (Law No. 5 of 2014). The decree reserved 127 of the 250 members' seats for representatives of the labor and farmer sectors (Sector A), while the remaining 123 seats (Sector B) were not allocated to representatives of any particular category.

At noon on Thursday 22, July 18, 2024, the head of the Higher Judicial Elections Committee officially [announced the results](#) of the elections, with a voter turnout of 38.16 percent of all the eligible voters (7,326,000 people out of a population of 19.2 million cast votes). The committee stated that the voters had cast their votes in 8,151 polling stations for 1,516 candidates, divided between 409 candidates for Sector A, and 1,107 candidates for Sector B. Meanwhile, 7,437 of the original 8,953 candidates withdrew from the electoral contest.



As expected, the Alwiḥdah Alwaṭaniyah [National Unity] electoral list won 185 seats¹, or 74 percent of the People's Assembly, with 169 seats going to the Baath Party accounting for 67.7 percent of the total, a two-seat increase from the 2020 election. Accordingly, the bloc that allied with the Baath Party won 16 seats,² accounting for 8.64 percent, the same number of seats they had in previous terms. Outside the National Unity list, independents won only 65 seats. Needless to say, the Baath Party has full hegemony over the People's Assembly with a two-thirds majority.

This report sheds light on the significance of this election for the Syrian regime. We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) believe that during this term, the People's Assembly will be compelled to vote on a constitutional amendment that would allow the head of the Syrian regime to nominate himself for a new presidential term, after the current one ends in mid-2028. That is in addition to the conventional roles played by the People's Assembly of Syria in rubber-stamping the decisions of the executive authority and the security apparatus, effectively providing a civilian façade to cover up the regime's crimes and lend the appearance of legitimacy to its absolute hegemony over the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government.

Moreover, we will present evidence confirming the illegitimacy of the regime's elections which violate international law, being conducted in a corrupt and unlawful environment with an utter lack of judicial supervision and guarantees, in addition to seeing widespread tampering in regard to the number of voters, as well as seat disparity, and most importantly and visibly, one party's absolute domination over the Assembly.

This report uses a descriptive-analytic methodology, drawing upon a case study and analysis of the relevant laws. The report draws a number of conclusions, most prominently that the elections of the 2024 People's Assembly of Syria are void, illegitimate, and incredible, as well as violating international resolutions and international human rights law, being based on an invalid constitution and an electoral law blighted by contradictions, loopholes, and transgressions.

1. Of those, 67 parliament members have been re-elected (36.2 percent), while the remaining 118 sit on the parliament for the first time.

2. Those 16 seats are divided between: Three seats for the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, two seats each for the Arab Socialist Union Party, the 'Unified' Syrian Communist Party, the Syrian Community Party – Bakdash, the National Covenant Party, the Arab Democratic Union Party, the Socialist Unionist Party, and one seat for the Democratic Socialist Unionist Party.

SNHR believes that the elections for this term, like their predecessors, are the furthest possible thing from free and fair in nature. These electoral processes and their outcomes have never represented the will of the Syrian people and Syrian society. Rather, they are charades imposed through the brute force and authority of the regime's security apparatus. They are nothing but a nominal staged 'procedure' devoid of any actual political substance. It should also be noted that the geographical area covered by this latest election was limited to only two-thirds of Syrian territory, with as many international actors present in the country as it has seen to date, and with the election held in the midst of a devastating economic crisis, with the value of the Syrian Pound continuing its sharp decline, while rates of inflation, unemployment, and poverty continue to surge. In addition to these points, over half the Syrian population is currently displaced, either as internally displaced persons (IDPs) or as refugees, [according to the UN Refugee Agency \(UNHCR\)](#),³ while the regime continues to commit numerous egregious violations.

As Fadel Abdulghany, SNHR Executive Director, says:

“The Syrian regime is weaponizing the state’s institutions against the Syrian people, even as it increases, furthers and perpetuates its tyranny. Chief among these institutions is the People’s Assembly of Syria which is engaged in devising and promulgating laws and legislative articles that contradict peremptory norms and violate fundamental human rights. The elections for the People’s Assembly of Syria are conducted in an environment ruled by despotism, wherein the Syrian people cannot choose freely. The members of the Assembly are effectively selected by the security apparatus. These are unlawful elections that only reflect and represent the will of the Syrian regime.”

3. The UNHCR estimates that approximately 13.4 million Syrians have been displaced internally or sought asylum abroad since March 2011.

II. The Search for Non-Existent Legitimacy: Why the Regime Insists on Holding Sham Parliamentary Elections

Since the Syrian regime has full and absolute hegemony over all arms of government, including the legislative branch manifested in the People's Assembly of Syria, this instrumental institution has been reduced to a front for an oppressive, despotic regime with no sense of autonomy whatsoever. Despite this, however, the regime has always insisted on holding elections for the People's Assembly. Indeed, since it promulgated the current constitution⁴ on February 27, 2012, the regime has held four legislative elections, in 2012, 2016, 2020, and now in 2024.

