‘Go to Damascus, my son’: Alawi demographic shifts under Ba’ath Party rule

Fabrice Balanche

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Over the course of the twentieth century, the Syrian Alawi community have experienced significant geographic and social shifts. Historically, many members of the community migrated from the marginalised Alawi stronghold in Syria’s largely agrarian coastal mountain region to the capital, Damascus, where they came to dominate the country’s ruling elite. While underdevelopment and demographic dynamism in the 1950s and 1960s arguably facilitated the community’s rise to power, demographic transition and social promotion have been significant factors in ultimately weakening Assad’s state. Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil uprising in the Spring of 2011, Bashar al Assad has struggled to restore hegemonic control over the state, even with the help of robust external allies. The increasingly apparent demographic inadequacy of his support base has seen Syria fragment along sectarian and territorial lines.

While Hafez al-Assad’s regime was nourished by the poverty of the Alawis, his son Bashar’s reign has been weakened by the community’s exclusive social promotion. Bashar al-Assad has, no doubt, succeeded in safeguarding his power thanks to the support of his Russian and Iranian allies, but at what cost to the Syrian State? The situation in Syria is very much linked to the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East, which remain indeterminate and unstable. Despite all the uncertainties, however, with the American-Iran rapprochement, Saudi Arabia and Iran’s bitter rivalry, and the future of Putin’s Russia, it is clear that communalism fuelled by regional interests will only further entrench itself in the region, provoking new territorial fragmentations, like those witnessed in contemporary Iraq. [1]

Syria’s shifting demographic realities are a key component to any comprehension of the present conflict or indeed envisaging what a future Syrian State could look like. Bashar al Assad’s regime and now the Alawi community itself are the victims of the success of Hafez al-Assad’s deliberate policy of factional favouritism. While the objective of this policy was to empower a previously marginalised community, and thus in the process create cadres

[1] Fabrice Balanche, “L’Etat au Proche-Orient arabe entre communautarisme, clientélisme, mondialisation et projet de Grand Moyen Orient”, *L'Espace Politique*, 11 (2010) http://espacepolitique.revues.org/index1619.html

of Alawi men and women both loyal to and reliant on the regime and its apparatus, in reality, it has only made the regime more fragile.

Assad's Alawi predicament lends itself to the political schema codified by Arab scholar Ibn Khaldoun in the Middle Ages, which Michel Seurat has so aptly drawn upon in his analyses of the Syrian regime.[2] According to Khaldoun's theory of *assabiyya*, a generation seizes power or '*mulk*', and constructs and institutionalises its rule. The generation that follows maintains and sustains power through living of its predecessor's legacy. Yet the third, and final generation in this cycle, corrupted by its privileges and weakened by its associated social promotion, loses power to the hands of a new *assabiyya* (or cohesive group) moving into the centre from the periphery, motivated to fight with all they have, to seize the *mulk*.

The once pervasive film of fear that covered Syria's population has been perforated and torn apart by a changing demographic reality; with vast numbers rising up against a ruling family supported by an ever-reduced minority.[3] The Syrian civil war has brought sharply into focus the pre-existing communal cleavages in the country, especially between the Sunni majority and Syria's religious minorities (Alawis, Druze, Christian, Isma'ili). During the first days of the uprising, the media's lenses were firmly fixed on the demonstrations in Deraa (a 99 percent Sunni city) and the periphery of Damascus.[4] Sunni[5] led demonstrations were being held throughout Syria, even in the traditionally Alawi provinces of Latakia and Tartus. At this early point, when the 'revolution' was embryonic, some Christians and Alawis joined the demonstrations. Their participation however, was not accepted by the entire Sunni community as evidenced by sectarian slogans against Syria's minority communities such as 'Send the Alawis to the grave and the Christians to Beirut!' It was not simply the Alawi community's privileged socio-economic position it stood to lose should Assad capitulate, more ominously, the threat of persecution by Sunni opposition

2 Michel Seurat, *l'Etat de Barbarie*. Paris: PUF, 2012.

3 According to my estimations, derived from Syrian Census data and the cartography of religious communities in Syria, the Syrian population in 2010 was divided proportionately into: Arab Sunnis (65percent), Kurds (15percent), Alawis (10percent), Druze (3percent), Ismai'lis (1percent), Twelver Shi'a (1percent) and Christians including the Armenians (5percent).

4 Fabrice Balanche, "Géographie de la révolte syrienne", *Outre Terre* 27 (Sep., 2011)

5 Demonstrations took place all over Syria, including in Salamyeh, an Isma'ili town and Sweida, the Druze city. These demonstrations were, however, small in size and had at their core real political (as opposed to communal) demands as a result of the strong presence of the leftist oppostion to the Assads' regime in these areas. Conversely, Alawi towns and quarters remained calm.

groups[6] fuelled Alawi fears of ethnic cleansing from the outset,[7] reinforcing Assad's support base in his core constituency. To understand the demographic challenges the regime faces in its struggle to maintain power in Syria, and just how much the Alawi community stands to lose if the insurrection is successful, it is important to examine the history of the Alawi community - from their persecution under Ottoman rule, territorial expansion during the French Mandate, and social promotion under the Ba'ath Party.

The 'Alawi State'

The Alawi community of Syria traditionally inhabited the country's western coastal region where it remained isolated until the Ottoman Empire collapsed (Fig.4.1). Ottoman rule prohibited what was viewed as a heterodox minority community from settling in strategic towns or urban centres. Institutionalised state persecution from the sixteenth century drove the Alawis to seek refuge in the mountains of Jebel Ansariya and its peripheral areas. At this time, the towns and villages that surrounded Jebel Ansariya were inhabited by Sunni Muslims, Orthodox Christians and Isma'ilis. The perfunctory road network which linked these areas however, with only one access route cutting through Jebel Ansariya to its centre, effectively isolated the Alawi from their neighbouring communities.[8] In the mid-nineteenth century, when internal strife and dwindling resources drove these minority communities from the mountains, many of them settled on the margins of eastern Homs and the Hama steppe[9] (Fig. 4.2). Many poorly uneducated Alawis worked as tenant farmers on the large estates of the Sunni and Christian elites in the plains surrounding Jebel Ansariya and in the valleys of the Orontes.

