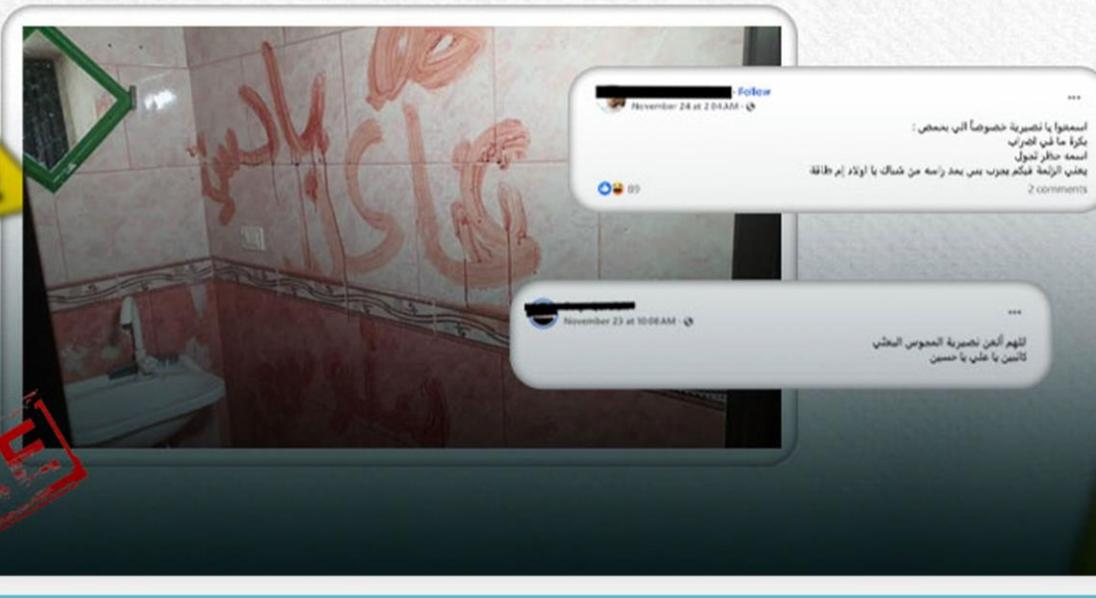


Zaidal/Homs Crime: Disinformation and Sectarian Incitement Behind Violence Against Civilians



- The Spread Of Disinformation And Sectarian Hate Speech Contributed To Transforming A Criminal Incident Into A Wave Of Collective Violence Targeting Alawite Civilians.

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Zaidal/Homs Crime: Disinformation and Sectarian Incitement Behind Violence Against Civilians

The spread of disinformation and sectarian hate speech contributed to transforming a criminal incident into a wave of collective violence targeting Alawite civilians

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1. Introduction

This report documents acts of violence of a sectarian nature that occurred in the city of Homs on 23 November 2025, following a brutal homicide in the town of [Zaidal](#). Drawing on eyewitness testimonies from various neighbourhoods in Homs, this brief investigation illustrates how the violence was preceded by the widespread circulation of disinformation and sectarian hate speech, which contributed to the targeting of Alawite civilians in their homes and communities, despite their having no connection to the original crime.

The report further demonstrates that incitement and disinformation played a decisive role in transforming an isolated criminal incident –later found to have non-sectarian motives– into collective attacks that included indiscriminate gunfire, the smashing and burning of private property, and attempted raids on the homes of Alawite civilians. It also highlights witness accounts indicating the inability –or possible negligence– of security forces to contain the violence during its initial hours, which further escalated the scope and severity of the violations. The report recalls the responsibility of the transitional authorities to take effective preventive measures to protect civilians and vulnerable groups, and to counter disinformation and incitement, so as to prevent the recurrence of violence that undermines social peace.

For the purposes of this report, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) conducted seven in-depth interviews with witnesses from areas targeted by armed individuals. Six interviews were documented during the attacks, while one was conducted several days later. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after clarifying the voluntary nature of their participation and the ways in which the information they provided would be used, including the incorporation of excerpts from their testimonies in this report. All witnesses expressed their wish to conceal their identities and any details that could lead to their identification, for fear of reprisals against themselves or their families. Accordingly, the report uses pseudonyms when referring to individuals whose testimonies are cited.

