



Syria — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[officially known as the Syrian Arab Republic]

08/24/1516 Start Part of Other Country [of Ottoman Empire]: Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire from the ‘Battle of Marj Dābiq’ on 08/24/1516 to 1918, with the exception of the period from 1831 to 1841, when it was occupied by Egyptian forces. 209F¹ The Ottoman Empire, governed by an absolute and autocratic monarchy, granted the sultan unrestricted power. For administrative purposes, Syria was divided into several districts under Ottoman rule. Following the McMahon-Hussein correspondence, the British promised the Arabs an independent state, and, in return, the leaders of the Arab revolt joined the Allies in the First World War to capture Great Syria from the Ottoman Turks from 1917 to 1918 (Zeine 1977, Thompson 2020). However, from 05/09-16/1916, the United Kingdom and France, with an assent from the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Italy, secretly adopted the so-called Sykes-Picot Agreement to establish their respective spheres of influence and territorial divisions in the event of the Ottoman Empire’s defeat (Douwes 2000, Pipes 1990). LIED and V-Dem do not provide data for Syria before 1917.

10/23/1917 End Part of Other Country [of Ottoman Empire, Autocratic Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, Electoral Oligarchy and France, Electoral Democracy, later only France]: On this date, the British military declared the “Occupied Enemy Territory Administration” (OETA), a joint British, French, and Arab military administration. When Syria and Lebanon were occupied by the Allied armies, they were not independent countries, but part of the Ottoman Empire, therefore, they were technically “occupied enemy territory” pending the signing of the peace agreement with Turkey (Zeine 1977:40). As the struggle for independence intensified, Governor Ali Rida al-Rikabi called for an election based on Ottoman electoral law but skipped the first stage of the election process to save time. While electors in the East Zone publicly cast their votes, France, and Britain blocked elections in the Western (Lebanon) and Southern (Palestine) zones and claimed that the Congress was not legitimately elected. Nevertheless, secret meetings were held in the French and British zones to choose representatives for the Congress. The conservative faction won fourteen out of sixteen seats allocated for Damascus. The General Syrian Congress convened on 06/07/1919, serving as a temporary advisory body rather than a formal parliament (Thompson 2020). The administrations were gradually dissolved between 1919 and 1920, following the withdrawal of British forces. Turkish rule ended in Syria on 09/30/1918 (Zeine 1977, Pipes 1990).

11/26/1919 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, Electoral Oligarchy and France, Electoral Democracy]/Start Autocratic Monarchy: On this date, Britain withdrew its forces from Syria and was replaced by French forces (Pipes 1990). Widespread protests across Syria followed, and the Syrian Congress declared unilateral independence as Kingdom of Syria without Allied consent based on the League of Nations’ principle of self-determination (Thompson 2020). According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held in 1918. In contrast, multiparty legislative elections were held in 1919. No executive elections were present. In this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem’s PCLI indicates according to our interpretation an ambiguous state of political liberties. In 1918, V-Dem’s JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. In 1919, V-Dem’s JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while

V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

03/08/1920 End Autocratic Monarchy/Start Constitutional Monarchy: On this date, the Syrian Arab Kingdom declared independence and the Congress elected Faisal king, who appointed al-Rikabi prime minister. For our classification of regime change events we adopt the Syrian perspective and code this case as a strategic liberal restructuring, taking into account the efforts to build a sovereign state. On 07/05/1920, the Congress presented a draft constitution outlining a civil, parliamentary form of government. The committee designated Faisal as king with limited constitutional authority and established a decentralized federal government structure, including provincial assemblies with local governance. The draft constitution also guaranteed equal rights and citizenship for all residents of Syria but did not grant women the right to vote. Within a week, Congress formally ratified the first six articles, establishing a civil, representative monarchy and delineating the king's powers bound by the constitution and divine laws (not Islamic laws as in the Ottoman constitution) (Thompson 2020). Syria's declaration of independence was denounced as a coup d'état by France.^{210F²} LIED and V-Dem do not provide any data for this specified period.