Even though this election, and all the preceding ones for the Assembly are nothing more than empty charades whose results are predetermined, they still hold a degree of importance for the regime as a means of conferring and consolidating political legitimacy, however spurious. Holding elections at the proper intervals is a goal in and of itself for the regime, demonstrating that it remains capable of superficially discharging its constitutional duties, and thus bolstering its continuity as a ruling power. Elections also help the regime to depict itself as strong before its allies and supporters, which is especially important given the regime's obsession since 2011 with maintaining the idea of its own control of the country, whatever the facts on the ground, and with giving the impression that Damascus is in charge of the decision-making process, despite this now being heavily influenced by Moscow and Tehran.

As for the causes of the regime's placing special emphasis on this particular legislative term, SNHR believes this can be explained by the following reasons:

1. Enabling the Syrian regime to continue its intrusion into the constitution and to issue legislative articles that solely serve the regime's interests: The People's Assembly of Syria has long been used by the regime as a despotic instrument to legitimize the practices of its executive arms and its various security agencies. To achieve this, the regime has passed many articles of legislations that blatantly violate constitutional and legal rules. SNHR has released multiple reports on laws of this nature passed by the People's Assembly of Syria, such as [the law on 'Managing and Investing Transferrable and Non-Transferrable Assets That Were Seized Pursuant to an Unappealable Judicial Ruling'](#), which legalize the usurpation of Syrians' rights and properties.

SNHR can see no indicators that lead us to believe there's any possibility of the Syrian regime changing its ways. That is to say, the regime will continue to use the People's Assembly of Syria to pass more laws violating human rights. Indeed, it's quite plausible that the primary function of this particular Assembly for the regime is to tamper with and amend the constitution so the current regime head can nominate himself for another presidential term in 2028, in light of the current constitutional

4. The 2012 Constitution took out the articles enshrining the power to lead the state and the society solely in the Baath Party, a power that has been established in Article 8 of the older constitution.

checks on the number of presidential terms a president can serve, as stipulated in Article 88 of the 2012 Constitution.⁵ Under the current regulations, a president cannot nominate themselves for three consecutive terms, with the current term ending in mid-2028. To pass a constitutional amendment, the proposed amendment must be approved by a supermajority of three quarters, according to Article 150 of the Constitution.⁶ The regime has already guaranteed that it will have such a supermajority in this Assembly, as with previous ones.

2. Continuing to provide cover for the regime's crimes: Instead of acting as a voice and guardian of the people, protecting them from the potential tyranny of the ruling power as governments are bound to do under a genuine democratic system of rule, the People's Assembly of Syria has been perverted into an instrument of control and oppression in the hands of that selfsame ruling power to serve its interests. This necessarily requires that the legislative body fails to protect the interests of society, as well as failing to exercise its powers to hold the government, or even one of its ministers, to account, or to dismiss them. The People's Assembly of Syria has never criticized or questioned the Syrian regime throughout its existence, especially since 2011, when successive governments have, under the command of the head of the republic, committed widespread violations that constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes, including the use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs, torture, enforced disappearance, and other gross human rights violations, all of which has been further established by independent courts that indicted the current Syrian regime on charges of committing crimes against humanity.

The People's Assembly of Syria has never raised its voice against any of the violations and crimes committed by the Syrian regime, or the many abusive laws and legislative articles it has issued. Instead, the Assembly has always blindly passed and approved these laws. Even worse, the People's Assembly of Syria has itself promulgated many laws that violate the rights of the Syrian people. The Assembly's fourth term will not be better by any means than those that preceded it, as it will certainly continue to cover for the regime's crimes and imbue it with a veneer of political legitimacy, which is especially egregious due to many violation perpetrators being elected to the People's Assembly of Syria for this term.

3. Perpetuate the mirage of political reform: Through these elections, the Syrian regime is attempting to portray the Syrian state as a legitimate entity governing on the basis of institutions founded on democratic norms. The regime also continues to promote the false idea that it is enacting meaningful reforms, complying with Arab and international demands for improving and readying the political environment in Syria for enduring changes. This is of great significance, as it comes at a time when the regime is restructuring many of its institutions, including the Baath Party's central command, its security apparatus, and some military units.

5. Article 88 of the 2012 Syrian Constitution states: "The President of the Republic is elected for 7 years as of the end of the term of the existing President. The President can be elected for only one more successive term."
Translation taken from: Constitute Project. Syrian Arab Republic 2012. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Syria_2012

6. Article 150, Paragraph 4 of the 2012 Syrian Constitution states: "The Assembly discusses the proposal for amendment. If it approved it with a three-quarters majority, the amendment shall be considered final provided that it is also approved by the President of the Republic."
Translation taken from: Constitute Project. Syrian Arab Republic 2012. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Syria_2012

Despite this, however, international indicators suggest that Assadist Syria is far ahead of all other nations in terms of corruption, fragility, and lack of transparency, making any of its statements about reform and improvement of the political environment nothing more than bald-faced lies. For instance, [the 2023 Global Corruption Index \(GCI\)](#),⁷ which is used for risk evaluation, identified Syria as the most corrupt country in the world.⁸ Similarly woeful, [the 2023 Corruption Perception Index \(CPI\) by Transparency International](#) has Syria as the third-most corrupt country worldwide.

[The Fragile State Index, released by the Fund for Peace](#), identified Syria as the fourth-most fragile country worldwide in 2024. A fragile state cannot discharge the main functions of governance, and lacks the ability to foster constructive relations with society. Fragile states are also more vulnerable to internal or external shocks.