2. Background to the Incident

On the morning of 23 November 2025, a man and his wife –members of the Bani Khalid tribe / from the Sunni community– [were found murdered](#) inside their home in the town of Zaidal, in Homs. The wife's body had reportedly been set on fire.

Within only a few hours, accounts spread rapidly across social media platforms, portraying the crime as a sectarian attack allegedly committed by one or more individuals from the Alawite community, relying in part on sectarian inscriptions found at the crime scene, including (O Hussein – O Ali).



Image 1: Crime scene in Zaidal/Homs: Sectarian slogans written by the perpetrator on the wall using the victims' blood, according to local sources.



Image 2: Screenshot of a comment accompanying a [post with a video](#) published by the Facebook page "أخبار العالم بالحظة" (World News at the Moment), accusing what it referred to as "Nusayri militias" of committing the Zaidal crime (a derogatory reference to the Alawite community).

Subsequently –approximately ten days later, on 3 December 2025– the Ministry of Interior [announced](#) that the crime was criminally motivated (robbery), that the suspect was a relative of the two victims, and that the sectarian slogans had been written with the intent to mislead and incite discord. The Ministry further stated that the matter of compensating the victims was "to be discussed in detail with the judicial authorities." However, this clarification came only after [widespread violence](#) had already erupted across neighbourhoods in the city of Homs.

On the day of the events (23 November 2025), the authorities adopted exceptional measures, including the [suspension of school attendance](#) and the [imposition of a curfew](#) in the city, in an attempt to contain escalating security tensions. These measures reflected the scale of unrest and fear that prevailed in Homs during those hours.

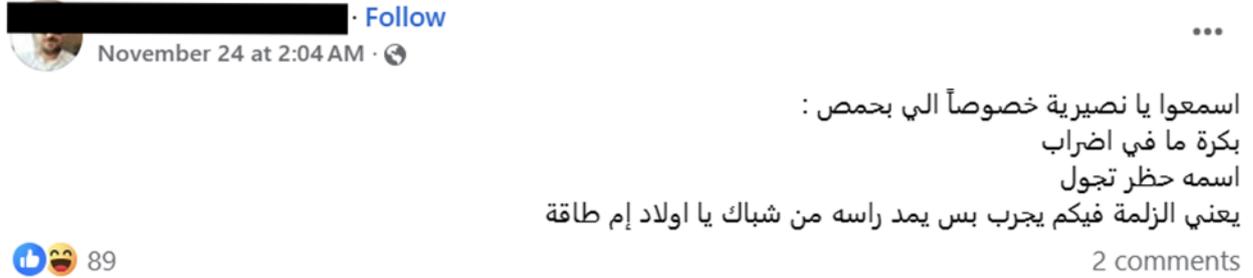


Image 3: A Facebook [post](#) dated 24 November 2025 by an individual insulting members of the Alawite community, following the authorities' announcement of a curfew.

3. Disinformation and Hate Speech Ignite the Spark of Violence

The events in Homs on 23 November 2025 demonstrate the pivotal role played by [disinformation](#) and hate speech in fueling sectarian violence and transforming an isolated crime into collective attacks. In the initial hours following the “Zaidal crime,” unverified narratives spread widely, attributing the crime to sectarian motives and collectively assigning responsibility to members of the Alawite community, in the absence of any verification or reliable official information.



Image 4: A Facebook [post](#) dated 23 November 2025 by an individual insulting members of the Alawite community and repeating what was written on the walls of the victims' home “O Ali – O Hussein”.

According to witness testimonies obtained by STJ, these narratives were circulated as established facts, relying solely on sectarian slogans written at the crime scene. This contributed to creating an inflammatory climate that enabled the justification of violence against civilians who had no connection to the incident.



Image 5: Screenshot of a comment accompanying a [post with a video](#) published on Facebook by a page calling itself "إدارة العمليات العسكرية" (Military Operations Administration), explicitly accusing what it described as "Shi'a militias" of committing the Zaidal crime, based on the sectarian inscriptions.

This discourse did not remain limited to describing the crime; rather, it extended to implicit or explicit calls for retaliation, employing generalized language that portrayed an entire religious community as collectively responsible for an individual criminal act.





Image 6: Screenshot of a comment accompanying a [post with a video](#) published by the Facebook page "أخبار الجزيرة السورية" (Syrian Jazira News), along with the comments on it, showing public mobilisation that preceded the actual attacks on predominantly Alawite neighbourhoods in Homs.

