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“Useful Syria” and Demographic Changes in Syria

Hussain Ibrahim Qutrib
Associate Professor of Geomorphology

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Abstract

In early 2016 Bashar Al-Assad coined the term (Useful Syria), referring to six governorates encompassing Damascus, Rif Dimashq, Homs, Hama, Latakia, and Tartus. He stated that he will defend them with all his might, and considered remaining governorates as less strategic. The study hopes to track qualitative (ethnic, religious, and doctrinal) demographic changes of inhabitants, performed by the Syrian regime and its allies in these Governorates through forced migration operations, “siege and starvation” tactics and forced banishment deals that aim to displace inhabitants, while replacing them with another demographic. This depends on a comparative study of an official population consensus in late 2011 and estimations made of population numbers in late 2016. The study will finally present the most important aspects of demographic changes in “Useful Syria” Governorates, accompanied by tables and charts and the results and recommendations derived from them.

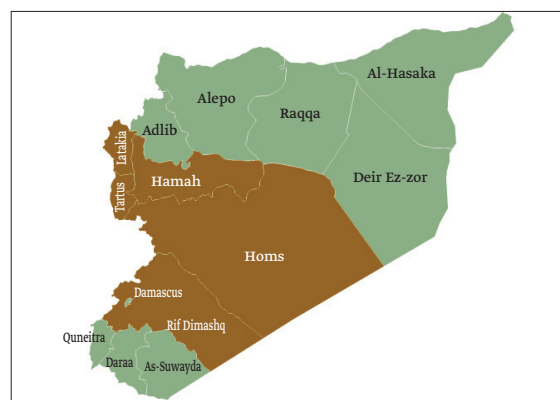
Introduction

Demographic change is ethnic, religious, and sectarian change of a population in a certain area in either a short or long duration of time, depending on the methods and tools used to execute this change. The possible means include exerting gentle force, such as through preaching (proselytizing), cultural and educational incentives, and the provision of facilities, privileges, and citizenship. They also include the tactics of appealing to material interests and using moral intimidation, in addition to various other pressure techniques. These are subtle and noncoercive approaches used in pursuing strategic plans in the long term. Another way of encouraging demographic change is through military force during wars and conflicts against civilians, such as operations of ethnic cleansing, forced displacement, blockade and starvation strategies, and employing coercive agreements to evict inhabitants from their homes and replace them with people from another demographic, as is currently happening Syria today.

“Useful Syria”

Bashar al-Asad first used the term “Useful Syria” in early 2016 to refer to certain governorates: Latakia, Tartus, parts of Homs and Hama, and Damascus and its countryside. He has also confirmed that he and his allies will defend these areas with all their might. Bashar considered the other areas and Syrian governorates destroyed by him and his allies as less strategic and believed that battles ensuing there are in a state of ebb and flow. The total area covered by governorates making up “Useful Syria” is considered to be 75,000 square kilometers, which is 40% of Syria’s total area of 186,000 square kilometers. The Syrian regime currently controls around 50% of the areas within the “Useful Syria” governorates mentioned above: large areas of Rif Dimashq, Homs, and Hama are still not fully under the regime’s control.

Areas and Governorates in “Useful Syria”



Source: Map provided by the author.

Geographic Importance of “Useful Syria”

The governorates and areas referred to by the name “Useful Syria” are considered vital to Bashar’s regime and his Alawite sect, and also to the interests of his allies, Russia, Iran, and the Lebanese Hezbollah movement.

This importance stems from the following factors:

- The regions that are included overlook the Mediterranean Sea.
- This is a densely populated area, being inhabited by 46% of the country’s total population.
- It includes the capital Damascus, which is an ancient historic capital.
- Alawites are almost solely present in these areas.
- With its neighbors, the Alawites and Shiites in Lebanon, it forms a sectarian confederation of Syrian Alawites and provides accessibility to the Mediterranean through another access point in the Lebanese territory.
- The Homs governorate is of a key strategic importance for the regime and its allies; on one hand it represents a link between key strategic areas between the coast, Damascus and Rif Dimashq, and on the other hand, it connects with the Shiite groups in Lebanon. This is why the regime started exerting overly aggressive military pressure on areas such as Qusair, Homs, and adjoining areas at the beginning of 2012, and surrounding Baba Amr, al-Inshaat, al-Sultaniyah, al-Khalidiyah, Karam el-Zeitoun, al-Rifai, al-Sabil, al-Bayada, and Wadi al-Arab. People in these areas were forced to leave until all these districts and areas were emptied. The regime is currently trying to flush out what is left in Alwaar district.
- It contains two Russian army bases: the naval military base in Tartus, and Humaimim Military Air Base in Latakia.

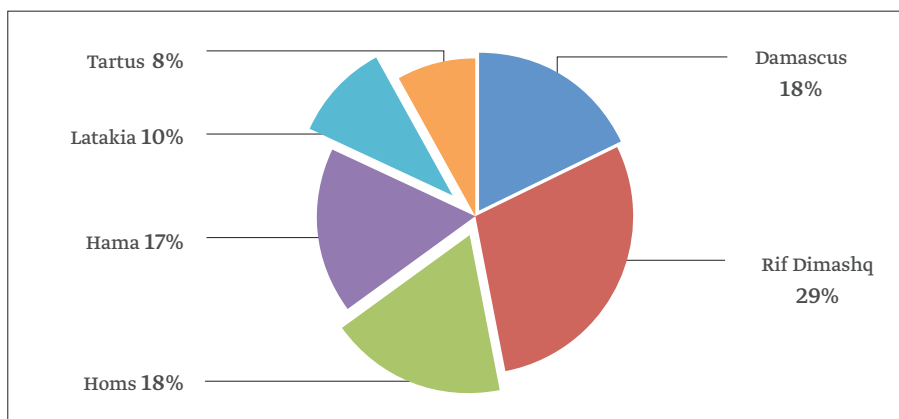
Demographic Geography of “Useful Syria” until the End of 2011

The population of “Useful Syria” in all six governorates reached 9,826,000 by the end of 2011; this was equivalent to 46% of Syria’s population, which was estimated at 21,377,000 at that time.¹

Population in “Useful Syria” Governorates at the End of 2011

Governorate	Population per Thousand	Population Percentage in Relation to Total Population in Syria	Population Percentage in Relation to That of “Useful Syria”	Area in Square Kilometers	Population Density (Person/Square Kilometer)
Damascus	1754	8%	18%	1599	1097
Rif Dimashq	2836	13%	29%	18032	157
Homs	1803	8%	18%	42223	43
Hamah	1628	8%	17%	8883	183
Latakia	1008	5%	10%	2297	439
Tartus	797	4%	8%	1892	421
Total	9826	46%	100%	74926	131

Population Percentages: Distribution in “Useful Syria” in Relation to Total Population in the Six Governorates in Late 2011

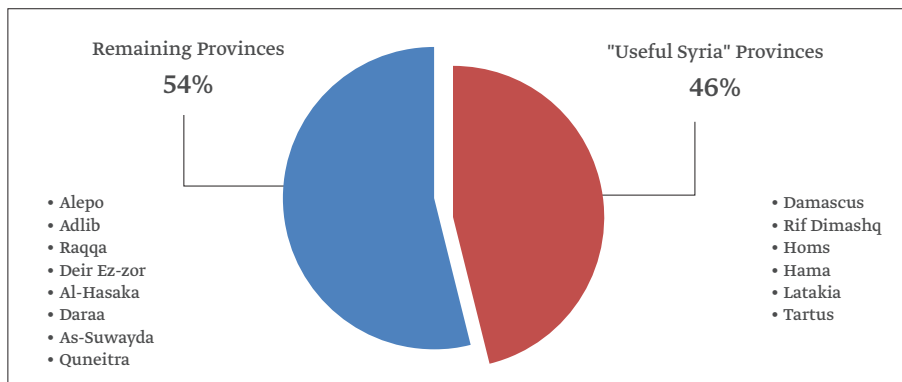


(1) Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Group, “Population and Demographic Indicators, 2011, Population Estimates by Gender and Governorate (per One Thousand) in December 31, 2011,” ch. 2. <http://www.cbssyr.sy/yearbook/2011/Data-Chapter2/TAB-3-2-2011.htm>.