4. Rehabilitate pro-regime figures: The People's Assembly of Syria has always been an instrument used by the regime to dispense privileges and benefits, and to rehabilitate regime clients in various sectors, ranging from religious figures to businessmen, artists, and even militia commanders, in order to enable the regime to continue benefiting from their resources and networks. Giving them parliamentary seats can also be viewed as a form of reward for their services, whereby the regime sends a very effective message: Those who are loyal reap the rewards.

This was reflected in the Assembly's third term starting in 2020 and the fourth term beginning in 2024. Both these Assemblies saw a lower than usual number of the conventional figures usually promoted as representatives of the Baath party, such as local dignitaries, businessmen, tribal chiefs, and religious figures, in favor of military officers, militia commanders, and even criminals who are notorious for committing widespread violations against the Syrian people. Other members have even been named on international sanction lists over their illicit activities and involvement in killing Syrians. In 2020, [SNHR released a report shedding light on the results of the 2020 Legislative Elections](#), which found that at least 56 members of parliament, or 22 percent of its members, had been involved in committing gross violations, some of which constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Based on an initial reading of the results of this year's elections, we have noted that a number of individuals responsible for violations against the Syrian people have again won seats at the People's Assembly of Syria, as SNHR's database confirms. Those include retired military officers, militia commanders, and war profiteers who have been named on international sanction lists. Some members were also re-elected even after their impunity had been lifted and they had been prosecuted over corruption charges.

7. Devised by the Global Risk Profile group, the GCI measures the level of corruption metrics on a scale from 0 (lowest risk/least corrupt) to 100 (highest risk, most corrupt). It uses metrics such as money laundering, fraud, terrorism financing,

8. One more indicator: On December 9, 2023, designated as the International Anti-Corruption Day, the US Embassy Syria [posted on its X account](#) that Syria is one of the world's most corrupt states.

Among those are Muhammad Hamshou, a businessman designated on US and European sanction lists who is Maher Assad's hand in the People's Assembly; Belal Na'al and Ammar Assad, co-founders of the National Defense Forces; Jihad Barakat, commander of the Baath Brigades; Firas al-Jahham, commander of the National Defense Forces in Deir Ez-Zour; Omar Hussein al-Hassan, head of the Political Bureau of the Iranian-backed Baqir Brigade; Aal Hassan Mohammad Sha'ban Barri, commander of the Aal Barri militias in Aleppo; Ayham Najdat Jreikous,⁹ founder of the National Defense Forces in Salanfa and al-Heffa in Latakia; and other wanted criminals.

We are currently working on a report in which we will be cross-checking the names of individuals who have been elected to the 2024 People's Assembly of Syria with SNHR's database of individuals involved in committing violations against the Syrian people.

III. Six Reasons Why Syria's Fourth Parliamentary Elections Are Invalid & Illegitimate

It is SNHR's belief that the 2024 elections for the People's Assembly of Syria are invalid, illegitimate, and lacking in any credibility, and that they violate international resolutions and international human rights law.

Our description of these elections as illegitimate is based on six main factors:

A. These elections were held in overt defiance of international resolutions, and disregarding the political process

These elections have been held as the regime continues to commit numerous violations, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances, which constitute crimes against humanity.

As SNHR's database confirms, Syrian regime forces have killed at least **67 Syrian citizens**, including nine children and four women (adult female) since the start of 2024 up until July 2024. Regime forces have also arrested and forcibly disappeared at least **482 individuals** since the start of the year, including five children and six women, in the same period. Of these, at least **26 individuals** have died due to torture.

Additionally, these elections were held at a time when 37 percent of Syrian territory still remains outside regime control, with the regime having no control over the governorates of Hasaka, Raqqqa, Deir Ez-Zour, Idlib, and large parts of Aleppo governorate. Meanwhile, the regime has lost control almost completely over the two governorates of Daraa and Suwayda, two regions nominally under its rule. In terms of population, over half the Syrian people have been forcibly displaced either as IDPs or refugees.

9. Despite that facts that Jreikous was stripped of his impunity by the previous People's Assembly of Syria, and that he is named, alongside the former governor of Latakia Ibrahim Khader al-Salem, in four corruption cases; he was re-elected to the Assembly.

Meanwhile, these elections blatantly contravene resolutions on Syria passed by the international community, including the Geneva I Communiqué, which was included in UN Security Council resolutions [2118](#) and [2254](#), both of which clearly state that the only way to resolve the internal armed conflict is to establish “a transitional governing body with full executive powers” which represents both the regime and the opposition. This body, the resolution continues, shall devise a new constitution that would constitute the foundations for parliamentary and presidential elections.