[Insert] Fig. 4.1 Distribution of Communities at the End of the Ottoman Empire

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6 Ayse Tekdal Fildis,"Roots of Alawite-Sunni Rivalry in Syria", *Middle East Policy*, vol. 19, no. 2 (Summer 2012), pp. 148–56.

7 Most of the civilian massacres have been limited to Sunni and Alawi-majority territories. In the Spring of 2012, in Sunni-majority Houla (108 killed) and Mazraa Qoubeyr (80 killed). Hala Kodmani, "Syrie : Nous, alaouites, allons être tués deux fois", Libération, 28 September 2012, http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2012/09/28/syrie-nous-alaouites-allons-etre-tues-deux-fois_849694; Georges Malbrunot Georges, "En Syrie, Homs au bord de la guerre civile", *Le Figaro*, 8 November 2011 http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2011/11/08/01003-20111108ARTFIG00640-en-syrie-homs-au-bord-de-la-guerre-civile.php ; "Houla: How a massacre unfolded", *BBC*, 8 June 2012, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18233934

8 Abdel Nour Antoine, 'Le réseau routier de la Syrie ottomane (XVI-XVIIIème)', *Arabica* XXX, 1983, pp. 169 – 189.

9 Still, to this day Alawis constitute a significant minority in this region, forming a quarter of the population of Homs in 2011, see Fabrice Balanche, "Géographie de la révolte syrienne".

[Insert] Fig. 4.2 Centres and Peripheral Zones at the End of the Ottoman Empire

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, France administered Syria under the mandate system before granting independence in 1946. In 1920, against the backdrop of growing Arab nationalist sentiment, which was increasingly articulated in explicitly Sunni-Muslim terms, continued conflict between the Alawi and Sunni communities compelled the French to create an Alawite State along Syria's western 'Alawi Coast'. Their aim was to shield the Alawi community from a Syria dominated by Arab nationalist Sunni Muslims and emancipate it from the tutelage of Sunni feudalism.

In theory, the geographic borders of the new Alawite State were drawn up to coincide with the demographic frontiers of the Alawi community. In practice however, this principle was not upheld. (Fig. 4.3) Rather, Sunni-majority territories including Baer and Bassit El Akkrad were integrated into the new state, while villages that were home to large Alawi land-owning families found themselves outside of these new borders. Moreover, despite great efforts by the French to develop an education system in the new Alawi state, to nurture an elite capable of leading a community described by Jacques Weulersse as 'forgotten by history'[10], and despite Alawis constituting the vast majority of its population, political and economic power remained concentrated in the hands of the urban Sunni and Christian elite. The results of the 1935 census indicate low levels of urbanisation among Alawi communities within the Alawi state's coastal region. While Alawis made up two-thirds of its inhabitants, they constituted only three percent of its urban population. French geographer, Weulersse noted that even within this state, Alawis were essentially absent from towns and urban centres altogether,[11] and by 1936, it was clear that the state-building project had failed and the Alawi statelet was reintegrated with the rest of Syria.

[Insert] Fig. 4.3 The Alawite State: 1920-1936

Over the next decade, the number of Alawis in the region's towns and urban centres grew significantly with around ten percent becoming urbanised (See Tables 1 & 2). According to the 1947 census, of the city of Latakia's 41,000 inhabitants, 63 percent were Sunni, 29 percent Christian and 8 percent Alawi.[12] At this time, over 80 percent of Syria's approximately 340,000 Alawis, which accounted for eleven percent of the population, were

[10] Jacques Weulersse, 'Ces attardés de l'Histoire', *Le pays des alaouites*, (Tours, 1940), p. 377

[11] Dreykish, to the south of the Alawiyin Mountains, was the most significant Alawi settlement with only two thousand inhabitants.

[12] 1947 census. Bureau Central of Statistics, Damascus.

concentrated in the coastal mountain region. This region, roughly equating to the boundaries of the governorates of Latakia and Tartus today, was the heartland of the Alawi community comprising a majority Alawi population (63.2 percent), a sizeable Sunni community (22.1 percent) and a smaller Christian community (13.6 percent).[13] Beyond the frontiers of this coastal region, the majority of Syria's Alawi population lived in a series of disconnected territories to the east of the Orontes including the towns of Mukharam al-Fuqani, Alyate, Jerbus, Sighuryn, and Abu Mendel.

Table 1: The Urban Population in the Syrian Coastal Region in 1935 by religious community

	Sunni		Christian		Alawi		Total
Town	Population	%	Population	%	Population	%	
Latakia	25 000	78.6	6 300	19.8	500	1.6	31 800
Jableh	6 073	96.9	81	1.3	116	1.9	6 270
Baniyas	1 671	77,5	350	16.2	136	6.3	2 157
Tartous	3 000	68.5	917	20.9	462	10.6	4 379
Arouad	3 300	99.8	6	0.2	0	0.0	3 306
Safita	40	1.3	2 716	89.5	280	9.2	3 036
Haffeh	911	70.8	360	28.0	15	1.2	1 286
Total	**40 955**	**77.6**	**10 293**	**19.5**	**1 509**	**2.9**	**52 757**

Source: Jacques Weulersse[14]

[13] 1.2 percent Isma'ili

[14] Jacques Weulersse, "Les Alaouites", *La France méditerranéenne et africaine* 2 (1938), p. 56.

Table 2: The Urban Population in the Syrian Coastal Region in 1947, by religious community

	Sunni		Christian		Alawi		Total
Town	Population	%	Population	%	Population	%	
Latakia	26 000	63.4	11 800	28.8	3 200	7.8	41 000
Haffeh	1 730	72.1	610	25.4	60	2.5	2 400
Jableh	8 020	90.1	240	7.2	640	2.7	8 900
Baniyas	2 650	67.9	950	24.4	300	7.7	3 900
Tartous	4 500	50.6	1 730	19.4	2 670	30	8 900
Safita	40	0.7	4 880	86.5	720	12.8	5 640
Arouad	5 060	99.2	40	0.8	0	0.0	5 100
Total	**48 000**	**63.3**	**20 250**	**26.7**	**7 590**	**10.0**	**75 840**

Source: Census 1947

[Insert] Fig. 4.4 Latakia Population Distribution by Religion

Although Alawi urbanisation was well underway by the end of the mid-twentieth century, levels of poverty and severe underdevelopment persisted. A description of Ramel Shmali, an informal Alawi quarter founded in the north of Latakia city, highlights the low socio-economic position of the community at that time:

> *No electricity, no water, no sewers, no municipal services, no medical care. Flies and gnats are as numerous as grains of sand....Most of the inhabitants of the quarter are workmen or other proletarians; some belong to the middle class of public servants or merchants; 35 percent of the inhabitants live in their own houses.*' [15]

For the poor and illiterate Alawi communities of Jebel Ansariya,[16] the French Army of the Levant, which commissioned between 10,000 and 12,000 troops drawn largely from Syria's religious minority communities, was the path of choice to social and professional advancement. That Alawis were over-represented in the French colonial army, and particularly in the *Troupes Spéciales du Levant* which formed the basis of the Syrian Army after independence in 1946, accounts in part for the disproportionately high number of Alawis officers in the Ba'ath Party's Military Committee after the coup d'état in the 1963.[17] When Hafez al-Assad came to power in 1970, the over-representation of Alawi officers in the intelligence bureau and key military units was institutionalised, and this further expedited Alawi urbanisation and the migration of large numbers of Alawis from Jebel Ansariya towards the surrounding plains and, eventually, Damascus.

Alawis descend the Mountain

In 1963, the new Ba'athist government initiated a series of agrarian reforms across Syria, such as the drainage of the swampy floodplains around the Orontes including, in 1968, the Ghab plain and the irrigation of the surrounding land.[18] While the most notable achievement of these reforms was the construction of the Tabqa Dam on the Euphrates, a large number of lesser-capacity dams were also built in the coastal region on the banks of the Orontes. The resulting agrarian transition from the cultivation of cereals to irrigated mixed farming created significant job opportunities in the sparsely inhabited plains. This development saw

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15 Munir Mushbek Mousa, "Etude sociologique des Alaouites ou Nusaïris", Masters diss., Paris-Sorbonne 1958, p. 784.

16 Jacques Weulersse, *Le pays des alaouites.*

17 Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

18 These had been initiated in 1958 with Agricultural Relations Law but were halted in 1961 for reasons including opposition from large landowners and crop failure due to drought between 1958 and 1961.

thousands of Alawi families move from the villages of Jebel Ansariya[19] to the surrounding low lying plains, and in the Ghab valley and Akkar plain. Agricultural colonies were established to accommodate this migration, significantly swelling the Alawi population, and transforming the periphery of Jebel Ansariya into an Alawi territory (see Figs. 4.5 and 4.6). The land reforms of the 1960s also included the seizure and redistribution of large agricultural domains, previously in the hands of the predominantly Sunni or Christian urban elite, to the Alawi population. The regime's aim was to secure the support of the Alawi community by offering it concrete opportunities for development and social promotion. Moreover, it complimented Hafez al-Assad's later strategy of undermining the Sunni Arab and Kurdish communities which inhabited these regions and which stood in opposition to his regime.

[Insert] Fig. 4.5 (formerly Fig.11) Demographic Growth in Latakia and Tartus by sub-District, 1970-1981

[Insert] Fig. 4.6 (Formerly Fig.12) Demographic Growth in Latakia and Tartus by sub-District, 1994-2004

After 1963, when the rural exodus brought large numbers from the Jebel's countryside to Latakia's urban centres, the government launched an extensive collective housing construction project, to cater for the influx of Alawi newcomers. Naturally, these initiatives were well-received by the coastal Alawi community, encouraging its urbanisation and facilitating its alliance with the ruling Ba'ath Party.[20] The migrant Alawis established quarters to the south and east of Homs, including Zahra, Karm El Loz, El Armen and Karm Zeitoun[21], and in the northern periphery of the towns and Alawi-majority villages of Latakia. These unprecedented Alawis numbers in the towns and urban centres dramatically altered the demographics of the coastal region, undermining the importance of the formally dominant Sunni and Orthodox Christian communities in favour of a more numerically significant and more densely concentrated Alawi community. New Alawi-majority areas like Besnada and Damsakho were subsequently integrated into the municipality of Latakia, extending its

19 Françoise et Jean Métral, 'Maitrise de l'eau et société dans la plaine du Ghab', *Revue de Géographie de Lyon* 3, 1979.

20 Fabrice Balanche, *La région alaouite et le pouvoir syrien*, (Paris : Karthala, 2006), p. 273.

21 These names have rural connotations; El Armen was initially a quarter populated by Armenian refugees with whom the Alawis share a long history of cohabitation.

boundaries and further diluting its Sunni population. By the 1980s, Alawis were the majority community in the coastal towns of Latakia, Jableh, Baniyas and Tartus and Syria's Mediterranean coast had effectively been transformed into Alawi territory, stretching east to west from the coast to the Ghab plain and north to south from the Turkish to the Lebanese border. Where Alawi villages were once enclaves within majority-Sunni areas, by the 1990s, and with the exception of Bassit, the opposite was the case: the villages of other communities found themselves enclaves within an expanding Alawi province.[22]

By 2010, Latakia's population had grown to over 400,000[23] of which approximately 50 percent were Alawis, 40 percent Sunni and 10 percent Christian. This demographic shift was also felt in Jableh and Baniyas and, similarly, in the coastal city of Tartus which experienced a ten-fold population increase between 1960 and 2010, from only 15,000 to nearly 150,000 inhabitants. Tartus has the highest percentage of Alawis of all Syrian cities, at 80 percent of the population, with the remainder split evenly between the Sunni and Christian communities. The city's promotion to the status of capital of the Tartus Governorate,[24] the construction in 1974 of Syria's second largest international port,[25] and the large scale investment in and development of the city's tourist sector, have made this small Alawi-majority town the second largest urban centre in the coastal region, creating thousands of jobs and giving it genuine political and economic importance.

Go to Damascus my son!

In the 1960s, as Alawis seeking employment in the expanding public sector flocked to the capital in their droves, Damascene Sunnis quipped: *Why is the back of an Alawi boy's heads flat? That is where their mothers slap them every morning and say: 'Go to Damascus my*

22 Alain Chouet, "L'espace tribal alaouite à l'épreuve du pouvoir", *Maghreb-Machrek* 147,(Jan.,-Mar., 1995), p.105. Alawis represent 70 percent of the population of Tartous, 55 percent of that of Latakia and 65 percent of those of Baniyas and Jableh. The mountain towns of Dreykish, Sheikh Bader and Qardaha are almost 100 percent Alawi; Safita is mixed Alawi and Christian, while Haffeh remains predominantly Sunni. In 1993, Haffeh was inhabited by 911 Sunni Muslims, 342 Christians and 15 Alawis. In 1994, according to the Town's civil register, there were 8,603 Muslims (including Sunnis and Alawis) and 1,002 Christians.