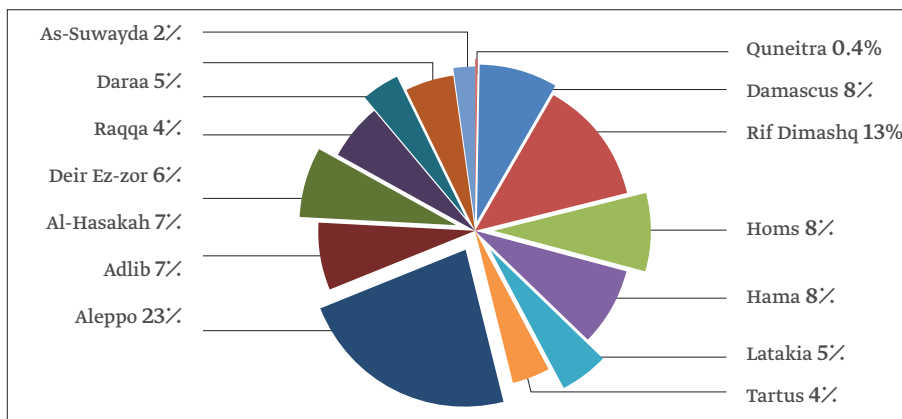
Population in the Rest of the Syrian Governorates at the End of 2011

Governorate	Population per Thousand	Population Percentage in Relation to Total Population in Syria	Population Percentage in Relation to the Rest of the Syrian Governorates	Area in Square Kilometers	Population Density (Person/Square Kilometer)
Alepo	4868	23%	42%	18500	263
Adlib	1501	7%	13%	6097	246
Al-Hasaka	1512	7%	13%	23334	65
Deir Ez-zor	1239	6%	11%	33060	37
Raqqa	944	4%	8%	19616	48
Daraa	1027	5%	9%	3730	275
As-Suwayda	370	2%	3%	5550	67
Quneitra	90	0.4%	0.8%	1861	48
Total	11551	54%	100%	111748	103

Comparison between Population Percentages in “Useful Syria” and the Rest of the Syrian Governorates at the End of 2011



Demographic Distribution in “Useful Syria” Governorates at the End of 2011²



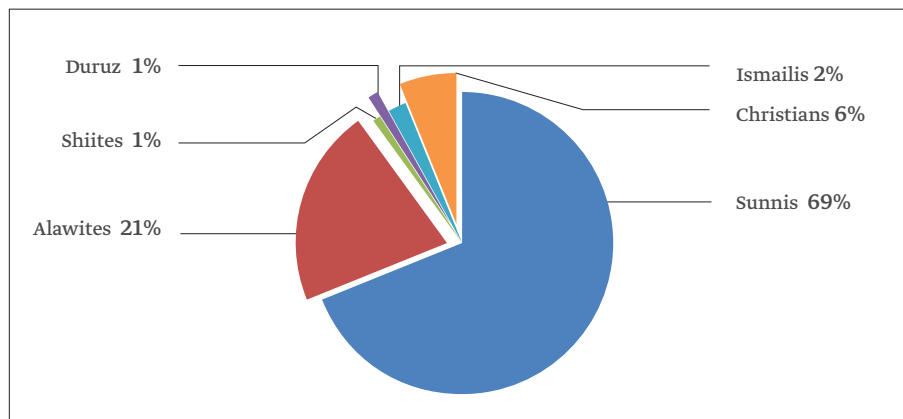
(2) All the statistics present do not include Syrians living outside Syria, and are taken from the Central Bureau of Statistics in Syria. All graphs were prepared by the writer based on the numerical information contained in the bureau's tables.

Population numbers in the six governorates of “Useful Syria” (Damascus, Rif Dimashq, Homs, Hama, Latakia, and Tartus) were distributed between Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, and Circassians (6,802,000, or 69%); Alawites (2,055,000, or 21%); Christians (542,000, or 6%); Ismailis (236,000, or 2%); Duruz (99,000, or 1%); and Shiites (92,000, or 1%) .

Population Distribution in “Useful Syria” Governorates According to Religion or Sect at the End of 2011³

Governorate	Sunnis	Alawites	Duruz	Ismailis	Shiites	Christians	Total
Tartus	140	550	0	58	0	49	797
Latakia	372	580	0	2	2	52	1008
Homs	1154	455	0	3	38	153	1803
Hama	1093	274	0	168	2	91	1628
Damascus	1583	82	5	2	24	58	1754
Rif Dimashq	2460	114	94	3	26	139	2836
Total	6802	2055	99	236	92	542	9826

Population Distribution According to Religion or Sect in “Useful Syria” Governorates at the End of 2011



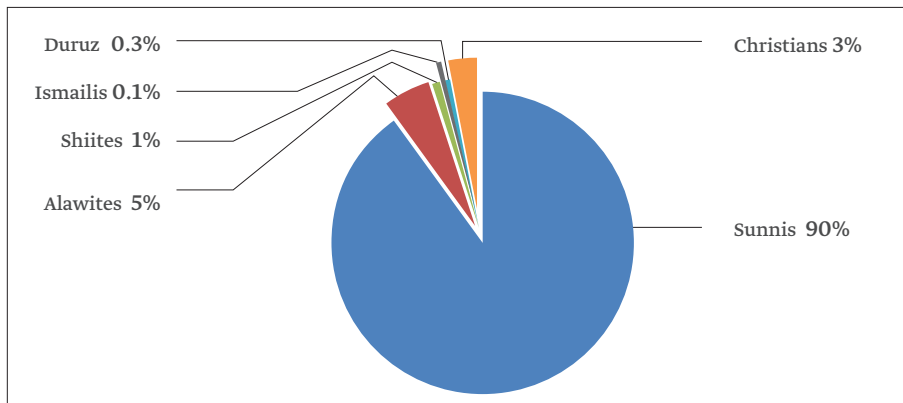
Damascus

By the end of 2011, Damascus’s population reached 1,754,000. This amounts to 8% of Syria’s population, and 18% of the population of “Useful Syria.” As for the ethnic composition, the city is comprised of 95% Arabs, 4% Kurds, and 1% other ethnicities, including Armenians, Assyrians, Turkmen, Cricassians, Azerbaijanis of Iran, Bosniaks, and Albanians. The majority in Damascus are Sunni, which amount to 90%. Additionally, there is a small percentage of

(3) “Minorities in Syria,” unpublished study, Syria Center for Research.

Christians living in Bab Tuma and Bab Sharqi in Damascus, which include Roman Christians, Greek Orthodox, Antiochian Orthodox, and Melkite Greeks, as well as a tiny Jewish minority. Alawites form 5%, Christians 3%, Shiites 1%, Duruz 0.3%, and Ismailis 0.1% of the population. The majority of Alawites and Ismailis and most Shiites came down to Damascus during the time when Hafiz al-Asad was president or under the tenure of his son Bashar and are not considered part of the indigenous population.

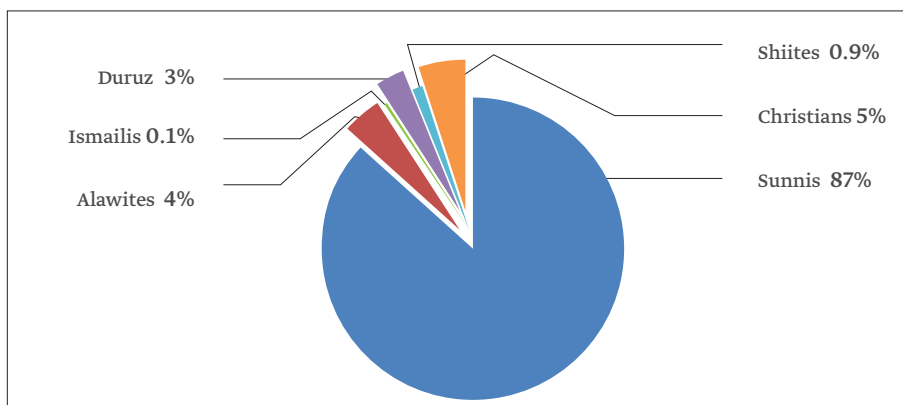
Population Distribution in Damascus According to Religion or Sect at the End of 2011



Rif Dimashq

At the end of 2011, the population of Rif Dimashq reached 2,836,000, accounting for 13% of Syria’s population and 29% of the population of “Useful Syria.” The inhabitants there are 87% Sunni, 5% Christian, 4% Alawite, 3% Duruz, 1% Shiite, and 0.1% Ismaili.

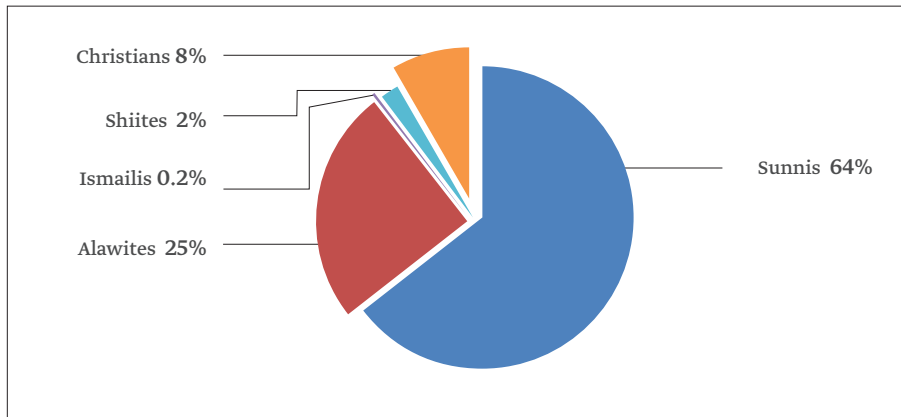
Population Distribution in Rif Dimashq According to Religion or Sect at the End of 2011



Homs

In late 2011, the population of Homs reached 1,803,000. This amounts to 8% of Syria’s total population and 18% of the population of “Useful Syria.” Sunnis make up 64% of the governorate, Alawites, 25%; Christians, 8%;, Shiites, 2%; and Ismailis, 0.2%.