Paragraph 4 of resolution 2254 explicitly specifies this sequence, “[The Security Council] expresses its support... for a Syrian led political process that is facilitated by the United Nations and, within a target of six months, establishes credible, inclusive and non sectarian governance and sets a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution, and further expresses its support for free and fair elections, pursuant to the new constitution, to be held within 18 months and administered under supervision of the United Nations, to the satisfaction of the governance and to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate, as set forth in the 14 November 2015 ISSG Statement;”¹⁰

B. These elections were held in a corrupt and illegitimate environment

These elections were held on the basis of Decree No. 99 which provided for holding elections in accordance with Article 62 of the Constitution and the rules of Law 5/2014 on General Elections. By examining both legal texts and how they came about, one can infer that:

The Syrian regime has engineered the 2012 Constitution unilaterally, making it legitimate solely in the regime’s eyes, and enforced it using its own security apparatus. In our view, the 2012 Constitution, and all presidential and parliamentary elections based on it, have no legitimacy, due to its being devised, approved, and promulgated in an autocratic and exclusionary manner by the ruling authority that dismissed all dissenting voices and all actual Syrian dissidents. Even the referendum for the constitution was conducted while the regime was committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people, which were exhaustively documented by various bodies, including the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) and SNHR. The referendum was also conducted amid a complete absence of a democratic climate or the most minimal levels of freedom of opinion.

10. On July 10, 2024, Germany’s Special Envoy for Syria Stefan Schnek released a statement via his [X account](#), stating that Germany does not support holding elections in Syria at this time. The diplomat’s statement also stressed that free and fair elections form an inalienable part of resolving the conflict and instilling peace in Syria, but the conditions for this have yet to be met. The statement also asserted that Germany supports the full implementation of UN Security Council resolution 2254.

Moreover, the constitution itself contains many articles that contravene the most basic standards found in any standard constitutional text, displaying an utter disregard for, and even an erosion of the principle of separation of authorities. It could be even argued that the constitution betrays the very concept of constitution, as its content can be described as security texts which have no resemblance to an actual democratic, constitutional texts. Both the 2012 Constitution and the elections held on the basis of that constitution completely lack legitimacy.

In addition to these points, the Syrian legal texts governing the electoral process contravene the most basic international standards, most prominently Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Syria has ratified. Article 25 states that, “Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions: (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors; (c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.”

As for the Law on General Elections, Law No. 5 of 2014, this is riddled with articles that contravene human rights and contradict the principle of equality among all citizens, as well as the principle of separation of authorities. For instance, Article 4 of Law No. 5 states that every citizen over 18 years of age is eligible to cast their vote in an electoral contest or a referendum, unless this right has been stripped or suspended, which effectively deprives hundreds of thousands of dissidents who have been denied their right to suffrage.

Other articles of Law No. 5 of 2014 only perpetuate the executive authority's hegemony over other authorities, eradicating any possibility of holding free and fair elections. For instance, Article 15 gives the governor in each governorate the right to issue a decision to form electoral committees for every polling station, even though these governors are appointed by the President of the Republic. Meanwhile, Article 123 states that the Ministry of Interior is charged with securing the necessary supplies for the elections and appointing workers to work under the oversight of the electoral committees. Article 28 also states that preparing the countrywide public electoral record is to be the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior in coordination with the two Ministries of Justice and Local Administration, as well as the Central Bureau of Statistics. This is problematic because all of these bodies are pillars of the executive authority in Syria. Moreover, Article 34 states that the Supreme Constitutional Court of Syria is the body tasked with supervising the presidential elections, even though [the members of the current Court were](#) appointed by the head of the regime himself back in 2022.

There is also Article 67 which requires that voters must have their ID card in their possession in order to vote, which effectively strips hundreds of thousands of eligible voters of their suffrage rights since their personal documents have either been ruined or lost, and they are currently unable to obtain new ones. Additionally, Articles 22 and 24 of this law require that 50 percent of the members of parliament and local administrative authorities be drawn from the labor and farming sectors, thereby maintaining the Baath Party's domination over these bodies, since both the labor and farmers' unions are completely under the Baath Party's control.¹¹

C. Lack of real judicial safeguards in any elections held by the regime

As Article 2 of Law No. 5 of 2014 states,¹² this law regulates the presidential elections, parliamentary elections, and local administration elections. It gives the High Elections Committee the power to supervise these elections according to Article 8. However, when examining the mechanisms by which these committees are formed and how they discharge their duties, their lack of autonomy becomes abundantly clear. The head of the Syrian regime has complete control over this committee by having the final say on the appointment and compensation of its members, as seen in Decree No. 131¹³ issued by the head of the regime on May 22, 2022, through which the Higher Judicial Elections Committee was established. As such, it is clear how this Committee, which is composed of seven sitting judges and seven reserve judges,¹⁴ has no autonomy, and how such decrees contravene the principle of the separation of authorities. This is also an overt intrusion by the head of the executive, the President of the Republic, into the workings of the judicial authority, as well as by the Minister of Justice, the representative of the executive authority in Syria as the deputy head of the High Judicial Council, who has the power to promote, assign, transfer, and prosecute judges, in violation of Article 140 of the 2012 Constitution. In this way, the committee and its members have no degree of autonomy or impartiality, which should be present in any body responsible for managing presidential elections, parliamentary elections, local administration elections, and referendums, as established in Article 25 of the 1966's ICCPR.

