

Syria: The Hate Speech and Disinformation Accompanying the As-Suwayda Massacres

Joint Investigation: How Media and Digital Narratives
Helped Fuel the “Third Wave of Violence”



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1. Executive Summary

This expanded joint investigation by Suwayda Press and Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) analyzes the media and digital discourse that accompanied the As-Suwayda massacres of July 2025, focusing on the official platforms of the transitional authority, as well as on the media outlets and public accounts that repeatedly adopted its narrative or its political and security vocabulary in covering the events. The report examines how these narratives contributed to mobilizing the public, deepening sectarian polarization, justifying armed mobilization, or downplaying the gravity of the violations committed against civilians, women and men alike.

The investigation focuses on the discourse that preceded and accompanied the third wave of violence, when certain narratives—such as “the rescue of the tribes,” “extending state control,” and “the Israeli project”—shifted from political or security characterizations of events into instruments of mobilization and polarization. The circulation of these narratives across multiple media outlets and digital platforms helped entrench collective perceptions rooted in fear and threat, blur the distinction between civilians and combatants, and reinforce a logic of collective responsibility.

The investigation includes a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a sample of public posts on the Facebook platform, comprising 11,118 posts published between 17 July and 17 August 2025, with the aim of examining patterns of engagement, hashtags, the language of the discourse, and indicators of disinformation and incitement.

The findings point to troubling trends in digital discourse that cannot be reduced to spontaneous reactions to events. The report recorded a sharp surge in posting intensity coinciding with developments on the ground, and a clear repetition of the same narratives and hashtags across specific pages and accounts, reinforcing indications of coordinated or directed publishing patterns.

The danger of these patterns lies in the fact that they did not merely report or comment on the news; they helped create a media and social environment more receptive to mobilization and retaliatory violence, and weakened public debate over the responsibility of armed actors for the violations committed against civilians. The report highlights the role that digital media can play—when coupled with mobilizing political rhetoric and disinformation—in inflaming local conflicts and threatening the social fabric.

2. Background

Between 13 and 19 July 2025, As-Suwayda governorate witnessed a wave of armed attacks that [included](#) killings, enforced disappearance, abduction, looting, destruction of property, and sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls. Violent sectarian clashes, sparked by looting and acts of revenge between the Bedouin and

Druze communities, escalated into large-scale violence involving local militias, forces of the Syrian transitional authorities, and armed groups affiliated with them.

According to [the report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria](#), the events unfolded in three main waves of violence. In the first wave, which the Commission described as the deadliest, government forces, accompanied by tribal fighters, committed large-scale violations against Druze civilians between 14 and 16 July, particularly in the west of As-Suwayda governorate and in As-Suwayda city. These violations included killings, torture, arbitrary detention, and looting, as well as summary executions of men identified as Druze after they had been separated from the women and children.

The second wave began on 17 July, following the withdrawal of government forces in the wake of the Israeli airstrikes that hit positions in As-Suwayda and Damascus. During this phase, neighborhoods inhabited by Bedouin tribes came under retaliatory attacks carried out by local armed groups, according to the International Commission of Inquiry.

The third wave, which the Commission described as the most destructive, took place between late on 17 July and 19 July and was carried out by tribal fighters who had been mobilized to advance toward As-Suwayda. This wave again targeted Druze civilians in sweeping acts of revenge, including the burning and looting of homes, shops, and religious sites in some 35 majority-Druze or mixed villages, as well as the killing of civilians and the abduction of others. The Commission also noted that some members of the government forces removed their military uniforms and joined those attacks.

According to the Commission's report, the three waves of violence left more than 1,707 people dead, the majority of them Druze. Among the dead, the report documented 1,190 men, 99 women, 22 boys, and 31 girls from the Druze community, in addition to the killing of 53 men, 9 women, 5 boys, and 3 girls from the Bedouin community.

The joint team that prepared this report, for its part, carried out an independent documentation effort, drawing on the forensic medicine lists of the National Hospital in As-Suwayda and cross-checking names against burial records and local families, and concluded by documenting 1,520 victims from the Druze community.

According to what has been documented, these waves were accompanied by a deeply polarized media and digital environment in which mobilization narratives, unverified news, hate speech, and disinformation proliferated. This climate helped fuel the justification of acts of violence and widen the scope of mobilization, particularly during the third wave of the events, which constitutes a central focus of this report.

3. Study Methodology and Data Sources

The report drew on three main sources of data. First, the monitoring and analysis of media and digital material published during and after the As-Suwayda events, including official statements and declarations, media coverage, and public posts on social media platforms. Second, in-depth interviews conducted by Syrians for Truth and Justice and Suwayda Press with witnesses, victims, and local actors who lived through the events in As-Suwayda city and its surroundings, from diverse social and professional backgrounds, over the period between April and July 2026. Third, a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a sample of public Facebook posts, collected using keywords linked to the events and the circulating narratives.

The Facebook sample comprised 11,118 public posts published between 17 July and 17 August 2025, drawn from public pages, groups, and personal accounts. The posts were classified and analyzed according to several criteria, including content type, publishing source, engagement metrics, keywords, and the hashtags used.

This period was chosen because it begins with the escalation of the third wave of violence and the large-scale tribal mobilization that accompanied it, and extends over a full month in order to track the continued circulation of the same narratives after direct military operations had ceased, and to test how content moved from real-time coverage to subsequent reproduction, incitement, and disinformation. This phase was also marked by a heightened intensity in the circulation of images, videos, and competing narratives, amid the expanding scope of the attacks, their multiple locations, and rising displacement and destruction.

Facebook was chosen because it is among the platforms [most widely used](#) for circulating news and public debate among Syrians, particularly during local crises, and because of the density of public content related to the As-Suwayda events during the period under study. This does not mean that the report confines digital discourse to Facebook or excludes the role of other platforms, such as Telegram, YouTube, and X; rather, it treats Facebook as a sample amenable to quantitative and qualitative analysis within clear methodological limits.

The analysis focused on examining the relationship between digital activity and developments on the ground, identifying the most widely circulated narratives, pinpointing the most active and influential accounts and pages, and analyzing the spread of sectarian and inciting discourse and disinformation. The report also sought to understand how certain narratives moved from the media and political sphere into the space of digital mobilization, and whether posting and repetition patterns pointed to possible coordination or direction.

The report nevertheless acknowledges the limits of its methodology and does not claim to represent the entire Syrian digital space or the positions of all users. Nor do engagement metrics, in themselves, constitute conclusive evidence of endorsement or

approval; they are used in this report as indicators of the scale of reach and the intensity of circulation. References to coordination, in turn, rest on the repetition of narratives, hashtags, timings, and reposting patterns, and are not to be understood as proof of a direct organizational or funding relationship unless independent evidence establishes one—which explains the need for broader independent investigations.

4. The Narratives That Paved the Way for, or Accompanied, the Third Wave

The third wave of violence that As-Suwayda governorate witnessed in July 2025 was not the product of developments on the ground alone; it also occurred in the context of a media and digital environment marked by the spread of mobilizing narratives, unverified or misleading information, and sharply polarizing rhetoric. As events escalated and independent sources of information receded, narratives emerged—through official media outlets, platforms close to the transitional authority or adopting its account, as well as public accounts and influencers on social media—that sought to interpret the events and frame them within specific security, political, and identity-based frames.

This chapter analyzes the impact of these [narratives](#) in shaping public perceptions of the Druze community, reinforcing feelings of fear and collective threat, and justifying mobilization and armed intervention. It also examines how the circulation of unverified news, decontextualized video clips, and sweeping accusations weakened the capacity to distinguish fact from rumor at the height of the events, and helped provide an environment more receptive to acts of revenge and to targeting based on sectarian affiliation.

4.1. The “Rescue of the Tribes” Narrative: From Spotlighting Bedouin Victimhood to Broad Identity-Based Mobilization

The “rescue of the tribes” narrative rose to prominence following [the speech of transitional Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa](#) on 17 July 2025, in which he stressed that the Syrian state was the sole party authorized to bear arms and enforce security, and rejected any “manifestations of defiance of state authority or the creation of parallel armed forces.” At the same time, he held what he described as “outlaw groups” responsible for the outbreak of the events, and praised the “patriotic positions of the tribes,” calling on them to abide by the law and to refrain from any acts of revenge or excesses.