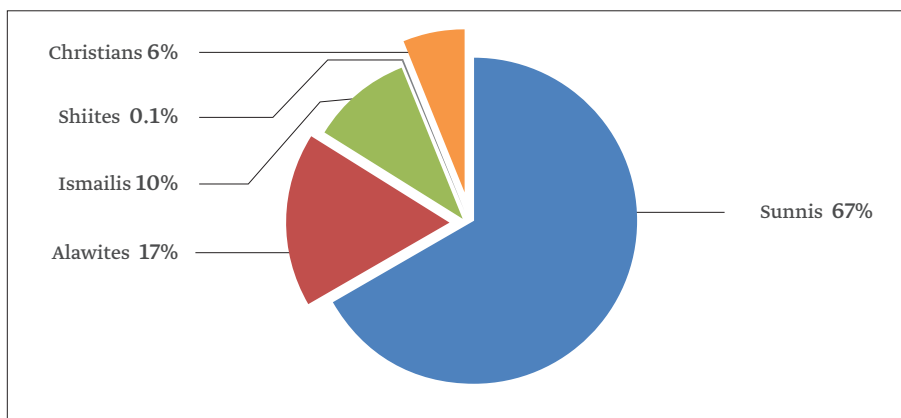
Population Distribution in Homs According to Religion or Sect at the End of 2011



Hama

At the end of 2011, the population of Hama was estimated at 1,628,000, representing 8% of the overall Syrian population and 17% of the population of “Useful Syria.” Percentages of various sects and religions were: Sunnis, 67%; Alawites, 17%; Christians, 6%; Ismailis, 10%; and Shiites, 0.1%.

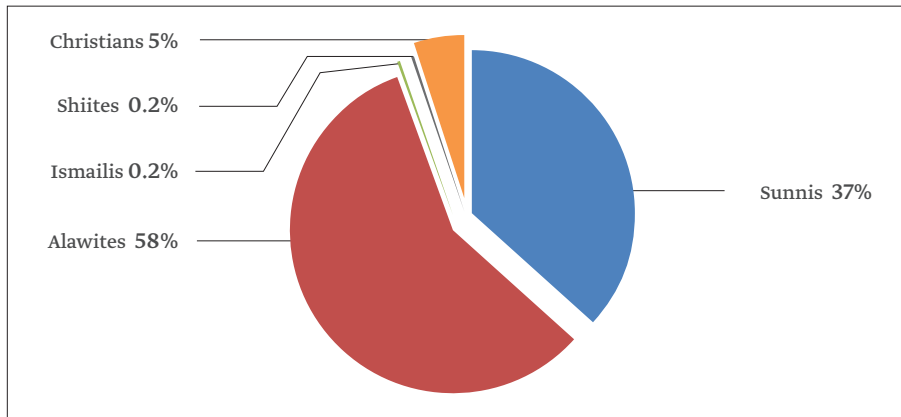
Population Distribution in Hama According to Religion or Sect at the End of 2011



Latakia

At the end of 2011, Latakia's population reached 1,008,000, accounting for 5% of the Syrian population and 10% of the population of "Useful Syria." The breakdown of ethnic and religious percentages is: Alawites, 58%; Sunnis, 37%; Christians, 5%; Ismailis, 0.2%, and Shiites, 0.2%.

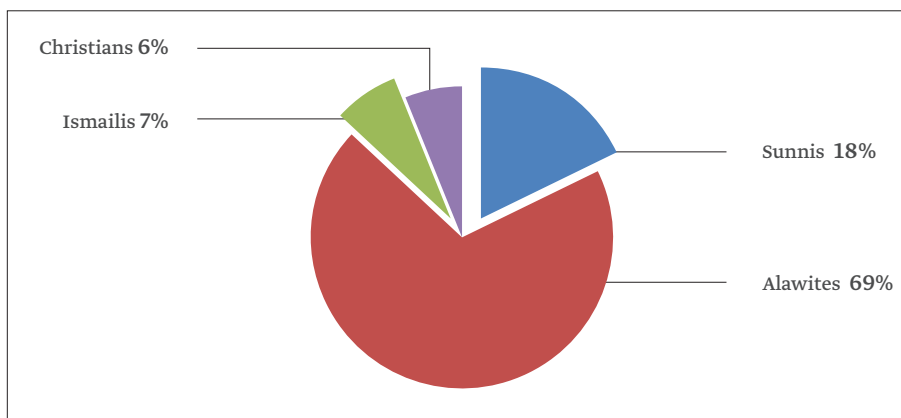
Population Distribution in Latakia According to Religion or Sect at the End of 2011



Tartus

At the end of 2011, the population of Tartus reached 797,000, which represented 4% of Syria's population, and 8% of the population of "Useful Syria." The breakdown of ethnic and religious percentages is: Alawites, 69%; Sunnis, 18%; Ismailis, 7%; and Christians, 6%.

Population Distribution in Tartus According to Religion or Sect at the End of 2011



Demographic Changes in Syria: Indicators and Facts

- The number of Shiite Shrines in Syria has increased from 3 to more than double this number and has spread all over the governorates.
- The Muhsiniyah School in Alamin district in Damascus was the only Shiite school in Syria. Today, there are more than 60 Shiite seminaries and secondary religious schools.
- Shiite religious authorities have set up several bodies to conduct religious rituals during Shiite festivals.
- The period between (1970 – 2007) is considered the golden phase of conversion to Shiism in Syria; as the number of converts increased by 76,000. 53,000 were Alawites, 16,000 were Sunnis, and some 7,000 were Ismailis. The number of Sunnis that converted during (1970 – 1999), at the time of Hafiz al-Aasad, was 6960 (i.e. with an average conversion rate of 232 per year). While that figure increased to become 8040 during Bashar al-Asad’s time, (i.e. an average of 1005 conversions per year).⁴

Number of Syrians of Various Sects Who Converted to Shiism as a Result of Shiite Proselytism during the Regimes of Hafiz and Bashar al-Asad and up to 2007

Sect	Number of Shiite Converts in Syria	Percentage
Alawites	52.700	69%
Sunnis	15.930	21%
Ismailis	7.400	10%
Total	76.030	100%

- Shiism has recorded a dramatic increase in all Syrian governorates, with a rise of more than 134 percentage points, in contrast with a 10-point increase previously.
- The number of Iraqis settled in Syria in 2007 reached 1 million, of which 57% are Shiite, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).
- Destruction pervaded most parts of Syria, resulting in the worst humanitarian crisis the world had ever seen. It is estimated that every minute in Syria there is a family that leaves home because of indiscriminate shelling, killing, the general atmosphere of terror, rape, or the difficulty of living under a failing infrastructure.

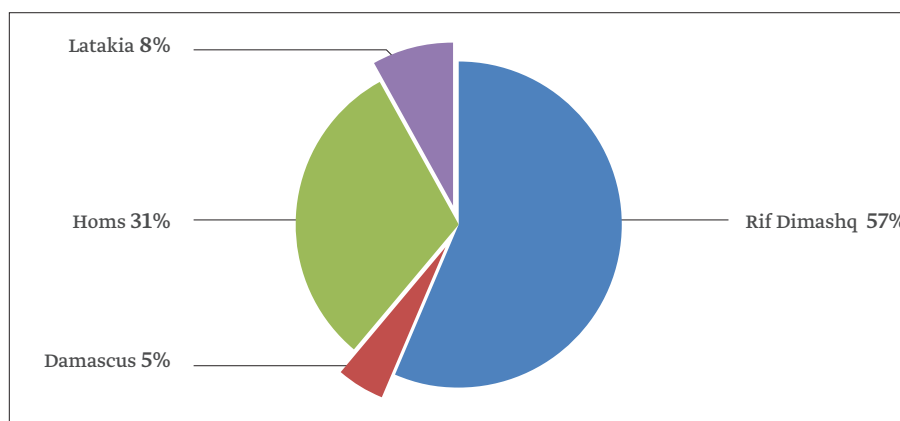
(4) “The Shiite Ba’th in Syria,” 1919-2007, International Institute of Syrian Studies, 2009, 170.

- More than half of Syrian residents have left their homes, becoming either internally displaced persons or refugees. Internal refugees have been estimated at 6.5 million, with 4.5 million going to areas outside the reach of the regime and 2 million in areas lying within the regime’s grasp.⁵

Number of Displaced people in Some Syrian Governorates According to the Latest Survey by the Syrian Human Rights Network⁶

Governorate	Number of Displaced (per Million)	Number of Displaced within the Governorate	Governorate Population (Per Million)	Displaced as Percentage of Governorate	Displaced as Percentage of Total Displaced in All Four Governorates
Rif Dimashq	2.2	0.45	2.836	78%	57%
Homs	1.21	0.08	1.803	67%	31%
Latakia	0.3	0.11	1.008	30%	8%
Damascus	0.18	0	1.754	10%	5%
Total	3.89	0.64	7.401	-	-

Displaced Groups as a Percentage of Total Displaced in All Four Governorates



- Displacement took on a Sunni sectarian dimension; as Alawite areas remained mostly safe, especially in Tartus and Latakia, and with the revolution being started by mostly Sunnis, it was they who bore the brunt.

(5) Erin Moony, “The Inside Story: Internal Displacement in Syria,” *Forced Migration Review* 47 (Sept. 2014). <http://www.fmreview.org/ar/syria/mooney.html>.

(6) Nasir al-Ghazali, “Exodus in Syria and Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt” (in Arabic), Damascus Center for Theoretical Studies and Civil Rights, in cooperation with Shabab Movement for Democratic Change, September 30, 2012. <http://www.achr.eu/raport%20syria.pdf>.