11. While the 2012 Constitution omitted Article 8 which had previously established the Baath Party's status as the leader of the Syrian state and society, this sentiment, i.e., "The leading party in the society and the state is the Socialist Arab Baath Party" [as phrased in the 1973 Constitution](#) is found in Law No. 84 of 1968 on Regulating Union Law, which is still in effect. As Law 84/1968 stipulates, the Baath Party has this power "in affirmation of the historical role of the working class in the outbreak and protection of the socialist revolution... and in implementation of the outcomes of the Party's Conferences that asserted the freedom of the people's organization within the nationalist socialist line, and to deepen democratic freedoms for these organizations, especially labor and farmers' organizations."
12. Article 2 of Law No. 5 of 2014 states that, "the aim of this law is to regulate the electoral process for the President of the Republic, regulating the electoral process for the members of the People's Assembly of Syria, regulating the electoral process for the members of the local administrations, regulating popular referendums; and to ensure the voters' right to freely select their representatives; to ensure the purity and integrity of the electoral processes and the candidates' rights to observe them; to punish those toying with the will of the electorate; to lay down the regulations for funding electoral processes; and to regulate electoral advertisements."
13. For more, see the articles of the 2012 Constitution, the Law on General Elections (Law No. 5 of 2014), and Ruling No. 122 of the High Judicial Council issued on April 25, 2022.
14. See Paragraph 2 and 3 of Article 8 of Law No. 5 of 2014 on Regulating General Elections.

Meanwhile, Article 83 of the same law requires that the Supreme Constitutional Court of Syria handles any appeals against the validity of a parliamentary candidate's victory. It should be noted, however, that the head of the regime also has complete control over the Supreme Constitutional Court, with [Article 141 of the 2012 Constitution](#) stipulating that the Supreme Constitutional Court is composed of seven members, including a head, and that those seven members are to be named by the President of the Republic via a decree. Building on that, [Law No. 7 of 2014 on the Supreme Constitutional Court of Syria](#) extends its seats to 11 judges who are to be named by the President of the Republic to serve for a four-year term subject to extension.

The president's absolute control over the Supreme Constitutional Court is yet another manifestation of the autocratic authoritarian rule in Syria, and a clear-cut case of how the principles of separation of authorities and judicial autonomy have been eradicated in the country. Naturally, this has had catastrophic repercussions on the nation's parliamentary elections, both in relation to the judiciary's ability to discharge its responsibilities for the preliminary monitoring of the laws regulating the electoral process in Syria and to whether or not they comply with the constitution and with the norms of democracy, justice, and transparency, as well as with retrospective monitoring by handling appeals related to the outcome of elections, and assessing their constitutionality. This also affects the judiciary's ability to assess the transparency of the electoral process and to ensure non-interference from the executive, which cannot be achieved as long as the members of the Supreme Constitutional Court of Syria are appointed by the executive apparatus.

D. Tampering with voter numbers and the issue of the electoral record with the lack of accurate population statistical figures

Articles 27 and 28 of Law No. 5 of 2014 on Regulating General Elections requires the issuance of a public electoral record, listing the figures for eligible voters. The law assigns responsibility for issuing this countrywide public electoral record to the Ministry of Interior in coordination with the two Ministries of Justice and Local Administration and the Central Bureau of Statistics. This record is also subject to review at the start of every year, which entails potential additions, revisions, or omissions, and to a second review, conducted by the High Judicial Committee, at least two months before the date of any electoral contest, as specified by Article 29.

Despite the passage of over a decade since Law 5/2014 was issued, no such record has been issued even once, let alone reviewed before an electoral process. Even more confusing is the fact that the Syrian regime has failed to undertake these duties even after all the data being digitized, making it far more readily available, with all citizens obtaining the household 'smart' cards required to benefit from state subsidies. Voting also now only requires that voters possess an ID card and present this at the polling station, following the failure of the earlier voter card experiment.

Another major issue is the fact that over half the Syrian population has now been forcibly displaced, either as IDPs or refugees, according to the UNHCR which estimates that there are currently 13.4 million Syrians who have been internally displaced or sought asylum abroad since March 2011. A large proportion of these dispossessed people have lost their personal documents, with the overwhelming majority having been displaced by the actions of the regime itself, and as such are unable to participate in the elections even if they wanted to do so.

As SNHR's database attests, the Syrian regime has killed at least **201,290 civilians**, while **96,103** Syrian citizens are currently categorized as forcibly disappeared persons since March 2011 (as of this writing). The regime does not update the information of those killed or forcibly disappeared at its hands in the civil registry's records, and never makes any mention or acknowledgement of the millions of IDPs and refugees. Even worse, the regime falsifies population figures, as SNHR documented in [a report released in 2018](#), in which it explained how the regime tampers with the numbers of forcibly disappeared persons and those killed in detention centers, before issuing death certificates for those victims through the civil registry offices without even notifying their families. In light of all of these issues, it is safe to say that a true, accurate electoral record does not exist.¹⁵