23 Projection based on the Censuses of 1981, 1994 and 2004, Fabrice Balanche

24 The Mohafaza is the most important administrative unit in the Syrian system. The Mohafaza is directed by a Mohafez (Governor), a high level civil servant, appointed by the President whom he represents in the Governorate. The Mohafez takes initiatives concerning the administration of the territory, and its economic development etc. at the same time being responsible for maintaining public order. In every Mohafaza, the state Ministries and government agencies have local departments and these create thousands of jobs and give the town a real political and economic importance.

25 Since its creation, the port of Tartus specialised in the transport of heavy goods (potash, iron, cement etc.) but quickly, its proximity to Damascus and Homs attracted container ships which previously had headed for Latakia. Latakia remains better equipped than Tartus for the transhipment of containers.

son!' In 1945, Damascus was home to no more than 4,200 Alawis.[26] In 1980, although the Alawi community represented just 15 percent of the Syrian population, the regime successfully expanded the Alawi's community's presence not just in the coastal region, but in large strategic urban centres such as Latakia, Homs and Damascus, from which the community had historically been absent through the installation of Alawi soldiers, civil servants, and their families.[27].

In the Syrian capital itself, the number of Alawis is now approaching half a million.[28] Hafez al-Assad reinforced his control of the capital by surrounding it with a ring of military installations where Alawis, as they were over-represented in the army, made up the majority of the population. He famously said: 'He who controls Damascus controls Syria'[29] This Alawi 'belt' around the city saw the emergence of informal Alawi-majority quarters such as Mezzeh. Informal military barracks were built nearby the presidential palace in the early 1980s and served as defensive urban agglomerations, acting to cement the state's control over the city and inscribe Assad's power on its urban topography. Not all Alawis who migrated to Damascus lived in this sort of military encampment; while Mezzeh and Abdalieh, which were constructed in the 1970s and 1980s, housed the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, Alawi regime loyalists also mixed with the ordinary Damascene population in the northern and western suburbs of Jdaydeh, Artuz, Jeramana and Sahnaya (see Fig. 4.13). In these towns, the Alawis were more accepted by the Druze and Christian communities[30] than they were in the more conservative Sunni suburban towns of Duma, Harasta or Daraya, which today form the strongholds of the Syrian opposition.

After the 1963 coup, the Alawi who held positions of responsibility in the administration routinely appointed their coreligionists from neighbouring villages to the Ministries and state agencies. Owing to chronically low levels of education on the Alawi coast, the state administration typically could only draw from a pool of recruits that held no more than a certificate of basic high school education. This created a schism between the Alawi at the top and the bottom of the state bureaucracy, as new recruits were mostly employed in low level

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26 After the transfer of the Sanjak of Alexandretta to Turkey in 1939, tens of thousands of people left the region to settle in Syria. The Alawi community of the Sanjak was much more urbanised than that in Syria. It comprise a significant intellectual elite, among them Wahib Ghanem and Zaki Harzouzi, two of the founders of the Ba'ath Party, who moved and settled in Aleppo and Damascus.

27 Estimate based upon the censuses of 1960, 1970 and 1981.Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus.

28 The Alawi population is more than 500,000 people according to the author's estimations.

29 This phrase, while never officially recorded, is attributed to Hafez al Assad and came up a lot in the author's interviews with Syrian army officers.

30 Author's interviews in the field for work on Damascus's urban agglomerations for GIZ 2003-2008

civil service and security posts. To consolidate his control over the state, Hafez al Assad recognised that he would require cadres of faithful and reliable Alawis across every stratum of the state apparatus. In order to ensure there was a steady flow of Alawis fit for this level of public service,[31] he extended state education provision to what were traditionally isolated and marginalised minority communities.

As Alawi recruits swelled the rank and file of the state apparatus, low-level posts became scarce and competition for employment in the public sector became fierce. Although a high school diploma or university degree become a prerequisite for entry, political connections were invaluable. Alawis, given their privileged position under the Ba'ath administration since the 1963 coup, had a clear advantage in this regard.[32] Today, the Alawi community is inextricably linked with the state apparatus. The 2004 census indicates that of those Alawis in employment, more than 80 percent worked in the military, state-led industry or the public sector.[33]

In 1981, 39.5 percent of the working population of Latakia was employed in the public sector with an upward trajectory in the early 1990s.[34] With large government recruitment drives largely targeting the Alawi community, and despite the fact that the Syrian economy was undergoing extensive liberalisation and privatisation, by 2006 it had risen to 56.6 percent.[35] That the principal beneficiaries of public sector growth were from the Alawi community can be explained by the Syrian regime's neo-patrimonial character. Both Assad regimes exploited state resources to reinforce Alawi solidarity, or *assabiyya*, by ensuring that public sector employment was concentrated in the hands of the Alawi community and the regime's supporters were rewarded for their commitment to the state. In the governorates of Latakia (54.6 percent) and Tartus (39.5 percent) the proportion of the working population employed in the civilian public sector is far greater than the national average (26.9 percent).[36] Compared with other communities they are vastly over-represented in this sector. Of the male

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31 Alasdair Drysdale, 'Center and Peripheries in Syria. A political geography study', p. 199.

32 Fabrice Balanche, *La région alaouite et le pouvoir syrien*, p. 164.

33 Fabrice Balanche, *La région alaouite et le pouvoir syrien*: 165 and Noujoud Allouch, 'La péri-urbanisation de Lattaquié' PhD diss., 2000, p. 239.

34 Noujoud Allouch, 'La péri-urbanisation de Lattaquié', p. 266.

35 According to several qualitative inquiries conducted between 2000 and 2013, I noticed a massive recruitment of Alawis in the public sector at Latakia. Those results have been confirmed by the thesis of Noujoud Allouch: he has figures on the distribution of the workforce (male and female working population) in the Alawi quarters of the Latakia periphery: 64.9percent in the public sector, 11.5percent in the non-agricultural private sector, 9percent in agriculture, 14.6percent without a job. Allouche Noujoud Allouch, "La péri-urbanisation de Lattaquié": 266.