- Homs was the first governorate to suffer terrifying attacks that destroyed its infrastructure and left many dead and martyred, prompting the 1.21 million (67%) of its inhabitants who managed to escape death to flee and to resettle in other parts of Syria or to live as refugees in other countries.
- Sunni residential areas in Homs became abandoned as a result of indiscriminate bombing, systematic destruction, and forced displacement.⁷ After working out a truce that allowed fighters to leave the city in 2014, the regime barred the Sunni population from returning and replaced it with Shiite and Alawite families.
- The regime set fire to the register of the Homs land title deeds.⁸
- Iran took over Abna Ja'far al-Tayyar mosque in Homs after rebels left the city in 2014, and rebuilt it in the architectural style of a Shiite shrine.⁹
- Lebanese Hezbollah took over al-Qusayr city and surrounding villages, drained them of their populations, and replaced their inhabitants with Lebanese Shiite families and militias of al-Ridha Shiite Brigade in Homs.
- The regime displaced the populations of several villages in Hamah governate, such as al-Asharnah, Qabr Fadhadh, and al-Ramlah, and replaced them with Alawites who had fled from Ishtabraq village.
- Lebanese Hezbollah issued a warning to the population of Madhaya City to evacuate and leave their homes.
- Russia Bombed both Turkomen and Kurd Mountain in Latakia governate, forcing 95% of the inhabitants to flee. This prompted former Turkish prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu to accuse Russia and the Syrian regime of engaging in ethnic cleansing in the Latakia countryside.
- The regime and Lebanese Hezbollah endeavored to occupy the al-Qalamun area and to drain it of its population for the purpose of establishing a geographical sectarian continuity between Lebanese Shiites and Syrian Alawites.¹⁰
- Iran insisted on replacing the populations of Al-Zabadani, Madhaya, Sarghaya, and Baqin with the population of Al-Fu'ah and Kafariyah. In April 2017 it was successful in negotiating a deal with Al-Fath army to evacuate the population of Al-Fu'ah and Kafariyah in two

(7) Ala al-Din Rashwan, "The Tragedy of Mass Exodus inside Syria" (in Arabic), Amnesty International, Middle East and North Africa Regional Office. <http://www.amnestymena.org/ar/Magazine/Issue21/TragedyofSyrianIDPs.aspx?articleID=1124>.

(8) National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, "Forced Displacement and Demographic Change in Syria under the Guise of the UN" (in Arabic), Arab Orient Center for Strategic and Civilization, September 6, 2016. <http://cutt.us/9jExg>.

(9) Ibid.

(10) "Ethnic Cleansing: A Passage towards Useful Syria" (in Arabic), Al-Jazeera.net. <http://cutt.us/Lbl4U>.

phases during 60 days in exchange of transferring Al-Zabadani militants and their families in Madhaya and neighboring areas to the Syrian North.

- The regime and Hezbollah imposed a complete blockade lasting more than three years on Dariya, which has a population of more than 250,000. During the blockade, Dariya was the target of indiscriminate bombing involving some 8,000 barrel bombs, eight attacks of chemical weapons, and three attacks with cluster bombs carried out. On August 25, 2016, the regime and its allies imposed an agreement on the population of Dariya that stipulates the displacement of the remaining population, after a continuing mass exodus, the martyrdom of more than 800 people, and the disappearance of 4,000 others following detention.¹¹
- The regime offers citizenship to Shiite mercenaries fighting alongside Iran within a strategic plan of demographic change in the Levant. It gives priority to Damascus and surrounding areas and to the Homs governorate; Bashar al-Asad said: “Syria is for those who defend it, not those who hold its passport.”
- Iran buys homes and businesses from owners with overblown prices. If owners refuse they are subject to terror tactics, such as the burning of Asrouniyah Souq in Damascus after shopkeepers there refused to sell.¹²
- The number of registered refugees at the UNHCR reached 4.2 million in neighboring countries. This number is less than the real estimates, as large numbers of refugees were not able to register with the UNHCR, while others do not wish to do so and opt to live outside refugee camps in the neighboring countries. The real estimate for Syrian refugees is considered to be around 5.3 million.¹³

Number of Registered Syrian Refugees at the UNHCR in Neighboring Countries up to the End of 2015¹⁴

Country	Turkey	Lebanon	Jordan	Iraq	Egypt	Total
Number of Refugees (per Million)	1.7	1.5	0.7	0.25	0.12	4.27

(11) National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, “Forced Displacement and Demographic Change in Syria.”

(12) Ibid.

(13) “Ethnic Cleansing.”

(14) Antonio Guterres, UNHCR Director, and Helen Clark, UNDP Program Administrator and Chair of the UN Development Group, “Strategic Regional Overview” (in Arabic), *Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015–2016: In Response to the Syrian Crisis*, 6. <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/3RP-Regional-Overview-Arabic.pdf>.

**Estimates of Demographic Change in “Useful Syria” at the End of 2016
According to Previous Estimates of Demographic Change Based on the Population
Distribution at the End of 2011 (per Thousand People)**

Governorate	Sect	Population, End of 2011	Population Shortage due to Killing	Population Shortage due to Displacement and Asylum	Shortage of Population due to Conversion to Shiism	Number of People Internally Displaced Coming to the City	Population increase due to Conversion to Shiism	Population Increase due to Gaining Citizenship	Estimated Population Numbers at the End of 2011
Damascus	Sunnis	1583	15	800	1	1100	0	0	1867
	Alawites	82	3	1	3	5	0	5	85
	Shiites	24	2	0	0	15	4	230	271
	Ismailis	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Duruz	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
	Christians	58	1	5	0	10	0	0	62
	Total	1754	21	806	4	1130	4	235	2292
Rif Dimashq	Sunnis	2460	75	1700	2	100	0	0	783
	Alawites	114	4	10	5	0	0	2	97
	Shiites	26	3	0	0	0	7	320	350
	Ismailis	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	Duruz	94	2	10	0	0	0	0	82
	Christians	139	2	15	0	0	0	0	122
	Total	2836	86	1735	7	100	7	322	1437
Homs	Sunnis	1154	80	950	3	100	0	0	221
	Alawites	455	50	10	10	5	0	4	394
	Shiites	38	5	2	0	5	13	250	299
	Ismailis	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	Duruz	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Christians	153	5	15	0	2	0	0	135
	Total	1803	140	977	13	112	13	254	1052

Governorate	Sect	Population, End of 2011	Population Shortage due to Killing	Population Shortage due to Displacement and Asylum	Shortage of Population due to Conversion to Shiism	Number of People Internally Displaced Coming to the City	Population increase due to Conversion to Shiism	Population Increase due to Gaining Citizenship	Estimated Population Numbers at the End of 2011
Hama	Sunnis	1093	35	700	1	400	0	0	757
	Alawites	274	10	35	6	10	0	1	234
	Shiites	2	0	0	0		9	5	16
	Ismailis	168	2	10	2	0	0	0	154
	Duruz	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Christians	91	1	10	0	2	0	0	82
	Total	1628	48	755	9	412	9	6	1243
Latakia	Sunnis	372	10	150	1	10	0	0	221
	Alawites	580	25	0	25	0	0	2	532
	Shiites	2	0	0	0	2	26	10	40
	Ismailis	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Duruz	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Christians	52	0	2	0	5	0	0	55
	Total	1008	35	152	26	17	26	12	850
Tartus	Sunnis	140	8	35	1	5	0	0	101
	Alawites	550	25	0	30	3	0	3	501
	Shiites	0	0	0	0	3	32	5	40
	Ismailis	58	1	0	1	4	0	0	60
	Duruz	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Christians	49	0	2	0	2	0	0	49
	Total	797	34	37	32	17	32	8	751
Total		9826	364	4462	91	1788	91	837	7625

Key Aspects of Demographic Change in “Useful Syria” Governorates

This author prepared the previous Table to estimate the volume of demographic change in Syria during the rule of Hafiz and Bashar al-Asad, based on the previously mentioned data and indications. The magnitude of the change was calculated at the level of the governorates of “Useful Syria,” and at the level of the population of each of these governorates. It reflects the decline or increase in the population as the result of killing, forced displacement, emigration out of the governorates, seeking refuge, Shiization, and the granting of citizenship to Shiites and Alawites arriving in Syria from Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, and other countries, based on the lowest estimates related to refugees, asylum seekers, and those who were killed.

These estimates are based on population figures as of the end of 2011. It is worth recalling that the demographic change began in the 1980s. However, at the time, it was limited by the small number of Sunni, Alawite, and Ismaili converts to Shi’ism, on the one hand, and the fact that the regime kept its granting of Syrian citizenship to immigrant Shiites and Alawites secret, on the other hand. For these reasons, analysis of the pre-2011 demographic change figures is not crucial. What is significant are the geographic spread of the changes across all the Syrian governorates.

The next Table summarizes the amount of demographic change in Syria by giving a comparison of population numbers in several governorates in “Useful Syria” at the end of 2011 and the population number in the end of 2016. When estimating the population number in “Useful Syria” in 2016, the author did not include the natural increase in population numbers, and instead considered the population numbers in 2011 as a constant. The aim was to clarify the volume of demographic change in Syria through changes in population percentages according to religion or sect.