Witness Tareq (al-Muhajireen neighbourhood) reported that neighbours circulated direct accusations against Alawites based solely on "sectarian slogans written on the wall," without any other evidence identifying the perpetrator. According to witness Ali (al-Arman neighbourhood), this narrative was used to justify attacks on predominantly

Alawite neighbourhoods, despite the absence of any link between the targeted residents and the crime.



Image 7: A Facebook [post](#) dated 23 November 2025 inciting violence, stating: “O Allah, leave none of the Nusayris of Homs behind,” along with a comment confirming displacement from some predominantly Alawite neighbourhoods.

The testimonies documented by STJ indicate that unreliable information did not remain confined to rhetorical circulation; rather, it became a direct trigger for collective violence. It employed generalized language, contributed to the targeting of residential neighbourhoods and private property, and shifted the response from the principle of individual criminal responsibility to a logic of collective punishment. The testimonies further reveal the fragility of community protection in the absence of prompt and effective intervention to counter disinformation and contain its repercussions. In the absence of timely and effective official rebuttals, inciting discourse contributed to creating an inflammatory climate that enabled violence to shift from accusations to on-the-ground targeting of entire residential neighbourhoods.



Image 8: A Facebook [post](#) dated 24 November 2025, representing another example of posts inciting the killing of members of the Alawite community.

4. The Discriminatory Nature of the Attacks and Collective Targeting

The testimonies collected from multiple neighbourhoods in the city of Homs indicate that the attacks did not target specific individuals on the basis of personal conduct or criminal suspicion. Rather, they affected residential neighbourhoods known to be predominantly Alawite, including al-Zahraa, al-Muhajireen, al-Arman, and others. Witnesses consistently described a single pattern of attacks, involving the entry of armed groups into these neighbourhoods, indiscriminate gunfire, the smashing and burning of property, and attempts to break into homes, without any indication of armed confrontation or retaliation by residents.

According to eyewitness accounts, civilians remained inside their homes from the earliest hours of the events, fearing for their lives, and tightly locked their doors, while attacks continued in streets and residential areas for several hours. These acts were accompanied by sectarian slogans and religious chants (Allhu Akbar), reinforcing residents' perception that they were being targeted on the basis of their religious identity rather than for any other reason. Hasan (al-Muhajireen neighbourhood) stated:

“Why are these Bedouins calling for reinforcements and mobilising other tribes, when no one has harmed them or responded to their actions? Now, convoys of armed Bedouin tribes are arriving from al-Bayyada and Deir Ba'albah via the old Palmyra Road in pick-up trucks to assist those currently present in Alawite areas. The question that keeps circling in my mind is: why?”

5. Violations Documented During the Attacks on Predominantly Alawite Neighbourhoods in Homs

Based on converging eyewitness testimonies from multiple neighbourhoods in Homs, as well as content circulated by social media users during the events, this report documents a range of violations that accompanied the wave of violence, targeting civilians and their property in a context marked by sectarian incitement.

5.1. Indiscriminate Gunfire and the Terrorisation of Civilians

In an interview, witness Mirvat (al-Zahraa neighbourhood) reported hearing gunfire from cars and motorcycles inside residential areas, forcing her to take cover against walls, return to her home, and lock it tightly.

Moreover, in the same context, Tareq (al-Muhajireen neighbourhood) stated:

“Convoys of motorcycles and cars entered al-Muhajireen with armed men firing indiscriminately at homes and buildings. The gunmen began smashing car windows, looting and vandalising shops, and they set several houses on fire.”

Several testimonies also confirmed hearing sustained gunfire for hours after the government announced a curfew. Tareq (al-Muhajireen neighbourhood) added:

“It is now 9:30 p.m., and the sounds of motorcycles and gunfire can still be heard, despite the curfew imposed in the city.”

Witnesses further reported hearing chants of “Allahu Akbar” and sectarian insults during the attacks carried out by armed individuals against residential neighbourhoods. Anas (al-Zahraa neighbourhood) stated:

“When they entered the neighbourhood where I live, they started firing shots, shouting insults and ‘Allahu Akbar’, then smashing cars and shops.”