The following day, al-Sharaa issued [a statement](#) accusing the local factions in As-Suwayda of committing “horrific violence,” which he deemed a direct threat to civil peace, pushing toward chaos and security collapse. This political rhetoric laid the groundwork for the media narrative around the “rescue of the tribes” that later crystallized across a number of platforms—official, close to the authority, or adopting its account—as the focus shifted from calls for restraint and for holding the

perpetrators of violations on all sides accountable, toward casting members of the Bedouin tribes as the collective [victim](#) of an organized [assault](#).

In this context, these platforms concentrated on scenes of victims and [displaced](#) families from the Bedouin tribes, and used characterizations such as “[ethnic cleansing](#)”, “massacres,” and “[systematic targeting](#)” in a framing that assigned collective responsibility for the violations to local groups in As-Suwayda, or, implicitly, to the Druze community as a whole.

One of the most prominent examples of this framing appeared in [a news item](#) published by the official Al-Ikhbariya TV on 17 July 2025 under an inflammatory and misleading headline: “Groups affiliated with Hikmat al-Hijri commit crimes of ethnic cleansing in As-Suwayda.”



Screenshot of [a news item](#) published on the website of the official Al-Ikhbariya channel on 17 July 2025 under the inflammatory, misleading headline “Groups affiliated with Hikmat al-Hijri commit crimes of ethnic cleansing in As-Suwayda.”

A significant part of this coverage relied on statements by the Council of Tribes and Clans, remarks by government officials, and [videos](#) and images issued by official or allied entities, without granting comparable space to other accounts of events or to independent verification of all the circulating claims.

This was evident, for example, in material published by the SANA agency and official Syrian television, and in the coverage of Arab and Syrian media outlets that clearly adopted the transitional authority's narrative or accompanied its forces on the ground, publishing closely aligned accounts, in both timing and content, from 17 July onward.

This synchrony was not limited to the republication of scattered news items; it was accompanied by the use of similar vocabulary such as [“faz’a” \(call to arms\)](#), [“nafir” \(general mobilization\)](#), and “rescue of the tribes,” and by the presentation of circulating claims as established facts before they had been independently verified.

Alongside this, media outlets and social media platforms saw a flood of news, images, and video clips concerning the [targeting](#) of individuals and families from the Bedouin tribes in As-Suwayda, often detached from the broader context of the events or from the role of certain armed groups belonging to those tribes in the conflict then underway. This pattern of coverage helped frame the events as a sweeping assault targeting an entire social group, rather than presenting them as a complex conflict in which multiple parties took part and which was marked by reciprocal violations—the largest share of which, as [the report of the International Commission of Inquiry](#) later confirmed, was borne by the Druze community.

This is not to deny the violations committed against members of the Bedouin tribes, which the International Commission of Inquiry likewise [documented](#); it is rather to note that selective, emotionally charged coverage helped present a fragment of the facts as the complete picture of the events, and obscured the broader context, which witnessed grave violations committed by multiple parties.

Some coverage reinforced this framing by [circulating inaccurate](#) figures about the size of the Bedouin community in As-Suwayda and the number of those displaced from it. A report by the Truth Platform refuted the claim that Bedouins make up 30% of the governorate's population, clarifying that their share does not exceed roughly 6%—about 34,000 people out of 570,000—and that no more than 29,000 of them were displaced by the violence, contrary to claims of 190,000 displaced. Al Jazeera Mubasher, meanwhile, [published](#) a higher figure on 19 July 2025, speaking of 250,000 Bedouins in As-Suwayda. The significance of these figures lies in the fact that they were used not as neutral demographic data, but as part of a discourse that inflated the scale of the targeting and reinforced a sense of sweeping collective victimhood.

At the height of the attacks, this narrative helped convert the violations committed against individuals and families from the Bedouin tribes into a broader mobilizing frame built on the idea of “rescuing” an entire social group. Rather than distinguishing

between civilians and combatants, or between individual and collective responsibility, this discourse helped dissolve those distinctions and cast the Druze community, explicitly or implicitly, as a single collective party to the conflict. The narrative thereby contributed to shifting the conflict from a local dispute with complex security and political dimensions into a confrontation of an [identity-based](#) and sectarian character, providing an environment more receptive to acts of revenge and to targeting based on social or sectarian affiliation.

4.2. The “Extending State Authority” Narrative: Framing the Military Intervention as a Restoration of Security and Legitimacy

From the first hours of the entry of the forces of the Ministries of Defense and Interior into As-Suwayda governorate, official Syrian discourse presented the military intervention as a necessary measure to restore security and stability, [extend state authority](#), end what was described as [“chaos”](#) and “the proliferation of weapons,” protect civilians, and pursue “outlaw groups.” This discourse linked the absence of state institutions to the deterioration of the security situation, presenting the reactivation of government institutions and the subordination of weapons to state authority as the essential gateway to ending the crisis. Yet the entry of the forces of the Ministries of Defense and Interior was not limited to a security intervention to separate the parties to an existing local conflict between Druze and Bedouin groups; it constituted direct military involvement in the conflict and was accompanied, according to what the Independent International Commission of Inquiry documented, by grave violations against civilians.

On 15 July 2025, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior, Nouredine al-Baba, [stated](#) that “state intervention has become inevitable to restore security to the governorate,” affirming that the operation aimed to “impose state authority and the rule of law” and to end what he called the “security chaos,” alongside disarming the groups operating outside state institutions. This framing recurred in subsequent ministry statements, which stressed that the entry of government forces came in response to “security imperatives,” and not with the aim of waging a confrontation with the local community.

In the discourse that accompanied the subsequent ceasefire agreements, this framing persisted through an emphasis on [“reintegrating](#) As-Suwayda into state institutions” and “restoring the state’s full sovereignty over the governorate.” This was reflected in the provisions of the circulated [agreements](#), which included reactivating government institutions, deploying security forces, and regulating weapons under state supervision. This discourse reinforced the presentation of the events as being, in essence, a matter of absent state authority, rather than also addressing them as a crisis of civilian protection and of accountability for violations committed by multiple parties.

This discourse, however, oversimplified a far more complex political and security context. Before the events of July 2025, the governorate was home to a number of local armed formations of Druze character, among them the Rijal al-Karama (Men of Dignity) Movement, the Sheikh al-Karama Forces, Liwa al-Jabal (the Mountain Brigade), and Dir' al-Tawhid (the Tawhid Shield), alongside smaller groups, as well as the emergence of the “As-Suwayda Military Council” during 2025. Most of these formations trace their origins to the years of the Syrian conflict, amid the retreat of state institutions and the spread of kidnappings, lawlessness, and attacks by extremist groups, which prompted the formation of local forces to protect residents, villages, and towns, and to avoid sending the governorate’s young men to distant front lines, according to local residents.

Nor were the positions of the local forces in As-Suwayda uniform toward the transitional government. Since the transfer of power in late 2024, some local factions and figures showed readiness to coordinate with Damascus or to integrate into the military and security institutions (among them [Rijal al-Karama and Liwa al-Jabal](#)), while other forces rejected the entry of government forces into the governorate ([a position](#) most prominently associated with Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri), or made it conditional on the role of the governorate’s own people in managing its affairs and on the adoption of a form of administrative decentralization. This variation shows that the local scene could not be reduced to a simple confrontation between “the state” and “outlaw groups.”

Nevertheless, Syrian and Arab media platforms that adopted the government narrative helped consolidate this reductive framing through the use of characterizations such as “armed gangs,” [“outlaws”](#), and [“rebels against the state”](#)—characterizations that, in many pieces, went beyond neutral news description and helped present the military intervention as the sole necessary means of [“restoring public order”](#) and “ending the chaos.” Videos of columns of government forces entering the governorate were likewise recirculated, accompanied by commentary describing what was happening as a “restoration of legitimacy,” without comparable attention to the conduct of the forces during the operations or to the violations that accompanied their entry.

The report does not dispute the state’s responsibility to protect the population and enforce the law, or its competence to regulate the bearing of arms in accordance with the law. But this responsibility does not grant the authorities an absolute license to use force, nor does it exempt them from the obligation to observe the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality, and the rules of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Nor may the narrative of “restoring legitimacy” be allowed to become a cover that shields the conduct of government forces from scrutiny or weakens the demand for the accountability of those responsible for violations.