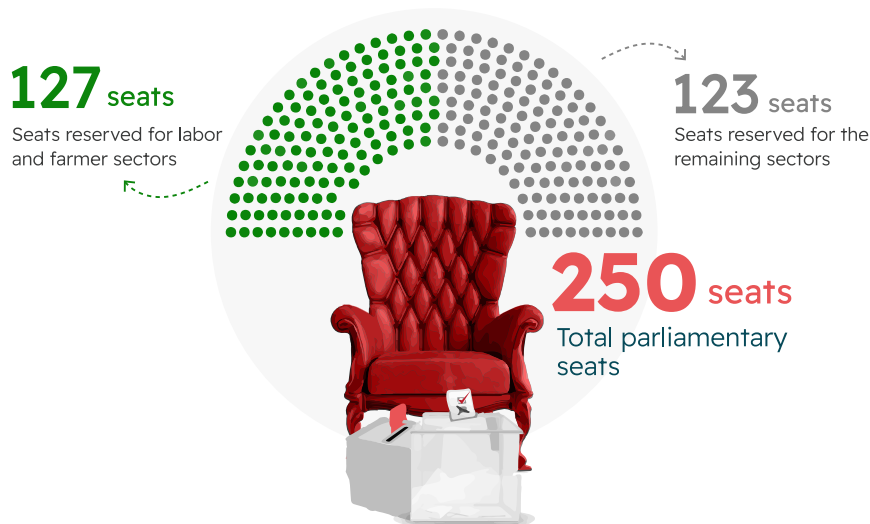
In 2016, the Syrian regime realized that the Syrian governorates under its control are currently inhabited by less than one-third of their original population. To address this deficiency, the regime promulgated [Law No. 8 of 2016](#), which allows military personnel and security officers to vote in the elections, even though Article 134 of the Law on Military Service of 2003, which is still in effect and has not been repealed, clearly states that "military personnel shall not be allowed to join political or social parties, bodies, associations, or organizations, except for the Arab Socialist Baath Party, nor are they allowed to join political, religious, or social forums. They shall also be prohibited from expressing political views directed against the principles and objectives of the [Baath] Party. Military personnel shall not be allowed to attend parties for foreign political representatives or to contact them, or any other foreign bodies, without the approval of the competent bodies." It is a well-known fact that these military personnel have a blind and unquestioning obedience to the President of the Republic and to compliance with the directives they receive from the regime's security apparatus.

15. At a press conference held following the announcement of the 2024 elections' results, the head of the Higher Judicial Elections Committee was asked by a reporter about the figure for Syria's total population; he evaded the question by saying that the total population number is not concern, and they are solely concerned with the number of eligible voters, in a statement that can be seen as a potential indicator of falsification and number-tampering.

E. Disparity in the distribution of seats based on the discretion of the President of the Republic

The People's Assembly of Syria is composed of 250 parliamentary members. Article 53 of the 1973 Constitution stipulates that half of all parliamentary members must represent the labor and farming sectors. The same stipulation was established in Paragraph 2 of Article 60 of the 2012 Constitution, as well as in Article 22 of Law No. 5 of 2014. As such, 127 parliamentary members represent the labor and farmer sectors, while the remaining 123 members represent the rest of the people, with no clear distinctions or clarifications as to how much representation each of the remaining categories has.

There are also no discernible standards determining the number of parliamentary members from each governorate. All such matters are left to the discretion of the President of the Republic.



In theory, reserving this many seats for laborers and farmers, a stipulation first introduced in 1973, was intended to reflect the regime's socialist ideals and to ensure representation for Syria's working class. In reality, however, the lack of candidacy criteria leaves massive space for manipulation, with many wealthy businessmen nominating themselves, wholly implausibly, as representatives of one of those two sectors.

In the most recent elections, this division remained the same as it was in the elections held in 2012, 2016, and 2020, with no regard for the significant demographic changes that have taken place in Syria since 2011. [According to the Syrian regime's Central Bureau of Statistics](#), Syria currently has a population of 29 million people (that is the entire Syrian population living in Syria and abroad), in [comparison to the UN estimate of 24.3 million people](#).¹⁶ No population census has been held in Syria since 2004. As such, there has been an immense disparity in the weightiness given to the votes in different areas, which led to clear and direct discrimination against voters from certain governorates in favor of others.

16. According to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). See: UN Population Fund. *World Population Dashboard*. <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population-dashboard> Accessed on July 22, 2024.

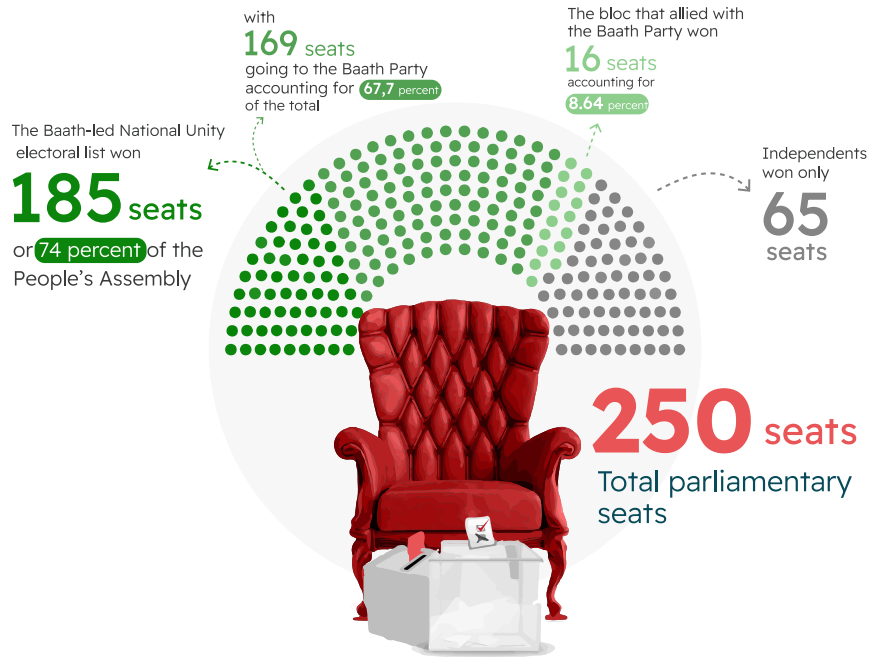
[The UN Human Rights Committee](#) outlined 27 issues in its fourth periodic report on Syria, released on April 5, 2023, which referred to the lack of integrity in parliamentary elections and a number of related issues, such as the absence of a safe and impartial environment for electoral campaigning, fraud, ballot-stuffing, political interference, and intimidation and coercing of voters.