36 Syrian Census 2004.

workforce in Latakia for example, 81 percent of Alawi, compared to 57 percent of Christian and 44 percent of Sunni work in the public sector.[37] This trend is replicated in Latakia female workforce with 35 percent of Alawi women working in the public sector, compared to 23 percent of Christian women and only 15 percent of Sunni women.

Consolidating power, declining demographics: higher education & lower birth rates

The rapid urban development and increased social mobility of Alawi communities under the Assad's (Hafez and Bashar) reign, has contributed to a better educated, wealthy, and politically influential class of Alawi citizens. Arguably, it has come at a high cost however, with the pauperisation and polarisation of Syria's rural Sunni populace and a dramatic decrease in Alawi birth rates and demographic figures. The link between higher education and lower fertility rates, while not an unusual global trend, is a worrying reality for a regime dependent on an minority Alawi core for security and military personnel.

In terms of educational progress, the Alawi population's access to education among was greatly improved by the establishment of primary and secondary schools in the coastal region.[38] In 1960, 60 percent of the population in Latakia aged fifteen and over were illiterate, and this corresponded with the national average at the time.[39] By 2004, in Latakia and Tartus, illiteracy had fallen to levels of 10.7 and 12.4 percent respectively,[40] which was lower than the national average of 17.5 percent. Furthermore, the gender gap in literacy rates within the Alawi community has entirely disappeared.

Encouraging members of the Alawi community to pursue higher education, Assad established a university in Latakia and enrolment figures grew. In 1981, the proportion of university degree holders in Latakia and Tartus was 1.8 and 2 percent respectively,[41] but by 2004 census this figure had trebled, and these cities ranked second and third on the national scale[42] at 6.3 percent and 5.9 percent respectively. The governorate of central Damascus was

37 Fabrice Balanche, *La région alaouite et le pouvoir syrien*, p. 165

38 A quarter of the secondary schools opened in Syria between 1963 and 1970 were in the coastal region see Alasdair Drysdale, 'Center and Peripheries in Syria. A political geography study', Phd diss., (University of Michigan, Chicago, 1997), p. 260.

39 Syrian Census 1960.

40 Syrian Census, 2004.

41 Syrian Census 1981 Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus.

42 Between 1981 and 2004 the national average doubled from 1.6 percent - 3.7 percent

the only province with a higher percentage of university degree holders at 8.9 percent.[43] This progression is due in part to high levels of gender equality in the Alawi region, which translated into better access to university education for women. The rate of enrolment in higher education is actually higher among Alawi women[44] than men[45] and women now constitute 40 percent of university graduates in the Alawi region compared to the national average of 30 percent.

Over the last twenty years, as more and more women took up educational opportunities, Alawi fertility rates have steadily declined and, within two generations, the average number of children per family dropped from eight to two.[46] There is a correlation between higher levels of education and lower birth rates; women seeking a career tend to put off getting married until they have finished their studies, most commonly after the age of twenty-five. The fertility rates in the Alawi provinces of Latakia and Tartus are much lower than those in the Sunni-dominated interior. In less than fifty years, the Alawis had come out of the second phase of their demographic transition - the first phase corresponding to the fall in mortality rates in addition to a sustained high birth rate. Alawi birth rates collapsed due to the success of the politics of development rolled out across the Alawi community which was disproportionately favoured under Hafez al-Assad's regime. A second contributing factor lies with Alawi religious philosophy and the more secular liberal culture of non-initiated Alawis, rendering them more receptive to progress and change. Alawi women are subject to less social barriers and religious constraints than their more conservative Sunni counterparts, allowing them to pursue education and employment opportunities, thus reducing Alawi birth rates.

Charting Syrian demographic growth during 1970-81 (the period in which Assad's development policies were most effective) tells a different story from the 1994-2004 period, when these policies were all but abandoned and the Alawi community had achieved its demographic transition. In the 1970s, the Alawi region had a demographic growth rate comparable to the national average, but by the 1990s, Alawi growth had all but collapsed, mirroring the pattern in other minority-majority regions such as Sweida (Druze), Shahba, Salkhad, Salamyeh and Mukharam al Fuqani.

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43 Syrian census 2004, Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus.

44 Fabrice Balanche, *Atlas du Proche-Orient Arabe*, (Paris: PUPS, 2011): 56.

45 Of the student body at the University of Latakia in 2009, 54.3 percent were women compared with a national average of 51percent. See Statistical Yearbook 2010, Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus 2011.

46 Youssef Courbage and Todd Emmanuel, *Le rendez-vous des civilistions*, (Seuil, 2007), p. 56.

[Insert] Fig. 4.7 (formerly Fig.9) Demographic Growth in Syria by District, 1970-1981

[Insert] Fig. 4.8 (formerly Fig.10) Demographic Growth in Syria by District, 1994-2004

Results from the last census period (1994-2004) highlight the significant increase in the difference in demographic growth rates in the Sunni and Alawi territories.[47] In Sunni-majority districts from Hama to Abu Kemal and the Hauran, demographic growth exceeded 3 percent a year while growth in the Alawi districts of the coastal region, for example in Tel Kalagh and Masyaf, was less than 2 percent annually. That region still enjoys a positive net migration rate (for reasons which will be elaborated below); its lower rate of demographic growth can be attributed to lower Alawi birth rate than in Sunni-majority regions, where net migration levels are negative. At the provincial level, the ageing populations of Latakia and Tartus's mountain districts have experienced the most significant reduction in demographic growth levels since, from the 1960s, the young adults of Jebel were drawn en masse by greater employment opportunities to the neighbouring coastal towns and to the Syrian capital. The coastal districts, on the other hand, have been able to maintain a demographic growth rate of between 2 and 3 percent thanks to the dense concentration of the labour force there.

Demographic trends in the Baniyas district of the governorate of Tartus are particularly interesting. Under the French Mandate, like many other coastal towns, Baniyas had a Sunni majority of 77.5 percent, a Christian community of 16.2 percent and a small Alawi population of 6.3 percent. [48] By 1990, these demographics had been reversed, with the Alawi population of Baniyas estimated at 65 percent.[49] There are two reasons for this: the migration of rural Alawi populations to districts like Baniyas (attracted by the large-scale industrial development of the city) and the 'packing' of the Alawi population in the district, through the administrative integration of the Alawi villages in the city's northern periphery which were previously on the municipality's outskirts, into the municipality itself.