This issue takes on particular importance in light of the findings of [the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria](#), which documented grave violations committed by multiple parties during the As-Suwayda events, among them

government forces and other armed groups, and indicated that some of the documented acts may amount to war crimes. Accordingly, the legitimacy of the operation's declared objective is not to be measured by the rhetoric of "restoring security" alone, but also by the legality of the means used, respect for the protection of civilians, and the guarantee of investigation and accountability for the violations committed.

4.3. The "Israeli Project" Narrative: From Describing a Foreign Intervention to a Tool of Mobilization and Delegitimization

Official media discourse, along with media platforms and public accounts that adopted the transitional authority's rhetoric, witnessed a state of intense mobilization in the wake of the Israeli strikes of July 2025. The strikes, which hit the Ministry of Defense and military sites in and around Damascus, were presented as the explanation for the entire crisis in As-Suwayda, and were linked to an external scheme targeting the Syrian state and its territorial integrity.

This narrative rested on several facts, namely the direct Israeli military intervention and the repeated Israeli [statements](#) about "protecting the Druze" in As-Suwayda. Yet some political and media discourse went beyond describing this intervention and debating its aims, transforming it into a comprehensive interpretive frame linking what had happened to an Israeli attempt to [weaken](#) the Syrian state, impose new political and security arrangements, or establish a separate entity in the region.

The expanded resonance of the "Israeli protection" discourse in some local circles cannot be understood in isolation from the security context that preceded the July events. The sweeping violations against Alawite civilians on the coast in March 2025, followed by the events of Jaramana and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya and the killings and sectarian rhetoric that accompanied them, deepened fears among segments of the Druze community that they might be subjected to similar violence. These events also heightened doubts about the capacity of the transitional state's institutions to protect minorities and to restrain the forces and armed groups associated with it, particularly should local formations be [disarmed](#) before effective security guarantees were in place. In this context, some local actors and circles grew more open to viewing Israeli intervention or protection as an option of necessity, even while aware of the Israeli political and security interests underlying them.

Yet this complex local context, with the genuine security fears it entailed and the varied positions of local actors toward the Israeli intervention, was not reflected in official and media discourse with a comparable degree of nuance and precision. That discourse reduced the divergent positions within As-Suwayda to a single frame built on "[seeking the backing of foreign powers](#)" and association with "the Israeli project." This framing was reinforced by the content advanced by the head of the transitional authority, Ahmad al-Sharaa, in his speeches of 17 and 19 July 2025, notably his references to

“seeking foreign backing” and [“open war with the entity”](#). Media platforms and digital accounts recirculated this vocabulary and expanded its connotations through news items, [opinion](#) and analysis pieces, videos, and digital [graphics](#). The events of As-Suwayda were thereby recast as a form of indirect confrontation between the Syrian state and Israel, rather than addressed as a local conflict that witnessed violations committed by multiple parties.

This discourse also helped redirect public debate away from the causes of the local violence and the conduct of the parties involved in it, toward an interpretation that saw the Israeli intervention as [conclusive proof](#) of an external [scheme](#) predating the events—of which the local confrontations were, on this view, merely the gateway to implementation. Coverage and political commentary presented the scene within a binary of confrontation between “the Syrian state” and [“an externally backed partition project”](#), narrowing the space for debate over the responsibility of local and government actors for the violations committed during the events.

This narrative extended to social media platforms, where accounts and pages supportive of the transitional authority circulated posts and [videos](#) speaking of an “Israeli conspiracy” or “an attempt to establish an Israeli-affiliated entity in southern Syria.” Characterizations such as “Israel’s agents at home,” “instruments of the Israeli project,” and “separatists” also became commonplace in references to local religious, military, and political figures who opposed the entry of government forces or criticized the policies of the transitional authority.

This narrative performed several parallel discursive functions. On the one hand, it provided a frame for presenting the government’s military intervention as a defense of the country’s unity and sovereignty in the face of an external threat. On the other, it was used to strip certain local opponents of national legitimacy by linking them to Israel, without distinguishing between different political positions or presenting evidence establishing any actual relationship with it. It also contributed to raising the level of polarization, as objecting to the government’s policies or criticizing the conduct of its forces came to be interpreted as alignment with, or service to, “the Israeli project.”

This analysis does not deny the reality of the Israeli intervention or the existence of Israeli political and security interests in southern Syria. The human rights and media problem arises, however, when this intervention is used to generalize accusations of collaboration and subservience against individuals or groups without sufficient evidence; to tie an entire local community to a hostile foreign power; or to portray Druze civilians as an extension of a hostile Israeli project—blotting out the distinction between them and political or military actors, and paving the way for their targeting to be accepted or for the gravity of the violations committed against them to be downplayed.

The danger of this discourse increases when it is coupled with demeaning or exclusionary characterizations, or is deployed to incite violence and discrimination, or to obscure the accounts and facts concerning violations committed by government forces or other armed groups.

5. Analysis of Inciting Discourse and Indicators of Digital Coordination and Amplification

This chapter draws on an analysis of digital data collected from the Facebook platform over the period between 17 July and 17 August 2025, with the aim of tracking the patterns of sectarian and inciting discourse, disinformation, and the digital narratives that accompanied the As-Suwayda events. According to the figures adopted in the report, the database comprised 11,118 posts.

The data underwent programmatic processing aimed at organizing it and extracting posting patterns, hashtags, engagement, and the most active accounts within the sample. The results were also compared, wherever possible, with the facts on the ground and the media material monitored by the report team.

The data reveals widespread and intensive circulation of content related to the As-Suwayda events, with a clear peak during the first days of escalation and subsequent spikes coinciding with renewed rumors and tension. It also shows the centrality of vocabulary related to sectarian and tribal identity, the presence of narratives such as “al-Hijri’s militia,” “David’s Corridor,” and “the independence of As-Suwayda,” alongside the repetition of identical or near-identical texts across numerous accounts.

5.1. Content and Reach Analysis

The sample shows diversity in forms and sources of content. This classification makes it possible to describe the overall structure of digital circulation before analyzing content and context.

5.1.1. Content Distribution by Type

Text posts ranked first in terms of the number of posts, followed by images and then videos. The posts classified within these categories totaled 11,118.

Post type	Number of posts
Text posts	3,957
Images	3,588
Videos	2,730
Other types	843

5.1.2. Content Distribution by Publisher

Public pages accounted for the largest share of posts in the sample, followed by personal accounts and then groups. The “public pages” category comprised pages selected by the research team on the basis of their broad reach and presence among the Syrian public, locally or regionally, over recent years. Their wide reach made them primary channels for the circulation of content related to the events, including reliable and misleading information alike, compared with the less widely followed personal accounts and groups.

Source type	Number of posts
Public pages	7,756
Personal accounts	2,428
Groups	934

5.2. Overall Engagement Indicators

Engagement indicators help measure the scale of content circulation and its capacity to elicit responses from users, bearing in mind that they do not directly reveal users’ attitudes toward the content: a like, a comment, or a “haha” reaction may express endorsement, objection, mockery, or disapproval, depending on the context of the post and the nature of the engagement.

The database outputs recorded some 233.2 million views, alongside millions of reactions and comments.

Metric	Recorded value
Views	233,217,497
Likes	3,731,243
Comments	597,663
“Sad” reactions	185,634
“Haha” reactions	173,536

The averages indicate that a single post received, on average, about 455.4 engagements when the averages of comments, shares, and other reactions are combined. This figure reflects the intensity of engagement around the events.

Metric	Average
Average comments	53.8
Average shares	12.6
Average other reactions	389
Approximate total of the averages	455.4

5.3. Temporal Analysis of Digital Activity

The timeline shows synchrony between the rise in digital activity and the milestones of escalation on the ground. Posting, hashtags, and videos surged during the first days, in parallel with the spread of the violence, the entry of tribal fighters into the governorate, and the circulation of calls such as “faz’at al-‘asha’ir” (the tribes’ call to arms), “general nafir,” and “rescue our people.” This activity was not limited to reporting the news; it included calls for armed mobilization, the reposting of specific narratives, and the circulation of inciting or misleading content, pointing to the role that social media platforms may have played in influencing public opinion and mobilization during the attacks.