07/25/1920 End Constitutional Monarchy/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Electoral Democracy]: On 07/18/1920, French General Henri Gouraud issued an ultimatum to Faisal, threatening an invasion, unless Faisal accepted the French mandate. While Faisal accepted the conditions, the minister of war, Yusuf al-Azma rejected the ultimatum, leading to the France-Syrian war, won after one day by French forces. The French installed a pro-French civil administration in Syria on 07/25/1920, bringing an end to the short-lived kingdom and dissolving its institutions.^{211F³} We code this a colonization in our regime change events system. However, it is a borderline case, considering the framing as a League of Nations mandate. We focus on the French military conquest and the dissolving of the national institutions. After the San Remo Conference held from 05/19-26/1920, the northern half of the Ottoman province of Syria (Syria and Lebanon) was mandated to France, and the Southern half (Palestine) to the United Kingdom (Pipes 1990). On 06/28/1922, France established the Syrian Federation (Fédération syrienne), comprising the states of Damascus, Aleppo, and the Alawite state. Subhi Bey Barakat, supported by France, was elected president on 12/17/1923 by the Federal Council. The Syrian Federation was dissolved on 12/05/1924, merging the states of Aleppo and Damascus into the state of Syria with Barakat as president.^{212F⁴} On 09/29/1923, France was assigned the League of Nations mandate of Syria, including present-day Lebanon and Alexandretta in addition to modern Syria.^{213F⁵} Under the French mandate (from 09/29/1923), Syrien was governed through a direct colonial administrative structure in which all real power was concentrated in the hands of the French High Commissioner. Although the mandate framework nominally envisioned gradual self-rule, the political system was designed to maintain French control. The High Commissioner, appointed by Frankreich, held overriding executive and legislative authority, including the power to issue decrees, dissolve local assemblies, and veto laws. Local representative councils existed but were weak consultative bodies with no sovereign powers. France deliberately fragmented the territory into multiple statelets (Damascus, Aleppo, Alawite State, Jabal Druze, etc.) to limit nationalist coordination. Suffrage was narrow and legislative elections were tightly controlled; there were no executive elections, and political liberties were severely restricted. Judicial and legislative checks on the High Commissioner were minimal. In practice, the mandate functioned as a centralized colonial regime, with Paris making key decisions and local institutions serving a subordinate, administrative role. According to LIED, only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period. No executive elections were present and there was no universal male suffrage. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and not really present according to our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI. Since 1922 V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited.

04/01/1928 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Electoral Democracy as International Mandate]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Electoral Democracy as International Mandate]: After the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927, elections were held in April 1928 for a constituent assembly. In 1928, male suffrage was introduced (LIED). The assembly convened for the first time in July 1928 and

formulated a draft constitution. However, France rejected the draft, stating that it undermined their special status as the mandatory power in Syria. France eventually ratified the constitution with alterations in 1930 (Schumann 2008). On 05/22/1930, the French High Commissioner promulgated the new Syrian Constitution, including universal male suffrage, and declared the Republic of Syria.^{214F⁶} However, no regime change is coded because the constitutional reforms did not entail a real transfer of power. Although a parliament and universal male suffrage were introduced, the French High Commissioner retained overriding executive and legislative authority, could dissolve parliament, and veto or replace any law by decree. Core areas such as security, foreign affairs, finance, and justice remained fully under French control. Local institutions lacked meaningful autonomy, making this an instance of continued direct colonial rule with only symbolic institutional reforms. LIED confirms the presence of multiparty and legislative elections during this time. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and not really present according to our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited.