F. The Baath Party has complete domination over the elections and has absorbed most of the seats

Syria has not seen any genuine democratic parliamentary life since the Baathist military coup of March 1963, which effectively ended the country's political life in its entirety. The erosion of political life was furthered by Hafez Assad's 1970 coup seizing control of the party. Subsequently, in the 1973 Constitution, Hafez Assad introduced what was known as the People's Assembly, as well as declaring the Baath Party as the "leader of the state and society." Ever since then, the Baath Party has completely dominated the People's Assembly of Syria, which never had any genuine political or legislative role to begin with, especially since most of its members are affiliated with the Baath Party and the other minor parties that revolve in its orbit as part of what was known as the National Progressive Front.¹⁷ The People's Assembly of Syria has been reduced to a shopfront institution providing a façade for the regime but with no actual independent powers of its own, existing to serve the presidential regime which has unchecked and unopposed powers. The President of the Republic has sole and unchallenged control over all critical decisions, the creation of legislation, and passing effectual laws. Even though the 2012 constitutional amendments removed Article 8,¹⁸ which stated that the Baath Party is the leader of the state and of society, this has had no effect on the Baath Party's and its allied parties' share in what's euphemistically known as the 'National Progressive Front', which now has 185 parliamentary representatives (including 169 for the Baath Party alone) following this year's elections, accounting for about two-thirds of the People's Assembly of Syria. This is an increase on past terms, when they had 183 representatives (including 166 for the Baath Party alone).

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17. The other parties in the National Progressive Front are puppet entities that only play their part in the staged electoral process, which exist with the patronage of the Baath Party. In reality, these parties have no weight, influence or presence on the ground. In a painful irony, Ammar Bakdash, the Secretary-General of Syria's oldest parties, the Syrian Communist Party, and the son of one of the party's historic leaders Khaled Bakdash, failed to secure a parliamentary seat as an independent, as he did not nominate himself as part of the National Unity (National Progressive Front) electoral list, which is the way to guarantee victory.
 18. In the 2012 Constitution, this article was replaced by a new article which states in Paragraph 5 that "Public office or public money may not be exploited for a political, electoral or party interest." However, the Baath Party has contravened its own constitutions by continuing to exploit public office and public money to serve its own political and electoral interests.

Baath Party dominates the People's Assembly of Syria



The remaining one-third of representatives are usually hand-picked by the regime's security apparatus depending on what favors they've done for the regime, including implicating themselves in committing violations and crimes against humanity; a parliamentary seat is seen as a reward for such services. This third of the representatives usually includes militia commanders, relatives of regime military personnel killed in action, businessmen who founded militias or supported the regime in other ways, and some pro-regime tribal and religious figures. In rare cases, the People's Assembly of Syria may include independent candidates to provide a veneer of credibility.

In addition to exercising powers and privileges on behalf of the leader and playing a guardian and parental role over the state, the Baath Party also has an extralegal military presence. Although [Paragraph F of Article 5 of Law No. 100 of 2011](#) on Regulating Parties prohibits parties from engaging in military activities, stating, "A party's activity shall not include assembling any public or secret military formation; or use, threaten to use; or entice violence no matter its form," nevertheless, by 2013, the Regional Command of the Baath Party has founded and commanded Baathist armed groups across Syria under the banner of the 'Baath Brigades' and others. These groups, which are directed through one central command hub in Damascus, are allocated part of the Baath Party's budget. They have been used to persecute and kill peaceful protesters in coordination with the regime's military and security forces. Naturally, the People's Assembly of Syria has never made any mention, whether direct or implicit, of this blatant violation of the law.

In the course of the Baath Party's preparation for the elections for the People's Assembly of Syria, the party held its public conference and elections on May 4, 2024. The conference was held at a time when the head of the regime was reconcentrating centers of power within the Baath Party in light of the challenges the regime is facing. The outcome of the party's elections did not give rise to more flexibility. Through introducing this reorganization, the regime established even greater domination or control to preclude any internal changes apart from those viewed as necessary by the regime. In other words, the party leaders established a solid, core bloc with even more centralized decision-making power in a mirror image of the regime's central power in the state, based on three main factors: sectarianism, the security-military complex, and militias and networks. Going forward, this bloc will evidently be the Baath Party's main focus.