The impact of the violence and the accompanying hate speech was not confined to the immediate terror experienced by civilians within their neighbourhoods; it also affected their longer-term sense of safety and stability, prompting some to seriously consider leaving their homes. Witnesses reported that the fear generated by the indiscriminate attacks, coupled with the use of sectarian incitement, led a number of families to believe that remaining in their homes was no longer safe.



Image 9: A Facebook [post](#) dated 24 November 2025 calling on members of the Alawite community and other minorities in Syria to flee by sea.

In this context, witness Tareq (al-Muhajireen neighbourhood) reported that he tightly locked the door of his home and remained inside for fear of being attacked. He explained that he had begun thinking about “**fleeing to the city of Tartous at the first opportunity**,” although he had previously never considered relocating his children or changing their schools. He added that the idea of moving had become a serious option for him, despite the financial burden and the forced disruption this would entail for his family’s life.

This testimony illustrates how fear stemming from violence and hate speech can evolve into coercive pressure that compels civilians to consider leaving their homes, thereby affecting the right to safe housing and family stability, even in the absence of official eviction orders or declared mass displacement.

It should be noted that, alongside the events witnessed in Homs on 23 November 2025, [social media users circulated](#) information indicating that a number of civilians had been injured as a result of gunfire in the affected neighbourhoods, with reports of casualties arriving at al-Zahraa Hospital in the city.

In this context, [official media outlets](#), citing sources at the Ministry of Health, stated that hospitals in Homs had received **“18 injuries, most of which resulted from indiscriminate gunfire, in addition to some traffic incidents,”** noting that necessary medical care had been provided, without publishing detailed figures or clarifying the nature of the injuries or the circumstances in which they occurred.

This discrepancy between circulating information and the official account underscores the difficulty of accessing accurate data and reflects the state of disorder that prevailed in the absence of transparent and detailed information.

5.2. Destruction and Arson of Property

Witnesses from multiple neighbourhoods documented the smashing and burning of dozens of vehicles, as well as the burning and destruction of small commercial shops. Hasan (al-Muhajireen neighbourhood) stated:

“The situation in Alawite neighbourhoods such as al-Zahraa, al-Muhajireen, and al-Bassel suburb is very bad, one could even describe it as tragic. General Security closed off the entrances to predominantly Alawite areas, yet this did not prevent armed individuals from entering on motorcycles and in cars, firing indiscriminately at homes, and smashing and burning the property of Alawite residents, including cars, shops, and houses.”

Witness Samer (al-Muhajireen neighbourhood) also reported that a small shop owned by his sister was set on fire, despite being closed:

“The attackers pounded forcefully on the shop’s metal door, then broke it open and entered. They then burned the shop down entirely, causing severe financial losses to my sister and her young children. She lost her only source of livelihood as a result of retaliatory acts.”

Similarly, witness Ismail (al-Arman neighbourhood) estimated that more than one hundred vehicles were damaged across several neighbourhoods, stressing that harm extended to the property of civilians from a range of professions. He added:

“The armed men smashed shops along the main al-Arman street, then moved from there to Ali ibn Abi Taleb School Street, where they smashed all the cars and set four of them on fire, including cars belonging to my friends. As for the street parallel to the main al-Arman street, it was burned down entirely. My friend there was terrified after his shop was burned, cars were set on fire in front of his home, and shots were fired at his house.”

5.3. Attempts to Break into Homes and Assault Civilians

Mirvat (al-Zahraa neighbourhood) reported that armed individuals attempted to break into her aunt’s home in al-Muhajireen in order to force her young sons out, though they

were not there. Witness Ali (al-Arman neighbourhood) also referred to the break-in of a house and the beating of a girl with a rifle butt, based on what he observed in the vicinity of his residence.

Furthermore, Ismail (al-Arman neighbourhood) stated:

“They vandalised my friend’s entire shop on the main al-Muhajireen street and beat him with a whip.”

He added:

“I saw them beating people and dragging them along al-Arman street near Iskandar Restaurant, and many [videos](#) documenting this were circulated.”

6. Conduct of General Security Forces and the Authorities’ Response

Several witnesses reported the presence of General Security personnel in some of the areas where the attacks took place. However, this presence did not translate – according to their accounts– into effective or deterrent intervention capable of halting violence or protecting civilians. Testimonies repeatedly described a security response characterised either by a practical absence on the ground or by limited intervention insufficient to contain the attacks.