06/25/1940 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Electoral Democracy as International Mandate]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Vichy, Right-Wing (Corporatist) Regime]: Following Germany's conquest of France in June 1940, the Mandate for Syria and Lebanon came under the control of Vichy France. During the period of Vichy France's control over the French Mandate for Syria, there was no functioning Syrian parliament, and local participation in governance was severely limited. Although Vichy authorities allowed the existence of nominal local administrations, these were fully subordinated to the French High Commissioner, who held ultimate authority. The Syrian parliament had already been dissolved in 1939 after France ceded the Sanjak of Alexandretta to Turkey. Under Vichy rule, it was not reconstituted, and nationalist leaders were marginalized, surveilled, or exiled. The regime suppressed political activity and maintained authoritarian control through French officials, particularly under High Commissioner Henri Dentz. With the shift of authority after the June 1940 armistice, control in Syria tightened significantly as Vichy France imposed the authoritarian structures of the motherland on the mandate. Opposition and anti-colonial movements were repressed more harshly, with contacts to Allied or nationalist circles increasingly criminalized. Censorship and propaganda were intensified, as Vichy installed stricter controls over the press, radio, and public communication. Military oversight also increased, given Syria's strategic position in the Mediterranean–Iraq–Palestine triangle, leading to heightened surveillance and occasional arbitrary arrests. The transition from the Third Republic to Vichy thus brought no liberalization but rather a marked intensification of repression. The room for maneuver of local elites narrowed, political opposition was suppressed more severely, and the administration was bound more tightly to authoritarian loyalty.

06/21/1941 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Vichy, Right-Wing (Corporatist) Regime]/Start Indirect Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy and France, Direct Rule Occupation Regime]: On 06/08/1941, British and Free French forces invaded Vichy France-held Syria and captured Damascus on 06/21/1941. A ceasefire went into effect on 07/12/1941, leading to the signing of the armistice between Vichy and Allied representatives on 07/14/1941 (Sutton 2022).^{215F⁷} General Catroux assumed the position of Free French governor and commander-in-chief of the Levant.^{216F⁸} On 09/27/1941, Catroux issued a declaration of Syrian independence, but it stated that France would retain control of the armed force and police, public services, and the economy. As the constitution was still suspended, he appointed a compliant non-nationalist as president. On 03/25/1942, Catroux restored the constitution of the Republic of Syria and a newly elected chamber of deputies convened and elected Shukri al-Quwatli as president on 08/17/1943 (McHugo 2015). On 12/27/1943, an agreement was signed between representatives of the French National Committee of Liberation and of Syria, by which most of the powers and capacities exercised hitherto by France under mandate were transferred as from 01/01/1944 to the Syrian government. However, from 05/29-31/1945, in a final attempt to maintain their control, France shelled the Syrian parliament and attempted to arrest Syrian government leaders. As a result, British garrisons assumed control

and the French started withdrawing their forces from Syria (McHugo 2015). On 08/01/1945, the French government agreed to transfer the command of the Syrian military to the Republic of Syria.^{217F} LIED lists elections and male suffrage as present during this period. According to LIED, only multiparty legislative elections were held until 1943 and no executive elections were present. In 1944 and 1945, multiparty executive and legislative elections were conducted. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. For the years 1941 to 1945, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are not really present. V-Dem's PCLI for 1946 is classified by us as an indication of an ambiguous status of political liberties. Until 1944, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. From 1945 onwards, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