47 But also the Druze and Christian.

48 In 1935, the population Baniyas was 2157 (1671 Sunni, 350 Christian et 136 Alawi), Jacques Weulersse, 'Les Alaouites', p. 56.

49 Although this figure has no doubt been exaggerated to bolster the significance of the community in the city, Alawis can nevertheless be said to have come to constitute the majority community see Alain Chouet, 'L'espace tribal alaouite à l'épreuve du pouvoir', *Maghreb-Machrek* 147, (Jan., - Mar., 1995) , p.105.

[Insert] Fig. 4.9 (formerly Fig.11) Demographic Growth in Latakia and Tartus by Sub-District, 1970-1981

[Insert] Fig. 4.10 (formerly Fig.12) Demographic Growth in Latakia and Tartus by Sub-District, 1994-2004

[Insert] Fig. 4.11 (formerly Fig.13) Religious Distribution of Population in the Baniyas District

Since 1990 however, Baniyas has been steadily losing its capacity to attract Alawi migrants, owing to the lack of new industrial projects and to the amelioration of infrastructural and communications networks that facilitated commuting from the rural villages to the urban centre. Between 1994 and 2004, despite its negative net migration, the city of Baniyas experienced significant demographic growth which seems to indicate an elevated birth rate. Alawi birth rates in this district remain low however, at 1.6 percent per year,[50] and they are even lower in the Alawi-majority villages bordering Baniyas which include Talyn and Anazeh, at 1.3 percent and 1.2 percent respectively. Thus, in the absence of Alawi migration to the district, and in light of the lower birth rates among Alawi communities, a higher growth rate in the Sunni community is the driver for significant demographic growth in this district. [51] Emboldened by this upward trajectory and the fact that its demographic growth far outstrips that of the Alawi community, Sunnis began to confront the state over institutionalised state prejudice which has seen its districts deliberately deprived of the public services and economic opportunities provided for the Alawi district. The revolt in the spring of 2011 in the Sunni quarters and villages of Baniyas, including Al Bayda[52] led to violent confrontations between members of the Sunni and Alawi communities. The Alawis were accused of monopolising jobs in the public sector, particularly in the oil refinery in the north of the city and the city's electric power station. This is just one example of the Sunni community, increasingly aware of its growing numerical significance in the country, opposing the region's local political system and contesting the state-sponsored fallacy of an Alawi-majority status quo.

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50 Censuses of 1994 and 2004, Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus.

51 Interview in Baniyas in 2009 for work on a project for the protection of the environment, GIZ and the Syrian Ministry for the Environment

52 http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/05/07/uk-syria idUKTRE74222020110507http://www.romandie.com/news/n/_Syrie_combats_inedits_en_pays_alalouite_sept_soldats_tues42020520131758.asp?n=_Syrie_combats_inedits_en_pays_alalouite_sept_soldats_tues42020520131758.asp

Although the rate of growth in Kurdish-majority provinces has been as weak as that of the Alawi population, this has much to do with the severe underdevelopment of the region which resulted in the migration of significant numbers from the north-eastern region, Afryn, Ayn El Arab, Hassakeh, Malkyeh, Qameshlyeh to Aleppo and Damascus. Similarly impoverished and underdeveloped Sunni-majority territories, such as the high plateaus of Qalamoun, however, although witnessing an equally strong trend of people moving to Damascus, have maintained high birth rates. Consequently, the growth rate in the Sunni plains south of Damascus, and across the vast Sunni crescent that stretches from the Syrian-Iraqi border to the foothills of Jebel Ansariya via Deir Ez Zor, Raqqa, Idlib and Aleppo, has not fallen below 3 percent a year. It is no coincidence that these zones are where the insurrection has been most firmly rooted.

[Insert] Fig. 4.12 (formerly Fig.14) Communal Distribution in Syria

Insurrection and Counterinsurgency

[Insert] Fig. 4.13 (formerly Fig.15) Military situation in Syria, July 2014

The Syrian uprising, initially a civil populist protest movement has quickly morphed into an insurgency led by armed Sunni militias. The first wave of violent conflict in the Alawi region, during the spring of 2011, saw hundreds of arrests and tens of deaths,[53] and according to Human Rights Watch, in May 2013, after battles between insurgents and the army, more than 248 people died and thousands from the Sunni districts of the coastal region were forced to flee.[54] There were also significant massacres of Alawi civilian populations in Aramo[55] and Maan.[56] In response, the Alawi regime-loyalists, highly conscious of the fact that a successful Sunni uprising would threaten their very existence in Syria, have fought back with particular brutality.

Despite this brutal repression in the Sunni majority areas, and strategies verging on ethnic cleansing in the Alawi region, the combination of an ageing Alawi population, low birth rates and mass emigration has meant that the principal source of demographic support and military personnel, so critical for the regime's consolidation of power, is drying up. Conversely the demographic importance of Syria's Sunni-majority regions, potentially hostile

53 Author's interview, April-May 2011, Syria
54 http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/13/syria-mass-executions-government-forces
55 A mixed Alawi-Armenian village in Jebel Ansariya where 150 were killed by rebels in August 2013.
56 An Alawi village near Homs where 50 were killed by rebels in January 2014.

to the regime, continues to grow both in the coastal region and on the broader national scale. The fundamental issue at stake remains the integrity and loyalty of the Syrian Arab Army. Does Bashar al-Assad have sufficient support or coercive capacity to compel Sunni troops compliance? Perhaps equally important, does he have sufficient Alawi soldiers to continue his counter-insurgency? The answer to both questions, are tellingly revealed in the fact that Sunni majority military units have not been utilised in major regime offensives and increasingly Assad has been relying on the external fighters of Lebanese Hizbullah, in co-ordination with Iranian intelligence and Iraqi Shi'i militias.