In this context, witness Tareq (al-Muhajireen neighbourhood) stated that General Security forces were **“either complicit with the Bedouins or incapable of deterring these armed men; in either case, they took no deterrent action.”** Similarly, witness Ali (al-Arman neighbourhood) indicated that the security forces’ intervention was limited to **“firing into the air,”** without preventing the continuation of the attacks. Other witnesses stated that the security forces **“did not engage with the armed men”** or intervened **“without any meaningful result,”** while Hasan (al-Muhajireen neighbourhood) reported the presence of General Security personnel without decisive measures being taken.

By contrast, the official media reported [statement](#) by the commander of Internal Security in Homs Governorate, as cited by the official news agency, indicating the extensive deployment of Internal Security personnel across Homs neighbourhoods and the vicinity of Zaidal following the crime, with the aim of protecting citizens and preventing the incident from being exploited to incite discord, and reaffirming the state’s commitment to protecting all components without exception. Sources within the Ministry of Interior also [reported](#) the dispatch of security reinforcements to southern areas of Homs following the incident, stating that the relevant authorities had implemented legal measures and gathered evidence to identify those responsible and restore security, while calling on citizens to adhere to official instructions and avoid sectarian strife.

The divergence between local residents' perceptions of the security response and the official narrative highlights a broader challenge of institutional trust and underscores the need for transparent and reliable crisis-information mechanisms.

Moreover, while a curfew was imposed and school attendance suspended on the day of the events, witness accounts suggest that these measures were introduced only after the violence had already spread and inciting narratives had circulated widely. Under their legal obligations, the authorities bear responsibility for adopting effective preventive measures to protect civilians without discrimination and to counter disinformation and hate speech, rather than limiting their response to reactive security measures after the fact.

7. Recommendations

The facts documented in this report point to serious human rights violations, particularly of rights enshrined in the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), including the prohibition of discrimination on religious grounds, and the rights to life and to security of person, in a context marked by the spread of hate speech and incitement to violence. The testimonies indicate that civilians were targeted solely on the basis of their religious identity, without any individual link to the original crime, amounting to a breach of the principle of individual criminal responsibility.

In accordance with its international obligations –as reaffirmed in the [Constitutional Declaration](#) (Article 12)– the State is required to take effective preventive measures to protect civilians from violence, prevent incitement to hatred and violence, and intervene promptly to mitigate risks when it is aware of a real or imminent threat. This obligation also aligns with general principles of domestic law requiring the protection of public security and the safety of citizens without discrimination.

In this context, the incidents documented in this report provide the basis for the following recommendations, aimed at preventing recurrence, strengthening civilian protection, and countering disinformation and hate speech.

7.1. To the Syrian Transitional Authorities

- Expedite investigations into crimes portrayed as having sectarian dimensions, and issue timely public updates to prevent the spread of inciting rumours and popular narratives surrounding crimes in Syria.
- Conduct serious and transparent investigations into all acts of violence that took place in Homs during the 23 November 2025 attacks, and hold those responsible accountable –whether individuals or armed groups– in accordance with the law.
- Adopt effective preventive measures to protect at-risk residential neighbourhoods, and ensure prompt and proportionate security intervention to prevent attacks against civilians and their property.

- Develop clear and rapid mechanisms to monitor and respond to disinformation and inciting rhetoric circulating through media outlets and social media platforms, while ensuring respect for freedom of expression.
- Ensure equal protection for all civilians without discrimination on the basis of religion or sectarian affiliation, and strengthen local residents' trust in institutions responsible for their protection.

7.2. To Civil Society Organisations

- Document hate speech and disinformation as direct contributing factors in the commission of violations, and integrate such documentation into monitoring and analytical reporting.
 - Strengthen community awareness initiatives on the risks of sectarian incitement and its impact on social peace and the protection of civilians.
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ABOUT STJ

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) started as an idea in a co-founder's mind while attending the U.S. Middle-East Partnership Initiative's (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program (LDF) in 2015. The idea became a reality and flourished into an independent, non-profit, impartial, non-governmental human rights organization.

ABOUT Ceasefire



The Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights aims to empower civilians in situations of armed conflict or prevailing insecurity to document violations of their rights; to seek justice and accountability for violations of civilian rights; and to develop the practice of civilian rights protection and raise public support for the promotion of civilian rights.

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