04/17/1946 End Indirect Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy and France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Autocracy [as independent country]: On this date, the remaining French and British forces withdrew, and Syria gained complete independence under the leadership of President Shukri al-Quwatli of the National Party (McHugo 2015). We code this as a negotiated transition in our regime change events classification system, because the occupation forces only withdrew after long negotiations in the UN Security Council.¹⁰ The Republic of Syria maintained a unicameral parliamentary system with a strong prime minister and a president elected by the parliament. However, the electoral system favored the stronghold of the traditional oligarchy instead of promoting the formation of political parties. Two rival party blocs represented the influential families: the National Party (al-Hizb al-Watani) and the People's Party (Hizb al-Sa'b). In 1948, the constitution was amended to allow President al-Quwatli's re-election, but in 1950, a new constitution reinstated the original provision banning consecutive terms. In 1949, women gained the right to vote if they possessed a certificate of graduation from elementary school, and the voting age was lowered to 18 years. Separate polling stations were established for female voters. Since the first post-independence election in 1947, voting rights were denied to officers, soldiers, police members, gendarmerie personnel, and other military organizations (Zisser 2001). In response to anti-government riots, the government declared a state of emergency on 12/02/1948. The regime was autocratic and it was not fully electoral due to the indirect character of the elections (Torrey 1964: 65). According to our classification, it is a borderline case between an electoral autocracy and the specific type of an electoral oligarchical autocracy. On 07/17/1947 the first direct, competitive parliamentary election took place. (Torrey 1964: 88-101, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 97).^{218F}¹¹ According to GWF Syria was a democracy in the period following the election. However, this is not in line with our data. We agree with HTW and LIED that the regime was a(n) electoral/multiparty autocracy. BMR also classified the period as non-democratic. Based on our observations, multiparty, executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED confirms that elections were not competitive in this period. In addition, V-Dem's CEI declares the elections as not clean from 1946 to 1947 and as not really clean between 1948 and 1949. However, the elections were somewhat free and fair since 1947 according to V-Dem's EF&FI. In this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as an indication of an ambiguous status of political liberties. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive's constraints fell into Intermediate Category 3, between substantial limitations and executive parity or subordination. Since 1948, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

03/30/1949 End Electoral Autocracy/Start Military (Personalist) Autocracy: The civilian government in Syria was held responsible for the Arab military's defeat in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which shattered the oligarchy's "precarious legitimacy" (Chin/Wright/Carter 2021:197). In response to anti-government riots, the

government declared a state of emergency on 12/02/1948. Then, on 03/30/1949, Colonel Za'im ousted President al-Quwatli in a coup and promised to establish a civilian-military government and to hold elections (Be'eri 1970). However, on 04/01/1949, Za'im dissolved the government after it refused to legitimize the new regime, and proclaimed himself head of state and selected individuals to fill cabinet positions (Carleton 1950). By 05/29/1949, Za'im had dissolved all political parties. On 05/30/1949, a new government led by Husni al-Barazi, consisting of six civilians and a military officer as minister of defense, assumed office but did not hold real political power. On 06/25/1949, Za'im ran uncontested for the presidency and was elected with nearly unanimous support, receiving 85 percent of the electoral votes (Chin/Wright/Carter 2021).^{219F}¹² According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as an indication of an ambiguous status of political liberties.

08/14/1949 End Military (Personalist) Autocracy/Start Military (Personalist) Autocracy: On this date, Za'im was arrested in a military coup led by Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi, subsequently tried by court martial, and executed (Carleton 1950). Al-Hinnawi assumed the Chief of General Staff role and led a ten-member "Supreme War Council". Following the coup, al-Hinnawi legalized political parties and transferred power to a civilian cabinet headed by President al-Atassi, with only the Minister of Defense being a military officer (Be'eri 1970). On 11/15/1949, the People's Party won the most seats in the constituent assembly election. Although the new government emerged from a more democratic election overseen by the coup leaders, the Supreme War Council "remained in the background as the supreme legislative, executive, and judicial authority" Chin/Wright/Carter (2021: 201), (Faksh 1985:10) code here a successful regime change because the coup leaders empowered civilians, reinstated the previously elected leaders, and promptly arranged for democratic elections. On 12/14/1949, a third coup led by civilian al-Hawarni and General al-Shishakli prevented democratically elected president al-Atassi from taking office. General al-Hinnawi and his supporters, both military and civilian, were arrested (Be'eri 1970). Khaled Azm, who had been ousted as premier on 03/30/1949, agreed to form a new provisional cabinet under provisional president al-Atassi. Military rule was not immediately imposed as the coup leaders attempted to maintain the appearance of civilian rule. On 12/24/1949, the deputy leader of the People's Party, Nazim al-Qudsi, formed a cabinet with a majority of People's Party members, but it quickly dissolved due to an army veto. On 12/27/1949, al-Atassi agreed to remain in office after a unanimous request from the constituent assembly (Chin/Wright/Carter 2021). On the subregime level the regime is also coded as a new military (Personalist) autocracy, while on the main level of the military autocracy no regime change is coded. We concur with Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014), that the coup established an indirect military control over a civilian government elected by the people. According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. The events of the March 1949 coup are not regarded as the onset of this regime, as the military faction that seized power in March was ousted in June 1949 through a subsequent military intervention. This later coup ensured fair elections and the restoration of democratic governance in November 1949. Post-December 1949, elected civilians governed most policy areas, although the military retained the authority to veto foreign policy decisions and the appointment of officials (Be'eri 1970: 57-64, Haddad 1971: 202-205, McGowan 1988, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 97). For 1950, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating an ambiguous status of political liberties. For 1951, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties were not really present. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