Activity reached its highest levels during the first days of monitoring (17 July 2025), then gradually declined as the confrontations subsided. A second spike was recorded in early August, coinciding with the circulation of misleading news about the abduction of a Sunni girl in the town of Ara and the tension and ceasefire breaches that accompanied it. This pattern points to the sensitivity of digital activity to events and rumors, even if it cannot on its own establish a direct causal relationship between posts and acts of violence.

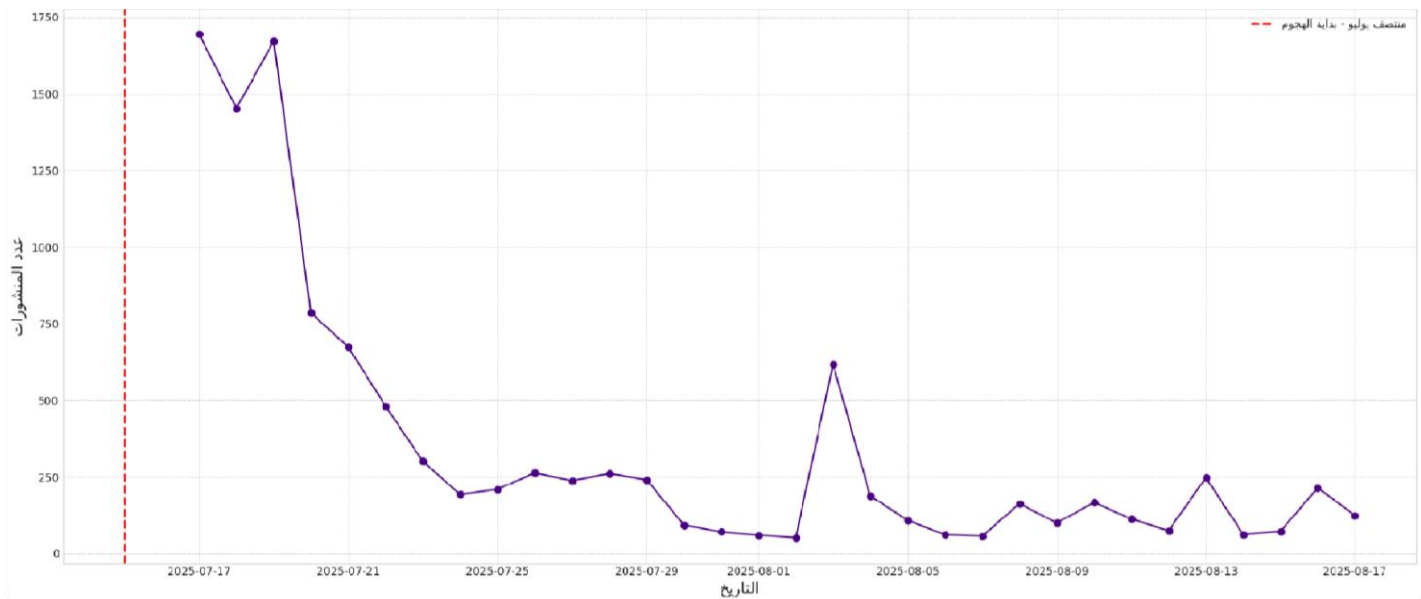


Figure 1: Daily posting volume and key developments on the ground, 17 July–17 August 2025. The vertical axis shows the number of posts, while the horizontal axis shows the date.

5.4. The Most Active Accounts and Indicators of Coordination

The data shows a set of accounts and pages topping the list of the most active in terms of the number of posts, and others topping the list of the most engaged-with in terms of total interactions. This distinction matters: highly active accounts may be part of an intensive posting campaign, while high-engagement accounts may wield greater influence in shaping public opinion.

The following charts show a set of accounts and pages that published the largest number of items linked to the keywords during the period studied. Their inclusion here is confined to quantitative description within the sample, and constitutes no judgment on their political orientation or on the legality of their content.

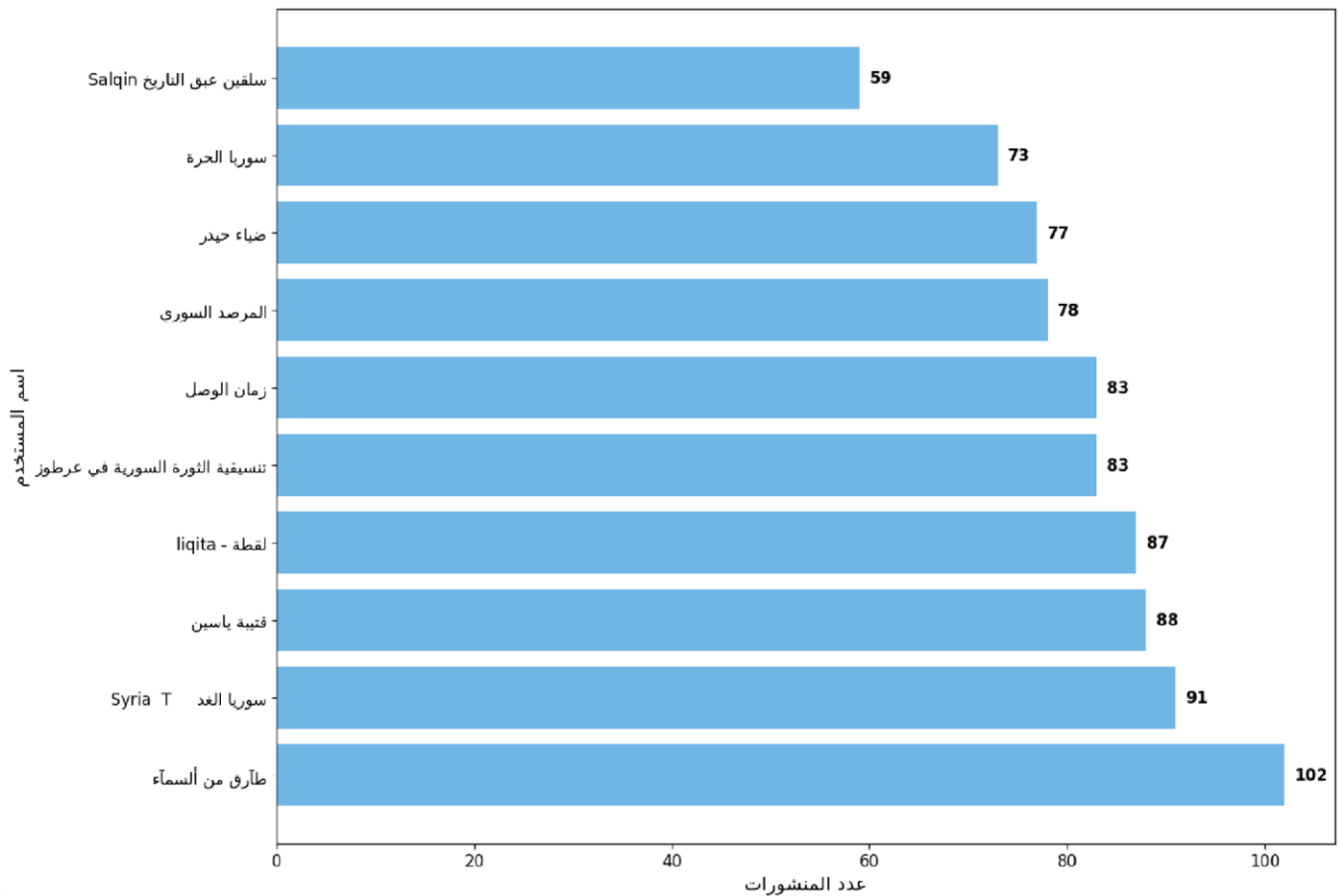


Figure 2: The ten most active accounts or pages by number of posts in the sample. The accounts and pages shown, from bottom to top, are: Tareq from the Sky, Syria al-Ghad (Syria T), Qutaiba Yassin, Liqita, the Syrian Revolution Coordination Committee in Artouz, Zaman al-Wasl, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Diaa Haidar, Free Syria, and Salqin: Abaq al-Tarikh. Account and page names are reproduced in Arabic in the figure as they appeared in the source data.¹

¹ Note: In the reproduced charts, account, page, platform, hashtag, and organization names remain in their original Arabic form to preserve accuracy and source traceability.