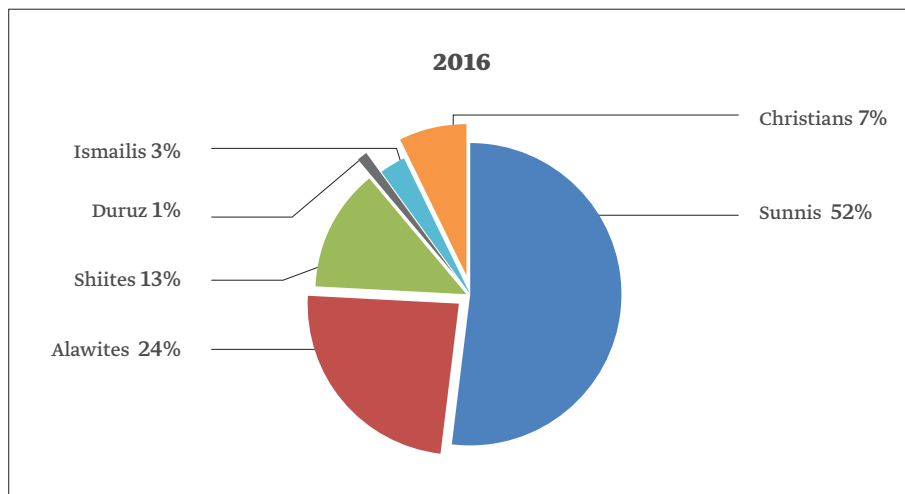
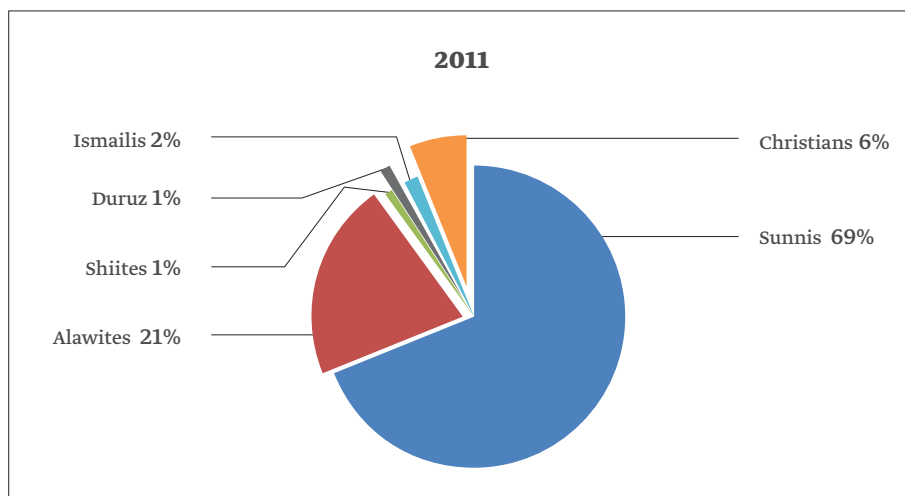
Estimated Population Distribution in Terms of Religion or Sect in 2016 Compared with 2011 in the Six Governorates of “Useful Syria” (All Figures in Thousands)

Year	Population Group	Damascus	Rif Dimashq	Homs	Hama	Latakia	Tartus	Total
Population in 2011	Sunnis	1583	2460	1154	1093	372	140	6802
	Alawites	82	114	455	274	580	550	2055
	Shiites	24	26	38	2	2	0	92
	Ismailis	2	3	3	168	2	58	236
	Duruz	5	94	0	0	0	0	99
	Christians	58	139	153	91	52	49	542
Total		1754	2836	1803	1628	1008	797	9826
Population in 2016	Sunnis	1867	783	221	757	221	101	3950
	Alawites	85	97	394	234	532	501	1843
	Shiites	271	350	299	16	40	40	1016
	Ismailis	2	3	3	154	2	60	224
	Duruz	5	82	0	0	0	0	87
	Christians	62	122	135	82	55	49	505
Total		2292	1437	1052	1243	850	751	7625

Prominent aspects of demographic change in “Useful Syria” include the following:

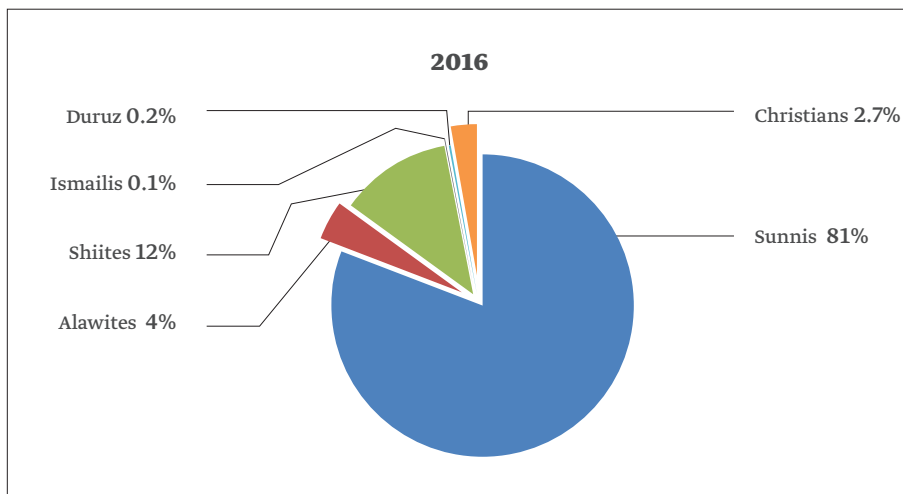
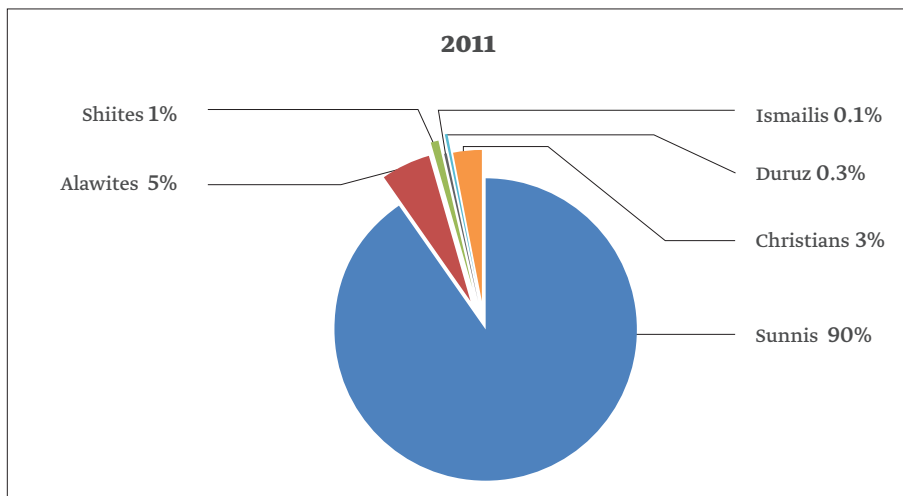
- The population in the six governorates of “Useful Syria” has shrunk by 22%, dropping from 9,826,000 at the end of 2011 to 7,625,000 at the end of 2016. Sunnis dropped by 17% from 6,802,000 to 3,950,000 (i.e., almost by half), The Shiite population jumped by 12%, from 92,000 to 1,016,000 (i.e., more than tenfold). The sharp decrease of Sunni population in “Useful Syria” led to a low population count in the six governorates and affected the percentages according to sect or religion there; the Alawites rose from 21% to 24% and the Christians rose from 6% to 7%, while the Duruz remained in the same percentage rate of 1%, even with all changes taken into account.

Comparison between Population Distributions in Terms of Religion or Sect in “Useful Syria,” 2011 and 2016



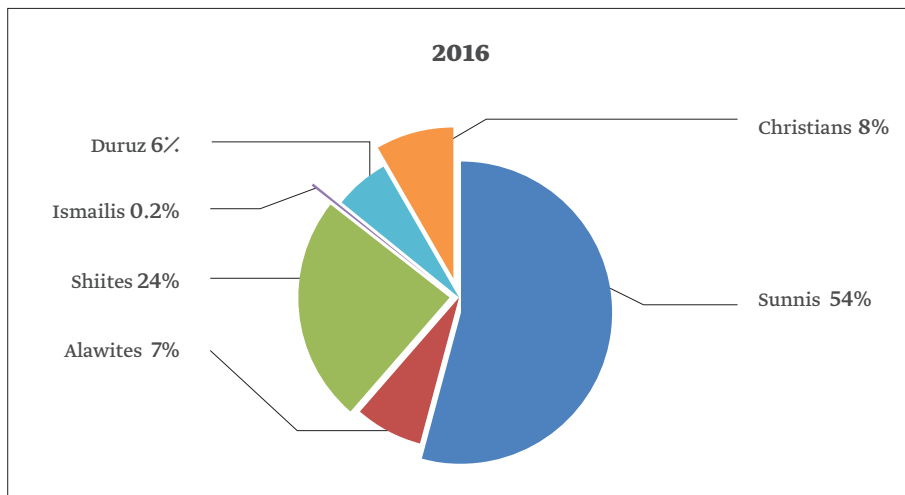
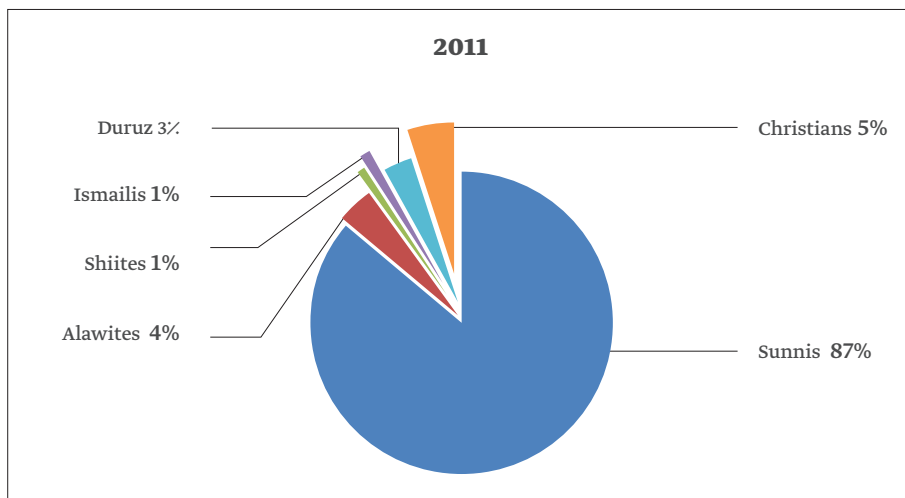
- The population of the capital, Damascus, increased 23%, from 1,754,000 in 2011 to 2,292,000 in 2016. This was caused especially by the increase in the number of Shiites from 24,000 to 271,000 and the increase of the Sunni population in the capital from 1,583,000 to 1,867,000, due to internal Sunni migration. This large increase in Shiite numbers in the capital alongside internal Sunni migration led to an overall increase in the city population of 11%. While the percentage of Sunnis dropped (to 9%), as did those of the Christians (from 3% to 2,7%), the Alawites (from 5% to 4%), and the Duruz (from 0.3% to 0.2%), the Ismaili sect remained mostly stable (with an increase of only 0.1%), even if the numbers of these religions or sects increase or remain the same.