11/29/1951 End Military (Personalist) Autocracy/Start Military (Personalist) Autocracy: On 11/13/1951, Premier Hassan al-Hakim resigned, and Maarouf al-Dawalibi, the People's Party leader, became prime minister. This appointment aimed to counter the populist efforts to end army interference. However, after being sworn in, the members of the newly formed coalition cabinet were imprisoned. Army chief of staff,

al-Shishakli, had warned al-Dawalibi that his cabinet was unacceptable and would lead to the dissolution of parliament. On 11/29/1951, al-Shishakli ordered the arrest of the prime minister, government members, the People's Party secretary general, and Hashemite sympathizers and declared the army in control over the country's security. Al-Dawalibi resigned on 12/01/1951, followed by President Atassi on 12/02/1951. The parliament was dissolved, and Colonel Fawzi Selu assumed full legislative and executive powers as president, prime minister, and defense minister. Al-Shishakli remained in control behind the scenes, while Selu acted as a figurehead (Seale 1965, Be'eri 1970). Consistent with MCM and GWF, we code this as a new military (personalist) autocracy as the coup removed the civilian government, ushering in direct military rule by decree. The era post-November 1951 is recognized as a distinct regime, as military leaders purged civilian allies who once held prominent positions and influenced policies. This restructuring narrowed the ruling group to a faction within the military (Torrey 1964: 207-12, Haddad 1971: 211, Finer 1975: 168-169, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 97). On 07/4/1953, all parties opposing al-Shishakli - including the Ba'th Party, People's Party, National Party, Communist Party, and others - signed a National Pact, "which was, in effect, a pledge to bring the dictator down" (Seale 1965:134). Consequently, revolts broke out nationwide, leading al-Shishakli to declare a state of emergency on 01/27-28/1954. According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. For almost the whole period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are not really present. We interpret the PCLI data for 1954 as political liberties being in an ambiguous state. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited.

02/26/1954 End Military (Personalist) Autocracy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: On this date a military coup ousted Shishakli. Ma'mun al-Kuzbari, the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, assumed the role of acting president. This avoided, as a compromise, a military confrontation among the supporters and opponents of Shishakli within the Syrian army. The 1950 constitution and parliamentary rule were reinstated as the military withdrew to the barracks. Given the reinstitution of the constitution and parliamentary rule, we code the direction of this military coup as liberalizing. Although military interventions are typically associated with autocratization, this case represents an exception due to its outcome: a transition toward greater institutional openness and political competition. On 03/01/1954, Hashim al-Atas, who had been deposed as president in the previous coup on 11/29/1951, was reinstated as president (Be'eri 1970). According to LIED, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. LIED identifies political liberties as absent and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as an indication of an ambiguous status of political liberties.