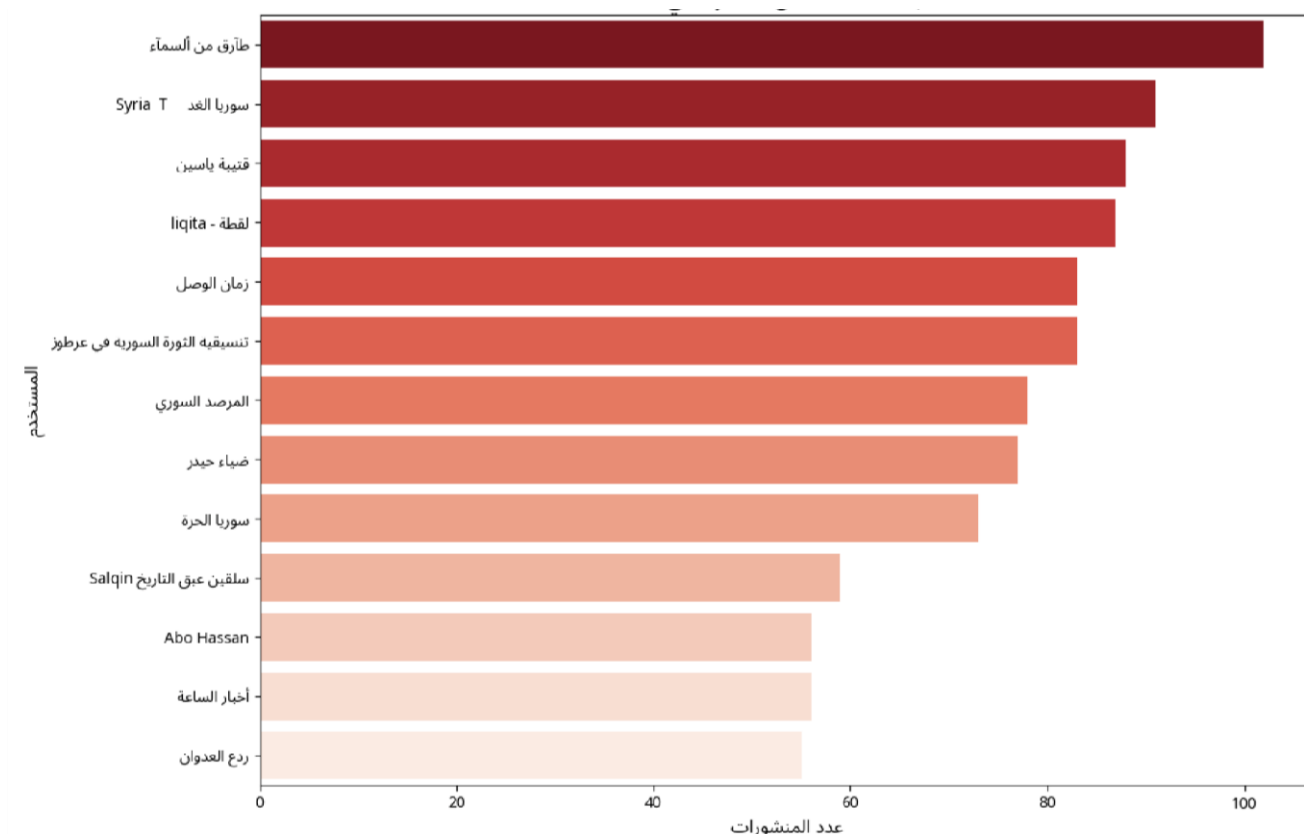


Figure 3: Accounts and pages with the highest posting rates in the sample, providing an additional indicator of posting intensity. The horizontal axis shows the number of posts, while the vertical axis lists, from bottom to top: Radd' al-Udwan, Akhbar al-Sa'a, Abo Hassan, Salqin: Abaq al-Tarikh, Free Syria, Daa Haidar, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the Syrian Revolution Coordination Committee in Artouz, Zaman al-Wasl, Liqita, Qutaiba Yassin, Syria al-Ghad, and Tareq from the Sky.

Some accounts appear on more than one list, indicating high output and engagement within the sample.

The following chart illustrates the variation in posting times among the most active accounts. Recurrent proximity in timing, when combined with identical texts and hashtags, may constitute an indicator of coordination among them.

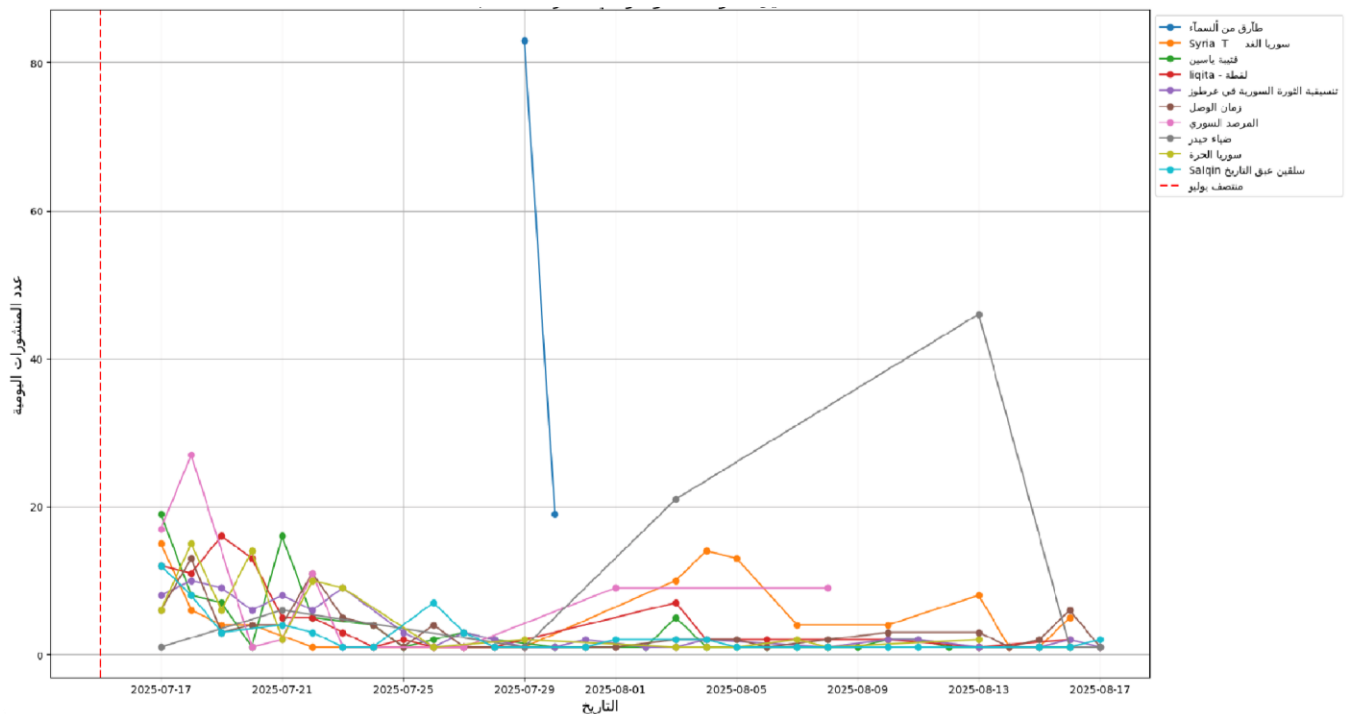


Figure 4: Daily posting activity of the most active accounts and pages over the study period. The vertical axis shows the number of posts per day, while the horizontal axis shows the date. The legend on the right lists, from bottom to top: Mid-July, Salqin: Abaq al-Tarikh, Free Syria, Diaa al-Badr, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Zaman al-Wasl, the Syrian Revolution Coordination Committee in Artouz, Liqita, Qutaiba Yassin, Syria al-Ghad, and Tareq from the Sky.

5.5. Content Analysis and Sectarian Discourse

This section focuses on the recurrent hashtags, words, and expressions that made sectarian or identity-based affiliation the axis for interpreting the events.

5.5.1. The Most Circulated Hashtags and Narratives

The charts show the most heavily used hashtags and those linked to accusatory narratives or to political and military mobilization. These indicators are useful for

measuring the presence of a narrative, but they are not sufficient on their own to classify all the posts that used them as inciting.