Members of the Sunni community in Syria have always been found at the heart of the armed forces, right from its inception. Sunni recruits however, drawn from the poor rural regions, comparable to Jebel Ansariya like the Hauran and the regions surrounding Homs and the Euphrates, had fewer opportunities for professional promotion in the armoured units, the air force and the elite units of the Syrian Army (like the infamous fourth division), which remain under the tight control of Alawi commanders who traditionally favoured the recruitment of Alawi personnel.[57] Mustapha Tlass[58], who served at Hafez al-Assad's Minister of Defence between 1972 and 2004, is an example of a senior military officer from the Sunni community whose appointment benefited his Sunni supporters. However, since the beginning of the current crisis, when several high profile Sunni officers (among them prominent Lieutenant, Abderrazzak Tlass[59], nephew of Mustapha Tlass, who went on to found and command the Al Farouk Brigade which took Bab Amer in Homs for the rebels in the winter of 2011-12) deserted to join the Free Syrian Army, the need for a strong and faithful Alawi component capable of defending the regime has been brought sharply into focus.

When the Syrian Army's 'golden boy' General Manaf Tlass, Mustapha Tlass's son proved incapable of quelling the opposition in his ancestral town of Rastan, allowing the town to become a stronghold of the opposition and subsequently fleeing to France via Turkey in July 2012,[60] it became clear that the Sunni units were simply not reliable enough to carry out an offensive against the rebels. Although conscious that its reservoir of Alawi recruits

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57 Maher al-Assad, youngest brother of Bashar al-Assad and his eventual successor in the case of the former's premature death

58 Mustapha Tlass left Syria in 2011

59 http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2012/03/01/le-lieutenant-tlass-figure-de-la-resistance-armee-de-baba-amro_1650436_3210.html

60 http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/former-golden-boy-manaf-tlass-emerges-as-contender-to-lead-syria-7979680.html

was draining, doubting their reliability and commitment, the regime was forced to leave regiments with a Sunni majority in their barracks. Consequently, it was slow to counter the insurrection and experienced great difficulty in regaining territory in the face of the fierce resistance of the opposition in the Sunni Arab territories.

Since the spring of 2012, in an effort to redress the communal imbalance in the security forces and to compensate for the significant losses suffered by the army, the regime conscripted Alawis in the coastal region, calling on almost all men between the ages of 20 and 40 to serve and fight. While Sunni men from this region have also been called to serve, the majority refused to join up and sought refuge in Turkey or, in some cases, joined the opposition fled in the mountains north east of Latakia (Jebel Akrad and Jebel Turkmen). Unsurprisingly, the Alawi community was more receptive to Assad's call to arms as many considered military service a defensive duty undertaken to ensure the survival of their community. Fear that Damascus might fall to the opposition and expose the Alawi community to Sunni vengeance for the 'privileged position' it held under the Assads was a strong motivating for potential recruits.

The regime has also called up Christian and Druze reservists but with less success. While these communities do not have the same vested economic interests in sustaining Syria's current status quo, as religious minorities who enjoyed protection to a greater extent under the Assads, they tend to share the Alawi community's fear of the majority Sunni population coming to power. However, fearing being sent to the front line to fight in Aleppo or the contested Qalamun Mountains, many Druze and Christians refuse to join the regular armed forces, preferring to join the ranks of the National Defence (*Difaa al-Watani*), a militia organised by the regime with logistic help from Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah. Its job is to maintain government control over territories which have not yet fallen into opposition hands. Mobilising the civilian population behind the regime has a dual advantage, of getting locals to protect their own villages and freeing up the army to fight elsewhere. Since the seizure of Raqaa in January 2013, the regime has begun to re-conquer territories that had previously fallen into rebel hands, compensating for the lack of loyal troops with technical superiority and external support from Hezbollah[61], a number of Iranian[62] and Iraqi soldiers[63] and even some Kurds of the PYD.[64]

[61] Hezbollah was forced to intervene in Syria its own troops and ultimately on the order of Tehran which could not bring itself to see Bashar al-Assad's regime fall since it was the lynch pin of the pro-Iranian

[Insert] Fig. 4.14 (Formerly Fig.5) The Military Situation in Damascus, July 2014

Back to the Future: Reviving an Alawi enclave

As previously mentioned, the Alawi coastal region currently enjoys a positive net migration. Due to employment opportunities in the army and the public sector, the majority of internal migration to the capital came from the Alawi-majority governorates of Latakia and Tartus up until the late 1980s. By the early 1990s however, the situation had radically changed. The extensive development of the Alawi region though rigorous agrarian reforms, disproportionately high state investment and a thriving public industrial sector,[65] meant that the Alawi community had less incentive to migrate for Damascus. These economic factors alone, do not account however, for the large number of Alawis who were born in Damascus and who now choose to return to the villages of their parents' birth. This trend is indicative of the community's sense of insecurity and the failed cultural integration of the Alawi community in the Syrian capital.

This is not the first time in contemporary Syrian history that the Alawi have retreated to the coastal region out of fear of persecution. The early 1980s also saw a large wave of Alawi migration from Syria's second city, Aleppo as a result of the Muslim Brotherhood's

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axis between Iran and the Mediterranean. Attacks by rebel forces against Shi'a villages in Homs triggered solidarity between the Shia on the other side of the border and their Syrian brothers. The threats against the Shia shrine of Sayyida Zeinab were another pretext for intervention for Hezbollah. The fear of being the next target should Bashar al-Assad fall was another argument put forward by Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary General of the Party. Retaking the town of Qusayr, Hezbollah proved that it had a determining role in Syria, present at every major offensive from the Jordanian border to Aleppo.

62 Iran has provided over 3 billion dollars to Assad's regime, money that they have no guarantee they will ever recover. Furthermore, Tehran sent over 30 000 tons of food and supplies to help the Syrian population suffering from the food crisis http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/1.584566. The credit line provided by the Iranian government allowed Assad's regime to have access to oil and to increase the value of the Syrian currency. Furthermore, through Hezbollah, Iran has been giving an essential military support to Assad. The Iranian republic has also sent their own military chiefs to train Syrian militias. The Iranian government is providing intelligence and training (http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/1.575593) to the regime troops and a rising number of Iranians have allegedly crossed the Syrian border to engage in the conflict. Furthermore, Iran's elite faction of their own Revolutionary Guard is in charge of the Syrian affair, under the command of the powerful Qassem Souleimani http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/09/30/130930fa_fact_filkins?currentPage=all

63 Iraqi Shi'ites flock to Assad's side as sectarian split widens, http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/19/us-iraq-syria- militants-idUSBRE95I0ZA20130619

64 The Syrian branch of the PKK which, having entered into a strategic alliance with the regime,was promised the Kurdish territories in the north of Syria in exchange for its support against the rebels.