09/24[-25]/1954 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral Autocracy: On these dates, competitive multi-party elections were held without interference from the military (Be'eri 1982: 80, Torrey 1964: 244-64, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 97). On 02/26/1957 "a number of important opposition leaders, including several MPs, were found guilty of trumped-up treason charges despite formal parliamentary immunity, marking the point at which the government crossed the line from democracy to autocracy. "Authoritarianization" occurred incrementally during 1956-57, as Colonel Sarraj gradually undermined the elected civilian government. We identify this guilty verdict as the point at which there ceases to be doubt about who exercised power. In May 1957, the government rigged by-elections, further reducing opposition representation (Torrey 1964: 329-31, 352-53). During 1957-58, Syria was ruled by an alliance of the Ba'th, a radical faction of the Nationalist party, Communists, and independents, supported by Ba'thist and Communist factions of the military. The president and prime minister were civilian Nationalists, and no party dominated the civilian coalition, though the Ba'th was gaining power throughout the period. The military was too factionalized to fully determine events. No single person seems to have been calling the shots during this period, but Colonel Sarraj has been identified as the "power behind the throne" (Haddad 1971: 224) and appeared to wield greater influence than any other individual leader (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 97-98).

Based on our observations, multiparty, executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED confirms that the elections score no competitiveness during this period. In addition, V-Dem's CEI confirms that the elections were not really clean. V-Dem's EF&FI indicates ambiguous overall election conditions. Furthermore, LIED outcomes concerning the political liberties remained absent, while V-Dem's PCLI indicates ambiguous scores. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was on par with or below that of other branches, reflecting executive parity or subordination. We would argue that in this case the classification of Polity5 is a miscoding that we take not into account. For the years 1954 to 1957, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as ambiguous regarding the status of political liberties. V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as political liberties not really being present. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

02/22/1958 End Electoral Autocracy/Start Part of Other Country [of United Arab Republic, Electoral Autocracy]: On 02/21/1958, Syrian politicians, under pressure of the army, decided to unite with Egypt and form the United Arab Republic (UAR) with Abdel Nasser as president. Consequently, Syria ceased to be an independent state and became the Northern Region of the UAR. The actual political power resided with Nasser, who abolished the Communist Party and all other political parties (Zisser 2001, Turner 1998, Torrey 1964: 379-80, McGowan 1988, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 98). In this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties were not really present. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited.

09/28/1961 End Part of Other Country [of United Arab Republic, Electoral Autocracy]/Start Military Autocracy [as independent country]: On this date, a military coup by Syrian officers ended the UAR and returned Syria to independence (Syrian Arab Republic) after Nasser of Egypt centralized power in Egypt at the expense of the Syrian partners of the UAR. On 09/29/1961 the Supreme Arab Revolutionary Command of the Armed Forces (SARCAF) appointed Mahmoud Kuzbari as the head of the provisional government and tasked him to form a new government consisting of politicians from the old National Party and People's Party (Zisser 2001).^{220F¹³} The main objective of the government was to re-establish a democratic government through democratic elections.^{221F¹⁴} Therefore, we classify this regime change as liberalizing. On 12/01/1961, the military oversaw a constitutional referendum (Be'eri 1970: 145-148, Haddad 1971: 265-273, McGowan 1988). In addition, a new National Security Council was formed, comprising army commanders, the president, and five ministers to supervise the civilian government (Zisser 2001). However, tensions increased between the civilian government, composed of conservative elite politicians, and the military, which sought to implement UAR socialist reforms to maintain military control over the government. The UAR restrictions on political and individual freedoms remained, and political parties continued to be banned.^{222F¹⁵} In this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties were not really present. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

03/28/1962 End Military Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, the same officers who led the secessionist coup against the UAR on 09/28/1961 carried out a military coup that overthrew the emerging electoral regime (Be'eri 1970). Al-Qudsi publicly resigned, and the parliament was dissolved with the "General Command of the Army and Armed Forces" taking over executive and legislative functions (McGowan 1988: 32). On 03/31/1962, Ba'athists and Nasserites attempted a counter coup, calling for the restoration of the UAR. However, the March 1962 coup encountered public resistance, sparking internal divisions within the military. This discord eventually led to conflicts within the military ranks, resulting in the establishment of a partly civilian government just one month after the coup. Despite the reinstatement of the

civilian president removed in March 1962, the military maintained influence over the cabinet's makeup and dissolved the parliament. As a result, this era is coded as indirect military rule and authoritarian (Be'eri 1970: 145-148, Haddad 1971: 265-73, McGowan 1988, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 98). According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. For that period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties were not really present. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