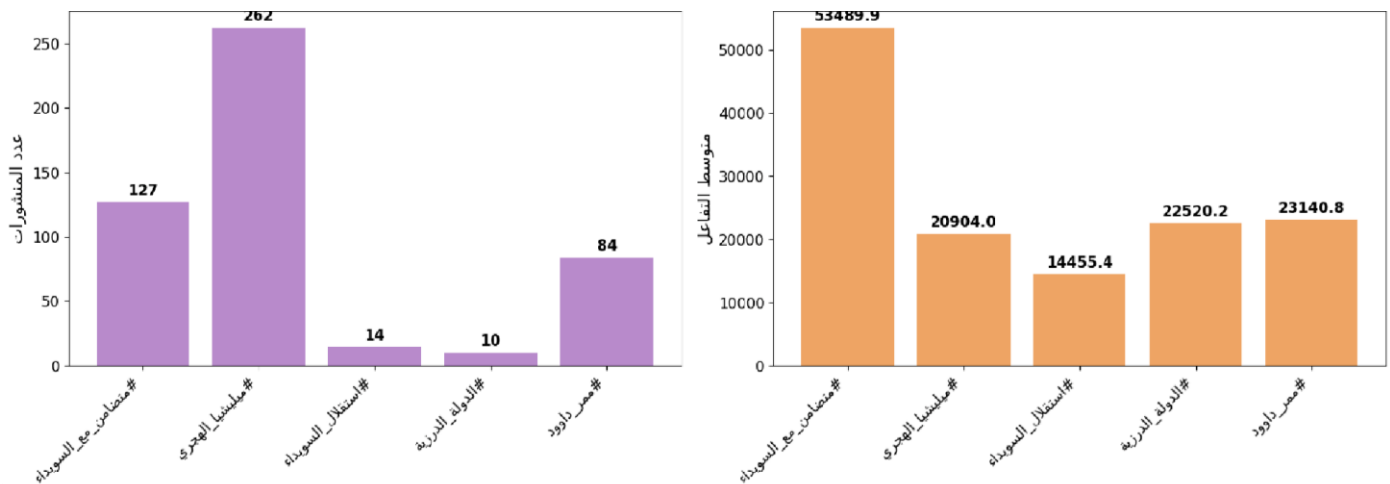


Figure 5: Posting volume and average engagement for the five selected hashtags. The left panel shows the number of posts associated with each hashtag, while the right panel shows the average engagement per hashtag. In both panels, the hashtags are listed from left to right as: “In Solidarity with As-Suwayda,” “al-Hijri’s Militia,” “Independence of As-Suwayda,” “the Druze State,” and “David’s Corridor.”

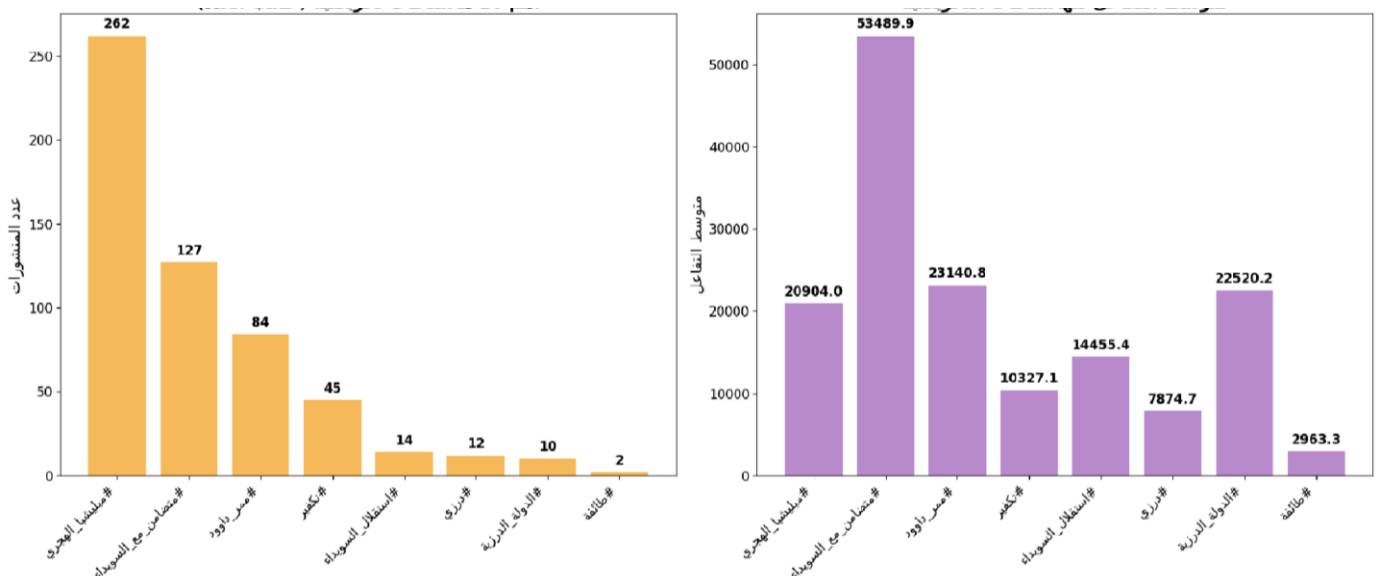


Figure 6: Posting volume and average engagement for the most prevalent hashtags associated with mobilizing and accusatory narratives. The left panel shows the number of posts associated with each hashtag, while the right panel shows the average engagement per hashtag. In both panels, the hashtags are listed from left to right as: “al-Hijri’s Militia,” “In Solidarity with As-Suwayda,” “David’s Corridor,” “Takfir” (accusing others of unbelief or apostasy), “Independence of As-Suwayda,” “Druze,” “the Druze State,” and “Sect.”

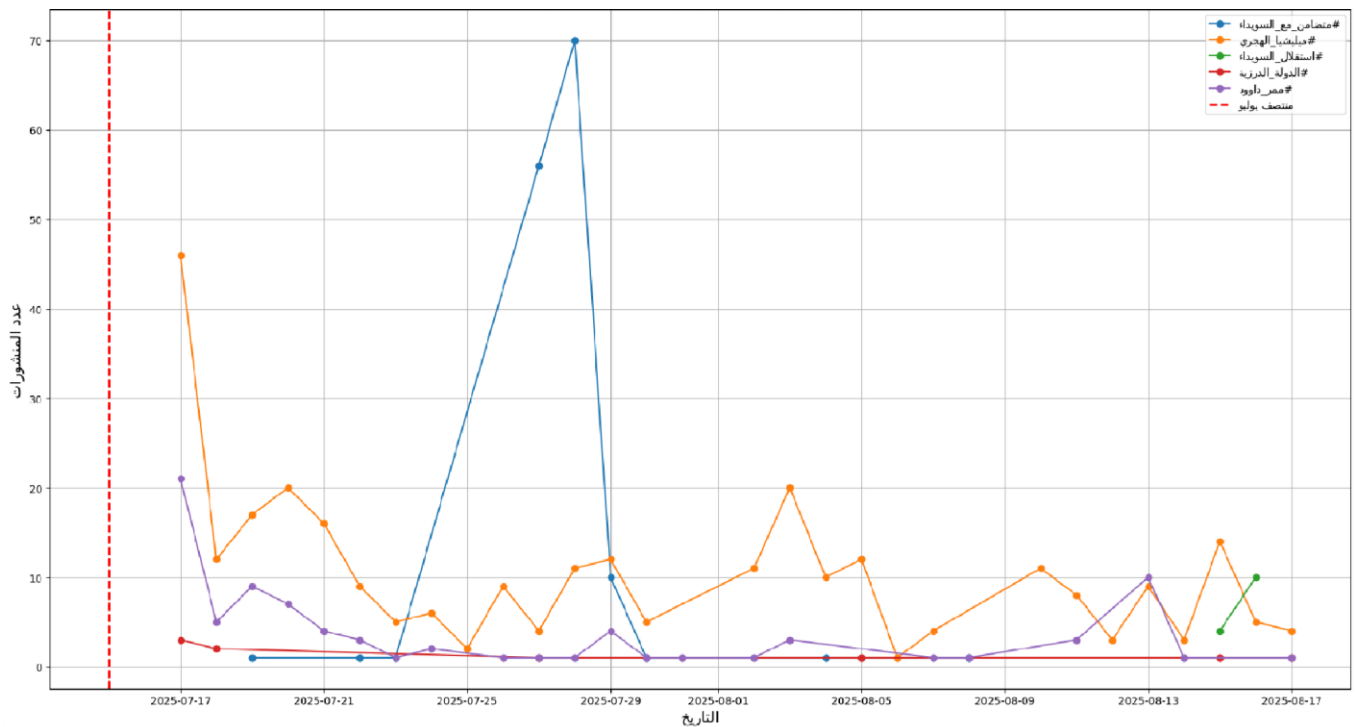


Figure 7: Temporal evolution of posting activity associated with the selected hashtags. The vertical axis shows the number of posts, while the horizontal axis shows the date. The legend, from bottom to top, includes: Mid-July, “David’s Corridor,” “the Druze State,” “Independence of As-Suwayda,” “al-Hijri’s Militia,” and “In Solidarity with As-Suwayda.”