65 Although it contained approximately ten percent of the Syrian population, the Alawi region accounted for more than twenty percent of the jobs in the public industrial sector

uprising during which Alawis were targeted.[66] Many Alawi migrants sought refuge in the Daatur Basnada quarter of Latakia, which was specifically built for the community.

Since the onset of the conflict in 2011, Jebel Ansariya and the coastal region once again has become a mountain refuge for tens of thousands of Alawi families[67] from all over Syria. Leaving the country's large urban centres and installing themselves in the small towns of the Jebel and the coastal region including Safita, Qardaha, Dreykish Skeykh Bader and Qadmus. Alawis are not however, the only community seeking to flee the conflict, to have sought refuge in the coastal region. The "Alawi" governorates of Latakia and Tartus currently harbour almost a million internally displaced people, including Sunnis who fled Aleppo and Homs. Yet for Alawi displaced or returnees, the coastal region is becoming the only permanent sanctuary for the community in Syria. As one Alawi refugee explains,

> *I was born in Aleppo in 1950, my parents were from Antioch. Before the onset of this crisis, I never felt myself to be Alawi, even at the time of the Muslim Brotherhood revolt in the early 1980s. Since 2011, however, we have felt the hatred directed at us. In September 2012, I left Aleppo with my whole family when one of my cousins was assassinated in the street. We came to Tartus and we will stay here, I don't think we can ever return to live in Aleppo.*[68]

[Insert] Fig.4.15 (Formerly Fig.6) Internal Migration Balance by Province 1990-1994

[Insert] Fig. 4.16 (Formerly Fig.7) Internal Migrations in Syria since 1990

A Neo-Khaldunian Conclusion?

Hafez al Assad's targeted development policies accelerated the demographic transition of the Alawi community in Syria. Urbanisation, education, low fertility rates and the subsequent Alawi retreat from these urban centres to the Alawi coast were all by-products of Hafez al-

66 On 16 June 1979, a group of the Muslim Brotherhood stormed the Artillery School in Aleppo, singled out the Alawi cadets and massacred them, killing 83 young Alawi military cadets.

67 Seeking to escape the conflict, the Alawis are not the only community to have sought refuge in the coastal region. The "Alawi" governorates of Latakia and Tartus currently harbour almost a million internally displaced people, including Sunnis who fled Aleppo and Homs.

68 Interview by the author, October 2013 in Tartus.

Assad's efforts to secure Alawi support for the regime. Ironically these factors serve to weaken Bashar al-Assad's own chances of survival in the current struggle for Syria.

We find ourselves back to the Neo-Khaldunian schema evoked in the introduction. In less than half a century, the Alawi community saw extraordinary promotion: the landless, illiterate peasants had become officers in the army, engineers, professors, doctors and lawyers. The majority of Alawis came to reside in towns and their villages quickly became vast peri-urban suburbs. The Alawis benefited more than any other community in the country from the politics of development, because of the clientelism that holds the Syrian regime together, but also because they knew how to seize the opportunities that were presented to them. Alawi religious philosophy encouraged an open-mindedness favourable to innovation, of which female emancipation is a prime example. The Ba'athist regime undeniably modernised Syria, even if the system seized up in the 1990s. It is possible to identity those less developed zones and populations by charting the birth rate: Deraa, the Sunni rural plains of Homs and Hama and the North of Syria, precisely the zones of the current opposition strongholds.

The large number of Syrian unemployed youth, many of which do not even possess a limited level of education, remains a critical component of Syrian opposition discourse. Islamist groupings such as Ahrar Es-Sham, Jubhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State - have prospered among a frustrated population which wants to take revenge on the 'Alawi' state. These new 'wretched of the earth' have nothing to lose and everything to gain, they only need a mobilising ideology to bring them together and give them a framework from which to change and win the '*mulk*'. Bashar al-Assad's regime continues to resist, with the support of key international players and the military technology which allows it to compensate for its inferior numbers. Different from Ibn Khaldun's age, the numerical parameter is no longer as significant today, nevertheless, it should not be excluded from our analysis. Similar to the fourteenth century, when Ibn Khaldun was writing his treatise of political science, ethnic purging remains an effective weapon of war. In Syria it is being utilised to reduce the insurrection and to re-establish a certain demographic equilibrium between non-Sunni communities and their Sunni counter-parts.[69]

[69] The displacement and expulsion of millions of Sunni Syrian refugees to Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Kurdish Iraq is a crucial weapon of war. For the regime they may pose a threat as refugee combatants or provide insurgency bases across the border, yet such mass movements are difficult to reverse (or indeed repatriate) creating lasting demographic shifts which strengthen the regime's position. This

Unsurprisingly, the civil war, high casualty rates, the large-scale displacement of peoples, and severe economic restrictions, led to a significant reduction in the birth-rate in every Syrian community. The situation is all the more critical for the Alawi community which has suffered approximately 60,000 military losses.[70] There will be no swift demographic recovery and the losses linked to the war, whether directly or indirectly, will not be compensated for by a rise in the birth rate after the end of the conflict. Today, the Alawi community forms approximately 10 percent of the Syrian population[71] and the regime is acutely aware that its political survival depends on Alawi cohesion and loyalty.

The key question remains whether Bashar al Assad will be able to re-establish and maintain stability while his principal political base continues to decline demographically. While promoting Alawis within the system led to the development of the community as a whole, Bashar al-Assad's regime and the Alawi community itself have become victims of their own accomplishments. The success of his father's policy of promoting Alawi to positions of responsibility throughout the state led, what was previously a marginalised minority community from underdevelopment and poverty to the seat of power. During Bashar al-Assad's tenure however, this has made the regime more fragile and the current imbalance leaves the regime's long-term viability so precariously balanced on the support of so few.

broader strategy is being replicated in forced displacement and urban destruction of entire Sunni neighbourhoods and quarters of Damascus and Homs. For more details see http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/30syria-thousands-houses-unlawfully-razed

70 April 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/01/us-syria-crisis-toll-idUSBREA300YX20140401

71 Other minorities traditionally and broadly loyal to the regime including the Druze, Christians, Isma'ilis and Shia are also experiencing a similar demographic weakening and now, the combination of all minority confessions corresponds to no more than 20 percent of the current population, compared to around 30 percent in the early 1980s.