03/08/1963 End Military Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: The military committee of the Ba'th party led a military coup that ousted General Zahr al-Din's government and its civilian allies (Be'eri 1970: 150-53). The National Council of the Revolutionary Command (NCRC) set up immediately after the coup contained a minority of Ba'th members, and the first cabinet they chose was half Ba'th. Lu'ay al-Atassi was released from prison and appointed as president on 03/23/1963. However, his presidential powers were limited, and he was more of a figurehead leader, while the junta controlled the regime.^{223F¹⁶} The central figure was Amin al-Hafiz, general, and member of the Ba'ath party. Over the next few months of factional struggle within the new government and within the military, however, most non-Ba'th officers were excluded from leadership and many non-Ba'thist officers and NCOs were purged from the army, leaving the regime dominated by the Ba'thist faction of the military (Be'eri 1970: 156-65, Rabinovich 1972: 49-59, McGowan 1988, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 98). Amin al-Hafiz clashed with Atassi in the aftermath of the violent Nasserite coup attempt. He overthrew Atassi on 07/27/1963, consolidated the regime and army command positions around him. We concur with Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) and Chin/Wright/Carter (2021) that this event constitutes a regime change as it brought Ba'athists and Nasserists to power and installed the NCRC under the leadership of General al-Hafiz, which effectively ended parliamentary rule in Syria. On 02/23/1966, al-Hafiz was overthrown by the nationalist faction of the Baath party with aid from the ethnic minorities, including the Druze. Salah al-Jadid took power behind a civilian puppet regime.

11/13/1970 End Military Autocracy/Start Personalist Autocracy: Crises within the Ba'ath Party precipitated by philosophical differences culminated in the Corrective Movement, a coup led by Defense Minister Lieutenant General Hafez al-Assad on 11/13/1970. Assad led a far-left and Alawite faction of the Baath party against al-Jadid after the defeat of the Syrian military in Jordan. The party and military were purged and Assad took power as president, party leader and military leader. On 11/13/1970 Assad became president and was subsequently elected secretary general of the party. The regime established a parliament, and in 1973, held the first national elections. The National Progressive Front (NPF), consisting of the Ba'ath Party and its allies, won an overwhelming majority of seats in the People's Assembly. By 1981, all the seats were distributed among NPF members" (Lansford 2021: 1613). Hafez al-Assad would rule Syria until his death in 2000, after which he was succeeded by his son Bashar Assad.^{224F¹⁷} An emergency law, enacted when the Ba'ath Party came to power in 1963, retained a ban on political opposition (Lansford 2021: 1614). Consistent with Chin/Wright/Carter (2021: 232) we do not code a regime change, but rather a shift in leadership within the existing regime. Assad orchestrated the ousting of Jadid by employing active members of the military who had not been dismissed. In this context, Assad is seen as a regime insider and a rival of Jadid. Until 11/13/1970, Syria had functioned as a military autocracy in which collective officer factions within the Ba'ath Party exercised real authority and presidents served largely as figureheads. The Corrective Movement transformed this pattern. Assad not only mobilized loyal units to seize control but subsequently purged the army, the party, and the security apparatus to eliminate rival factions. By uniting the offices of president, commander-in-chief, and general secretary of the Ba'ath Party, he concentrated effective power in his own hands. The regime was thereby reshaped from a collegial military autocracy into a personalist autocracy. Assad's dominance rested not on the corporate weight of the military institution but on his personal networks, and the dynastic succession to his son in 2000 confirmed the personalist nature of the regime. On 03/15/2011 The Syrian civil war emerged as a component of the broader 2011 Arab Spring protests, stemming from dissatisfaction with