**Comparison between Population Distributions in
Terms of Religion or Sect in the Damascus Governorate, 2011 and 2016**



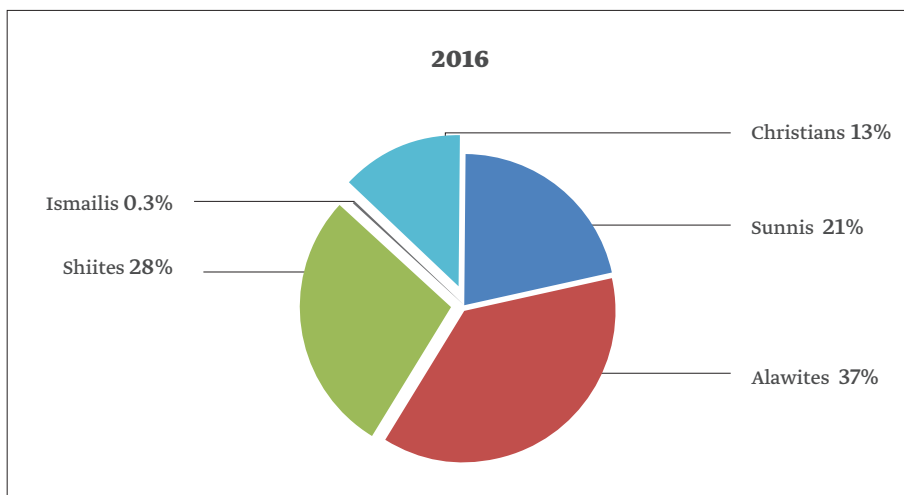
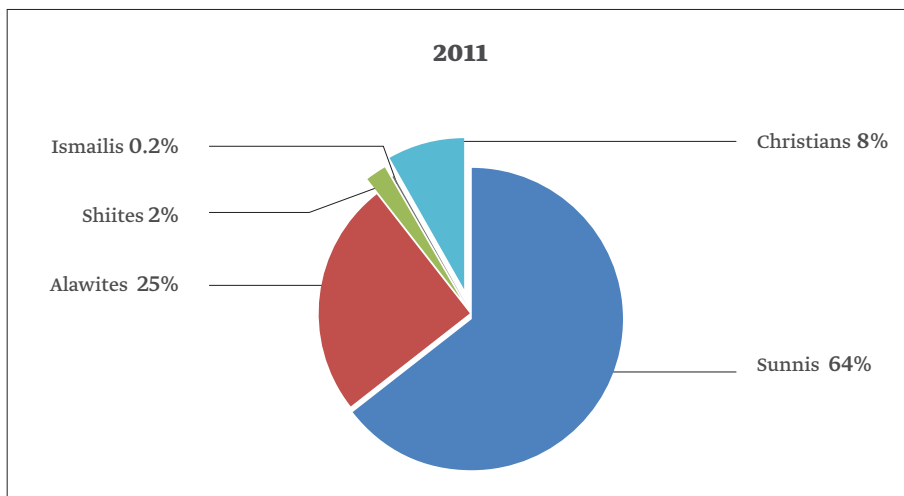
- The population of Rif Dimashq dropped greatly (by 49%), from 2,836,000 in 2011 to 1,437,000 in 2016. The share of the Sunni population fell to 33%, from 2,460,000 to 783,000 (i.e., it dropped by more than two-thirds). At the same time, the share of the Shiite population increased from 26,000 to 350,000 (i.e., increasing by 13-fold). The sharp drop in Sunni population affected the overall population count in Rif Dimashq and changed the percentages of people according to religion or sect; Christians rose from 5% to 8%, Alawites rose from 4% to 7%, Duruz rose from 3% to 6%, and Ismailis rose from 0.1% to 0.2%.

Comparison between Population Distributions in Terms of Religion or Sect in Rif Dimashq, 2011 and 2016



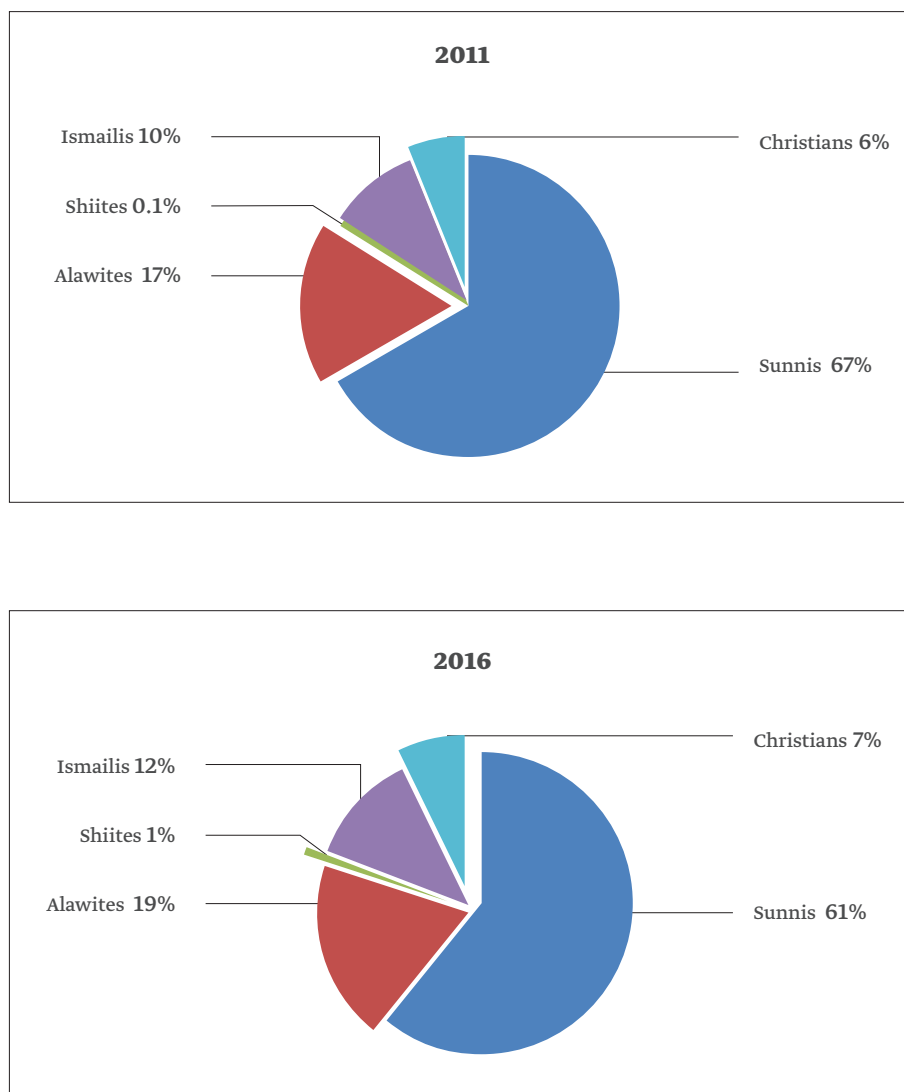
- The population of Homs declined significantly by more than 42%, from 1,803,000 in 2011 to 1,052,000 in 2016. The Sunni population suffered a huge proportional decrease, from 43% at 1,154,000 to 19% at 221,000. There was a remarkable increase in the proportion of the Shiite population, from 26% at 38,000 to 29% at 299,000 (increasing sevenfold). The large decrease of Sunni population to an overall decrease in the population count in Homs governorate affected population percentages according to sect or religion; Alawites increased from 25% to 37%, Christians from 8% to 13%, and Ismailis from 0.2% to 0.3%.