5.5.2. Accounts Using the Selected Hashtags Most Frequently

The analysis tracks the accounts that used certain selected hashtags at the highest frequency, whether by adopting their content, relaying the news, criticizing it, or reposting it.

User/Group Name	Most Frequently Used Hashtags & No. of Uses
Syria al-Ghad	#Al_Hijri_Militia (75)
Mauro	#In_Solidarity_with_As_Suwayda, #Takfir (49)
Syrian Revolution Network	#David’s_Corridor, #Al_Hijri_Militia (23)
Fidaa Alhalabi	#In_Solidarity_with_As_Suwayda (12)
Syrian Revolution Coordination Committee in Artouz	#Al_Hijri_Militia, #Tribes (11)

Figure 8: Accounts with the highest use of selected hashtags associated with mobilizing and accusatory narratives.

5.5.3. Words Linked to Identity, Violence, and Contempt

The monitored words fell into three main groups: vocabulary linked to identity and affiliation, such as “Druze” (durzi, duruz), “Sunnis,” and “tribes”; vocabulary linked to violence, such as “slaughter” (dhabh), “throat-slitting” (nahr), and “raid” (ghazwa); and vocabulary carrying contemptuous or takfiri (excommunicatory) connotations, such as “batini” (esotericist), “murtadd” (apostate), “zindiq” (heretic), and “kafir” (infidel). Words in the first group carry no inciting connotation in themselves, while the second and third groups call for a deeper reading to determine whether the word was used to incite.

Word	Frequency	Number of users
Tribes ('asha'ir)	3,081	1,303
Druze [sing. masc.] (durzi)	3,014	1,566
Druze [sing. fem.] (durziyya)	2,901	1,518
Sect (ta'ifa)	2,220	1,276
Druze [pl.] (duruz)	1,723	1,021
Sunnis (sunna)	500	363
Sunni (sunni)	358	262
Tribes (qaba'il)	320	249
Slaughter (dhabh)	225	168
Denomination (madhhab)	154	120
Jews (yahud)	115	92
Zionism (sahyuniyya)	83	67
Shia [sing.] (shi'i)	73	60
Throat-slitting (nahr)	57	43
Esotericist (batini)	56	51
Shia [pl.] (shi'a)	54	43
Moustaches (shawarib)	50	40

Word	Frequency	Number of users
Creed (mu'taqad)	50	44
Esotericism (batiniyya)	48	43
Umayyad (umawi)	45	34
Neighbor (jari)	45	38
Bashar	33	32
Umayya	27	23
Apostate (murtadd)	25	22
Heretic (zindiq)	20	14
Majesty (jalala)	15	15
Infidel (kafir)	13	9
Raid (ghazwa)	13	13
Apostates (murtaddin)	11	11

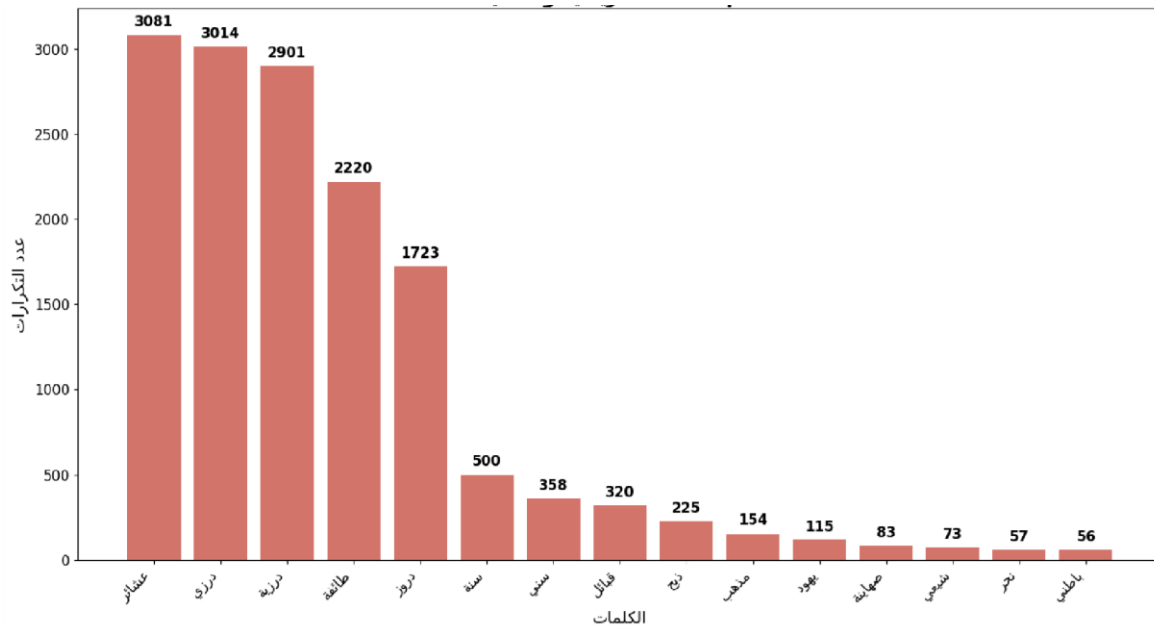


Figure 9: Frequency of selected identity-based and violence-related terms in the analyzed content. The vertical axis shows the number of occurrences, while the horizontal axis lists, from left to right: “tribes,” “Druze” (masculine singular), “Druze” (feminine singular), “sect,” “Druze” (plural), “Sunnis,” “Sunni,” “tribal groups,” “slaughter,” “religious denomination,” “Jews,” “Zionists,” “Shiite,” “throat-slitting,” and “esotericist.”