the Syrian government.^{225F¹⁸} In 02/2012, constitutional amendments removed the provision securing the Ba'ath party's political dominance. Despite this, in the 05/2012 parliamentary elections, the Ba'ath party and its affiliates in the National Progressive Front (NPF) maintained control over the government. In 03/2014, the assembly approved legislation allowing multiple candidates for the presidency. However, this law, stipulating ten consecutive years of residency in the country before the election, excluded numerous potential candidates, such as expatriates and members of the opposition-in-exile. Once again, in the 2020 parliamentary elections, there were no competing parties aside from the NPF. (Lansford 2021: 1615). Between 03/15/2011 and 03/31/2020 Syria is a borderline case between having no central authority and the regime we classified it in, since Assad did not hold power over part of the territory. The Syrian Armed Forces controlled 63.57% of Syrian territories as of March 31, 2020. The SDF held 25.57%, while rebel groups (including HTS) and Turkey controlled 9.72%. The Islamic State held 1.14%.^{226F¹⁹} Reestablishment of the Assad regime. On 05/26/2021 President Assad won a fourth term in highly repressive and uncompetitive elections that only took place in government-controlled areas. Syrians living abroad largely refrained from voting.^{227F²⁰} According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held from 1963 until 1970. Thereafter, only executive elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty. From 1973 onward, both executive and legislative elections were held, but they were once again not categorized as multiparty. According to Polity5, until 1999, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. From 2000 to 2011, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. From 2012 onward, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. Since 1964, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent. Except from 1967 and 1970 and in 2023, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. According to FH's classification for the assessed regime period, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. In this period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is likewise classified by us as showing that political liberties are absent.

12/08/2024 End Personalist Autocracy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: Between 12/08/2024 and 03/29/2025, Syria underwent a regime change from a personalist autocracy under Bashar al-Assad to a non-electoral transitional regime led by Ahmed al-Sharaa. On 12/08/2024 the Assad regime collapsed during a major offensive by opposition forces as the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The Syrian capital Damascus was captured and Assad departed to Moscow, Russia. Assad's departure ended decades of personalist rule. The HTS appointed Mohammed al-Bashir as the new Prime Minister of the Syrian caretaker government. On 03/13/2025, the Interim Constitution was promulgated, and on 03/29/2025, al-Sharaa appointed a transitional cabinet, formally institutionalizing the new autocratic transitional framework.²¹ According to FH's classification, a score of 13 makes the territory not free, which we also place in the not free category.

Non-Electoral Transitional Regime as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Dam 1979, Dam 1996, Hinnebusch 1990, Hinnebusch 2002, Khalili 2009, Perlmutter 1969, Wedeen 1999, Ottaway/Choucair-Vizoso 2008, Bank 2004)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Marj_Dabiq

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandate_for_Syria_and_the_Lebanon

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Kingdom_of_Syria

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Federation

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandate_for_Syria_and_the_Lebanon

- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Syrian_Republic
- ⁷ <https://www.anzacmemorial.nsw.gov.au/our-stories/our-stories/syria-lebanon-campaign-june-july-1941>
- ⁸ <https://www.britishmilitaryhistory.co.uk/docs-middle-east-1930-1947-syria-1941-1945/>
- ⁹ <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/middle-eastnorth-africapersian-gulf-region/french-syria-1919-1946/>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Syria/The-French-mandate>
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1947_Syrian_parliamentary_election
- ¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/1949/06/26/archives/syrian-president-chosen-unopposed-zayim-elected-on-complicated.html>
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1961_Syrian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat;
<https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/middle-eastnorth-africapersian-gulf-region/syria-1946-present/>
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maamun_al-Kuzbari
- ¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1961_Syrian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lu%27ay_al-Atassi
- ¹⁷ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corrective_Movement_\(Syria\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corrective_Movement_(Syria))
- ¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_civil_war
- ¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_civil_war
- ²⁰ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/syria/freedom-world/2023>
- ²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Assad_regime

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