The party's elections also betrayed a disposition towards the militarization of the party through military and security networks in parallel with the militarization of wider society, which now can be tied to the regime through patronage networks. This is best evidenced by the fact that 63 percent of the current party members are connected to the regime's security and military networks, including military personnel, party branch secretaries, militia-adjacent members, and others. There has also been an increase in the number of Alawites in the Central Committee, and a heavier and more concentrated geographic representation for the two governorates of Latakia and Homs.¹⁹

All of these factors undermine the legitimacy of the elections for the People's Assembly of Syria, which in reality do not concern, nor they are binding to the Syrian people, unless imposed through the coercion of the security apparatus and its use of force.

19. Al-Mustafa, M. (2024). *Intikhābāt alba'ath 2024... i'ādah al-tashkīl wadīnāmyāt al'asad līlsayṭarah* [The Baath Elections 2024... Restructuring and the Assad's Quest for Control]. OMRAN for Strategic Studies. Retrieved July 22, 2024, from <https://bit.ly/4daX9xf>

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- Since the Assad family seized power in Syria, the People's Assembly of Syria has been merely a tool of the regime, not representing the Syrian people or holding the government accountable for the violations it has committed against them. The People's Assembly of Syria can be described as a war council in support of the Syrian regime.
- Syrian elections have historically been fraudulent, and these elections are no different. This is evident from the suppression of any real opposition, as the security apparatuses' dominance, their complete impunity, and the regime's control over the judiciary and legislative branches, along with the lack of freedom of opinion, leave no room for establishing genuine opposition parties. Instead, only nominal parties have been produced, with the Baath Party remaining the sole party for decades. The so-called 'National Progressive Front' consists of nebulous parties, with the Baath Party as its backbone. The security apparatuses impose candidate lists loyal to the regime and mostly affiliated with the Baath Party as a form of compensation for its supporters, making the elections illegitimate, unfair, predetermined, and non-binding for the Syrian people.
- The right to genuine and effective popular participation in elections is unavailable due to the absence of a safe or neutral environment. More than half of the Syrian population are either IDPs or refugees, and over 37% of Syrian territory is outside the regime's control. With the dominance of the security apparatuses and the fear of their brutality, the lack of media freedoms or any safe space for civil society, the vast numbers of displaced voters, and hundreds of thousands of people wanted or forcibly disappeared by the security apparatuses, there is a clear violation of Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 25 of the ICCPR.
- Free and fair elections require comprehensive legal and political reforms that achieve political transition and remove legislation entrenched in tyranny and human rights violations. Elections are linked to laws that ensure the existence of independent media, free press, freedom of assembly and demonstration, and the formation of political parties and associations, as well as the elimination of discrimination among citizens. Additionally, there must be a separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers, the abolition of exceptional courts, and the restructuring of security apparatuses.
- The Syrian regime's insistence on conducting the elections reflects its refusal to make any changes or concessions, even if only symbolic, either domestically within Syria itself or within the international community. This complicates any possibility of advancing the political process and keeps the country in a state of instability.
- Conducting these invalid, misleading, and unfair elections indicates that the Syrian regime continues to operate with security and military criteria in managing Syria's affairs. It treats internal and external stakeholders as if it were victorious in the war and not obliged to make substantial changes in its behavior and approach. This has been facilitated by the international community's failure, including that of the UN Security Council, to achieve any serious progress towards political transition and the complete impunity for those committing violations against the Syrian people.

- The executive authority completely controls the legislative authority represented by the People's Assembly of Syria, which has stripped it of its independence, both in terms of its formation and control over the laws issued by it. Legislative policy in Syria has been devoid of all standards regulating legislation, particularly those related to conflicts, and has violated constitutional and legal principles in many legislations.

Recommendations

UN and international community

- Issue clear messages from all countries rejecting these elections and declare them illegitimate as they violate UN Security Council resolutions.
- Consider the Syrian regime's holding of these elections as a unilateral step aimed at completely destroying the peace process.
- Place members of the Syrian People's Assembly of Syria on EU, US, Canadian, and global sanction lists for passing laws and decrees that violate fundamental human rights principles.
- Impose sanctions on the Syrian regime in response to its unilateral continuation of these elections, which demonstrates the regime's contempt for the international community and the UN Security Council.
- Impose direct sanctions on the Syrian regime's allies, particularly Russia and Iran, for supporting it in committing violations and evading the requirements of the political process.

UN Security Council

- Condemn the Syrian regime's violation of Security Council resolutions by proceeding with elections that undermine the political process and oppose UN Security Council decisions.
- Take serious steps to implement UN Security Council Resolution 2254, which calls for the establishment of a transitional governing body, and achieving a political transition that ensures free and democratic presidential, parliamentary, and local elections, thus sparing the Syrian people further suffering and violations, and contributing to ending the Syrian conflict.

UN Special Envoy to Syria

- The UN Special Envoy to Syria should be more stringent with the Syrian regime regarding its blatant violation of UN Security Council resolutions related to the political process and should directly condemn these elections.
- An official position should be declared to the Syrian people regarding the illegitimacy of these elections and their violation of UN Security Council resolutions.
- The failure to take a firm and clear stance by the UN Special Envoy will embolden the Syrian regime to proceed with undermining what remains of the political solution.

UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI)

- Raise the subject of the egregious human rights violations seen in these elections.



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