Comparison between Population Distributions in Homs in Terms of Religion or Sect, 2011 and 2016



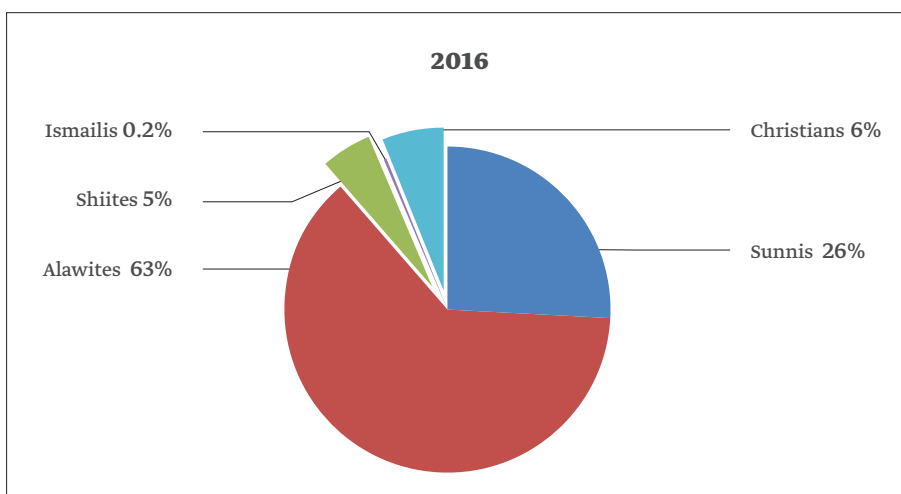
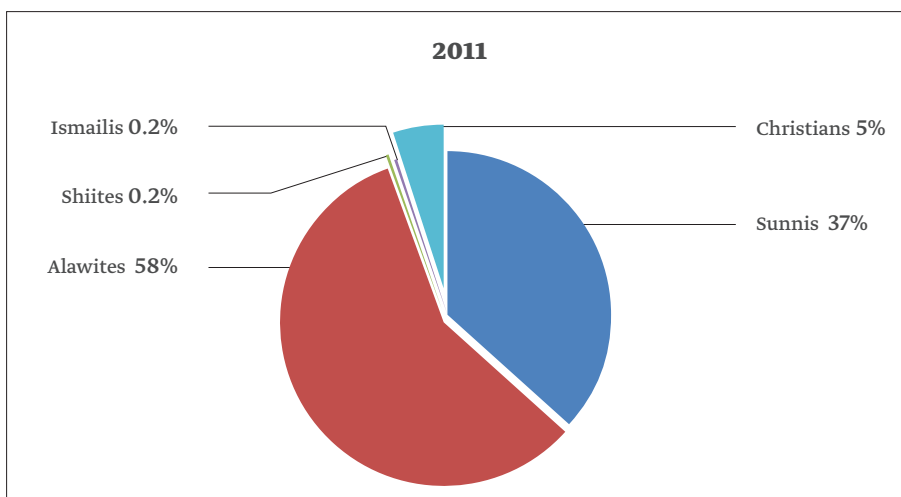
- In the Hama governate the population declined by about 24%, from 1,628,000 in 2011 to 1,243,000 in 2016. The Sunni population declined by 6%, from 1,093,000 to 757,000, while the Shiite population increased by 1% from 2,000 to 16,000. The drop in the Sunni population led to a shift in population percentages according to sect or religion; in this way, Alawites increased from 17% to 19%; Ismailis, from 10% to 12%; and Christians, from 6% to 7%.

Figure 16. Comparison between Population Distributions in Hama in Terms of Religion or Sect, 2011 and 2016



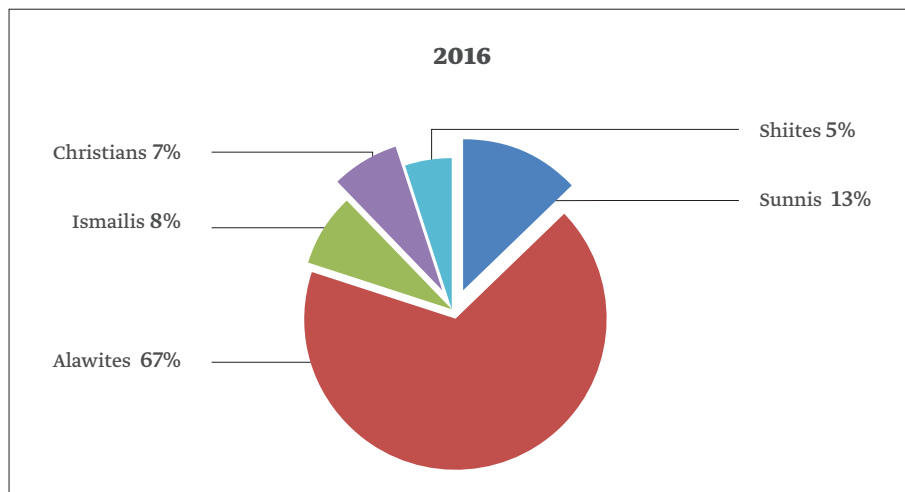
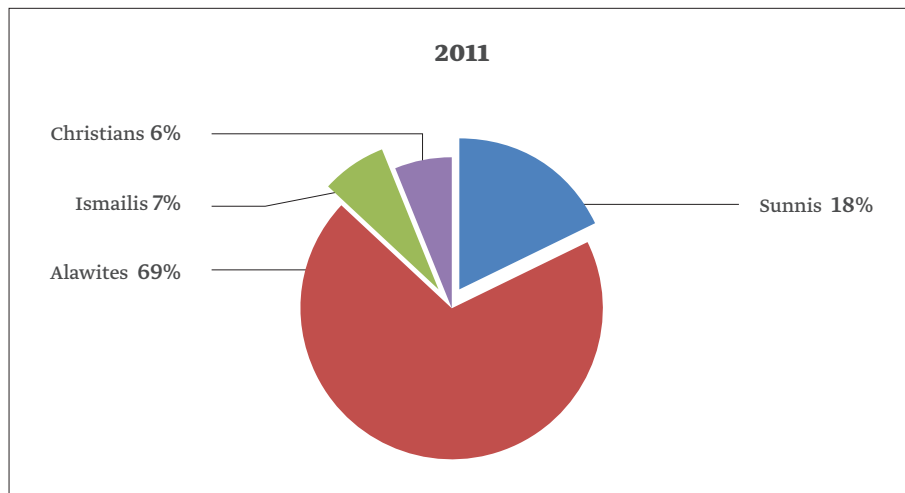
- The population of Latakia fell by 16%, from 1,008,000 in 2011 to 850,000 in 2016. The Sunni community shrunk by 11%, from 372,000 to 221,000. Meanwhile, the Shiites in the area rose by 5%, from 2000 to 40,000. The decrease in Sunni population resulted in an overall decrease in population percentages and a shift in population numbers according to sect and religion. Alawites increased from 58% to 63%, and Christians, from 5% to 6%; The Ismailis remained more or less the unchanged, at around 0.2%.

Comparison between Population Distributions in Latakia in Terms of Religion or Sect, 2011 and 2016



- There was no significant change in the composition of the population in Tartus governate, where population decreased by a small percentage (7%), from 797,000 in 2011 to 751,000 in 2016. The Sunni population there decreased by 5%, from 140,000 to 101,000, while the Alawites decreased from 69% to 67%. The city experienced an increase in the Shiite presence, which reached up to 40,000 and amounted to an increase of 5% in the overall population. The decrease in Sunni population resulted in an overall decrease in population percentages and a shift in population numbers according to sect or religion; the Ismailis rose from 7% to 8% and the Christians, from 6% to 7%.

Comparison between Population Distributions in Tartus in Terms of Religion or Sect, 2011 and 2016



Results and Recommendations

The regime and its allies have made considerable progress in executing their strategic plan for demographic change in Syria. Recently, however, they turned their focus to what Bashar al-Asad's regime has dubbed "Useful Syria" as a tactical transitory objective.

They began by removing the population of the cities of Damascus and Homs and their surroundings, as well as Rif Dimashq, explaining these attempts as siege strategy and truce making on the level of the districts and towns. The regime forcibly expelled the Sunni population of Homs, setting fire to the land ownership registers, and barred the inhabitants from returning to their homes following the 2014 agreement that allowed the revolutionaries to leave. It also forcibly evicted the population of al-Qusayr and its surroundings and replaced it with Lebanese and Iraqi Shiite families.

Several agreements and truces have been negotiated in Damascus and its countryside. The most important of such agreements was the forced displacement of the populations of Dariya and Mu'dhamiyat al-Sham under the auspices of the United Nations. In addition, Iran agreed with Al-Fath army upon replacing the indigenous populations of al-Zabadani, Sarghaya, and the Damascus countryside with Shiite populations from al-Fu'ah and Kafariyah in Idlib.

The regime and its allies adopted two key strategies in executing their plan for demographic change in Syria: strategic siege and truce agreements. Strategic siege was employed by providing one opening for the siege area and then closing off all entryways to the districts it intends to block. This provided the inhabitants with a single exit path, and a way to go in and out for employees not facing arrest or incarceration. The regime and its allies then prevent food, baby formula, and medical supplies from entering the area while commencing random shelling with mortar shells and explosive drums. Electricity and water are then cut off, and the regime uses scare tactics by spreading rumors of imminent break-ins; this is all in an effort to drive out the population. In later stages the regime closes off all ports of entry and the brutal shelling is intensified in preparation for a surrender and exit agreement. This was the case in Dariya and other cities.

The regime was keen to flush out the original inhabitants of Damascus, Rif Dimashq, and Homs by employing selective truces in the areas under siege at the level of the districts. This was true for Bab Amr, Inshaat in Homs, and districts of Barzeh, Qaboon, Tishreen, Bayt Sahn, Yilda, Bibla, al-Qadam, al-Assaly, al-Hajar al-Aswad, Zabadany, and Madaya. This strategy enabled the regime to drive out the inhabitants, who fled the horrors of the shelling, as well as rebels and fighters who laid down their weapons. The regime was then able to move on and employ the same tactics to other areas.¹⁵

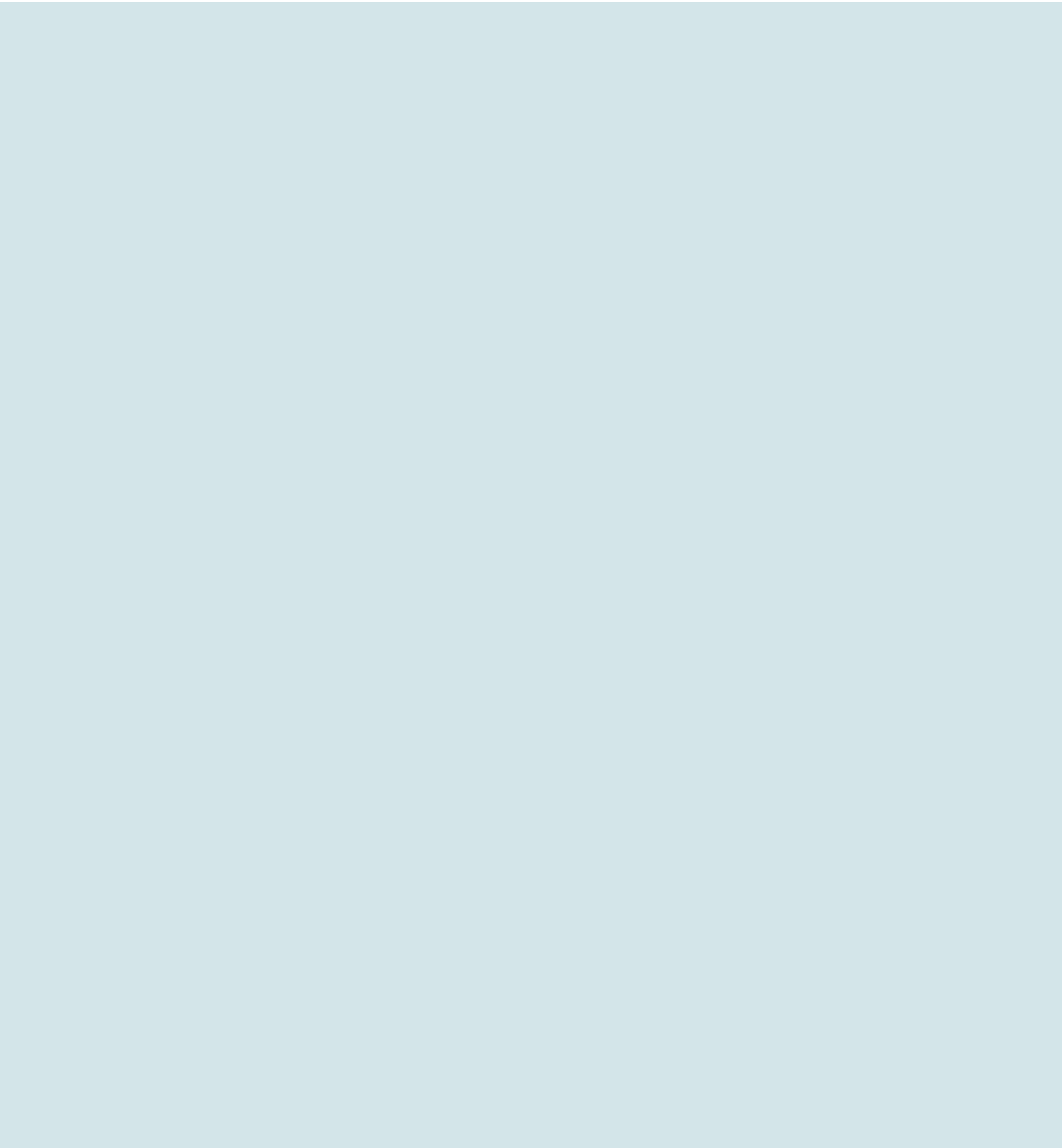
(15) National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, "Forced Displacement and Demographic Change in Syria."

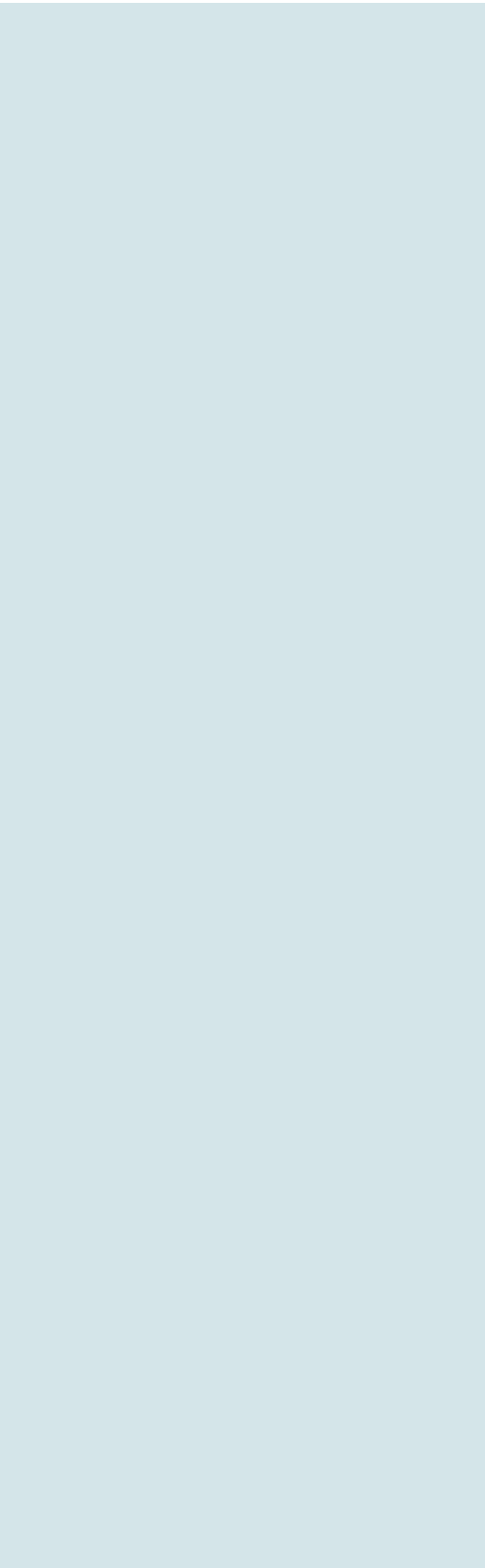
Several outcomes were noted as a result of the regime’s strategic plan for demographic change:

- The share of the Sunni population declined almost by half in the six governorates of “Useful Syria,” from 6,802,000 at the end of 2011 to 3,950,000 in 2016. The Sunnis represented almost 17% of the governorates’ population. The governorates most affected by the decline were Homs, at 43%; Rif Dimashq, at 33%; and Damascus and Latakia, at 9%.
- The Shiite population in “Useful Syria” increased by more than tenfold. from 92,000 in 2011 to 1,016,000 in 2016. There was an increase of 12% of the governorates’ population numbers, with Homs registering an increase of 26%; Rif Dimashq, 23%; and Damascus, 11%.
- There was a slight decrease in the Alawite population of “Useful Syria,” from 2,055,000 in 2011 to 1,843,000 in 2016. However, these statistics are deceiving, as the percentage of Alawite inhabitants in the total number of inhabitants actually increased from 21% to 24%, due to the large decrease of Sunni inhabitants. The governorates that witnessed the most increase in Alwaite population were Homs, at 12%, and Latakia, at 5%.

Key recommendations suggested by the author in regard to these results are the following:

- This study has been careful to avoid exaggerating the magnitude of the exodus and forced displacement. Nevertheless, it conveys the clear idea that the Syrian regime and its allies have achieved considerable progress in their drive to bring about demographic change in Syria. This is why the author recommends the need to construct a work team for more field studies and the provision of sufficient capabilities to face the plan of demographic change in Syria.
- No official consensus of the population in Syria exists from 2011 onward. There is a need to document the reality of the population indicators available after this date.
- All possible legal and financial measures should be taken to stop killing, forced migration and starvation prevalent throughout Syria.
- There is a need to raise the issue of demographic change at international gatherings and to bring a lawsuit against the regime and its allies. Forced demographic change is a war crime from the standpoint of international law.
- Syria is a Muslim Arab country and a founding member in the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC); therefore the league, the OIC, and all Arab and Islamic countries, including their human rights institutions, must stand up to the Iranian strategy of demographic change in Syria in all international forums and tribunals.
- Action should be taken to stop various types of public and private real-estate theft that aims to create a demographic change in Syria.





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مركز الملك فيصل للبحوث والدراسات الإسلامية
King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies

P.O.Box 51049 Riyadh 11543 **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

Tel: (+966 11) 4652255 Ext: 6892 Fax: (+966 11) 4162281

E-mail: research@kfcris.com