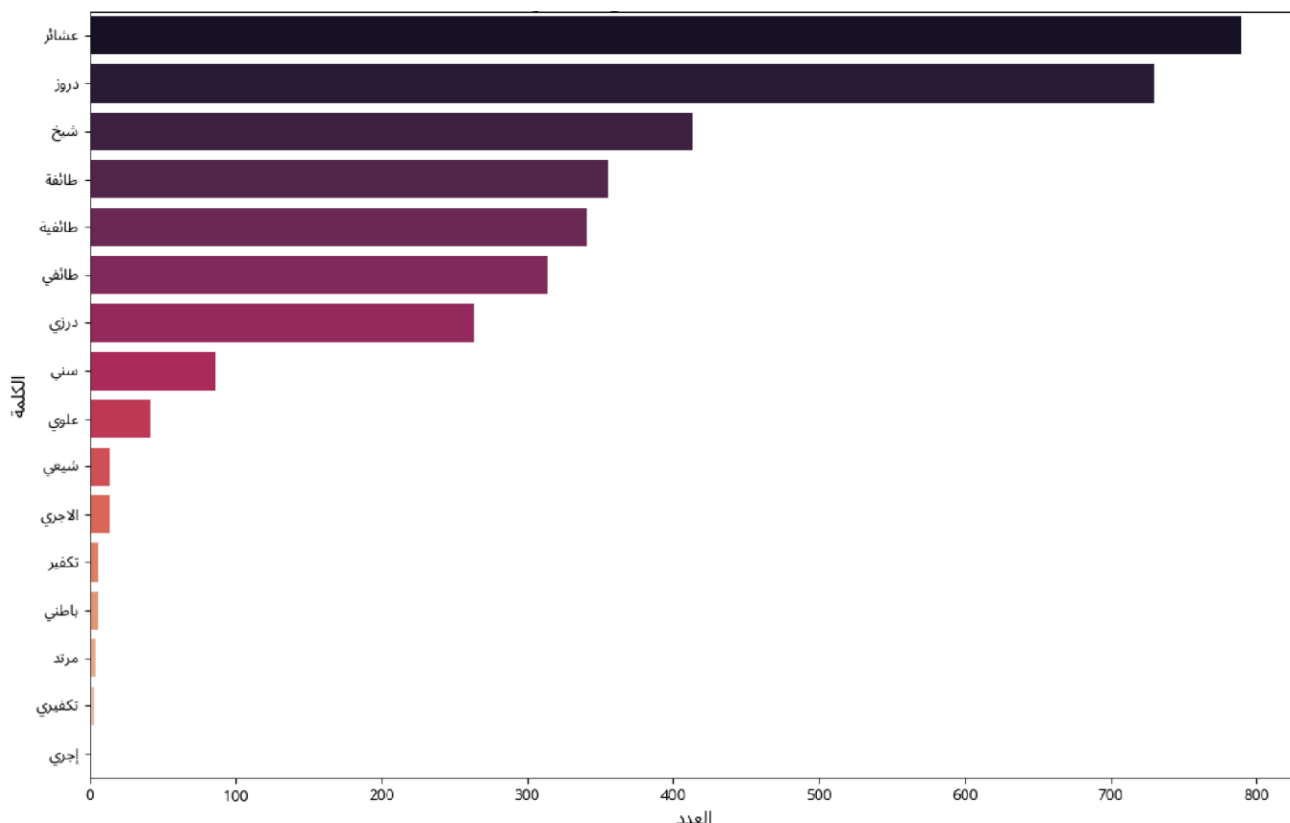


Figure 10: Frequency of selected identity-based, sectarian, and religiously charged terms in the analyzed content. The horizontal axis shows the number of occurrences, while the vertical axis lists, from bottom to top: “Ijri” (a derogatory wordplay on al-Hijri’s name), “Takfiri,” “Apostate,” “Esoteric,” “Takfir,” “al-Ijri” (a derogatory wordplay on al-Hijri’s name), “Shiite,” “Alawite,” “Sunni,” “Druze,” “Sectarian” (masculine form), “Sectarian” (feminine form), “Sect,” “Sheikh,” “Druze” (plural form), and “Tribes.”

5.5.4. Bigrams and Dominant Narratives

Bigram analysis helps identify the recurring frames used in describing the events. The recurrence of expressions such as “al-Hijri’s militia,” “David’s Corridor,” and “the independence of As-Suwayda” evokes narratives linking the conflict to rebellion, separatism, or the Israeli project.

Bigram	Number of occurrences
“Al-Hijri’s militia”	456
“David’s Corridor”	298
“The independence of As-Suwayda”	267

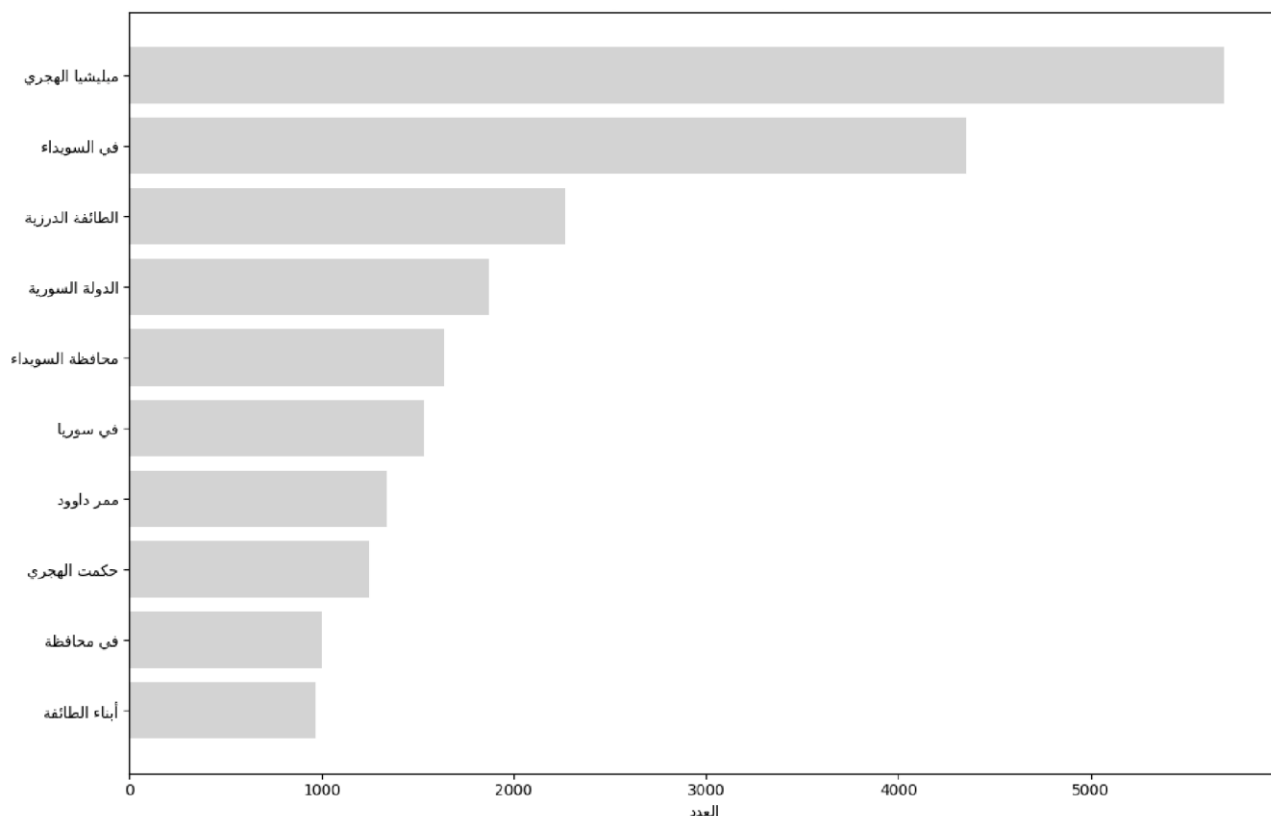


Figure 11: Frequency of the most common bigrams in the analyzed content. The horizontal axis shows the number of occurrences, while the vertical axis lists, from bottom to top: “Members of the Sect,” “In the Governorate,” “Hikmat al-Hijri,” “David’s Corridor,” “In Syria,” “As-Suwayda Governorate,” “the Syrian State,” “the Druze Sect,” “In As-Suwayda,” and “al-Hijri’s Militia.”

5.6. Analysis of Repeated Content and Repeat Users

The repetition of identical or near-identical texts across multiple accounts is one of the indicators of organized amplification, particularly when posting times converge and the same wording and hashtags are used.

5.6.1. The Most Repeated Posts

The most repeated posts centered on narratives of “al-Hijri’s militia,” tribal movements, weapons seizures, humanitarian convoys, Israel’s dream, and “David’s Corridor.” The repetition shows that these topics underwent broad amplification within the sample.

Abridged post content	Number of occurrences
Statement: tribes affirm that their operations are directed exclusively against “al-Hijri’s militia” and warn against...	45

Abridged post content	Number of occurrences
The Interior Ministry seizes a shipment of weapons and ammunition coming from “SDF militia” areas to...	38
Syrian Foreign Ministry: we condemn the blocking of a humanitarian convoy’s entry into As-Suwayda...	35
Statement by Sheikh Laith al-Balous on the As-Suwayda events, with strong condemnation of the bloody events...	34
“Tha’la” cleared of “al-Hijri’s militia” after the tribes take control of it	27
Part One: “Israel’s Dream” – the Golan–Euphrates road (David’s Corridor)	26
As-Suwayda: the Grand Mosque directly targeted by “al-Hijri’s militia”	24
Calls from “al-Hijri’s militia” requesting a disengagement force from Damascus...	22
Clarification: the news is correct regarding the arrest of Sheikh Yousef al-Jarbou...	21
Tribal forces manage to liberate the village of al-Khalidiya in the As-Suwayda countryside...	20
Part Three: Israel’s Dream – the Golan–Euphrates road (David’s Corridor), a new Middle East	20
Near-total collapse in the ranks of the collaborationist Hijri militia, with continued advance and control imposed over areas...	19
Final part: #Israel’s_Dream – the Golan–Euphrates road (David’s Corridor), a new Middle East	19
Agreement on the entry of General Security into all areas of #As-Suwayda...	18

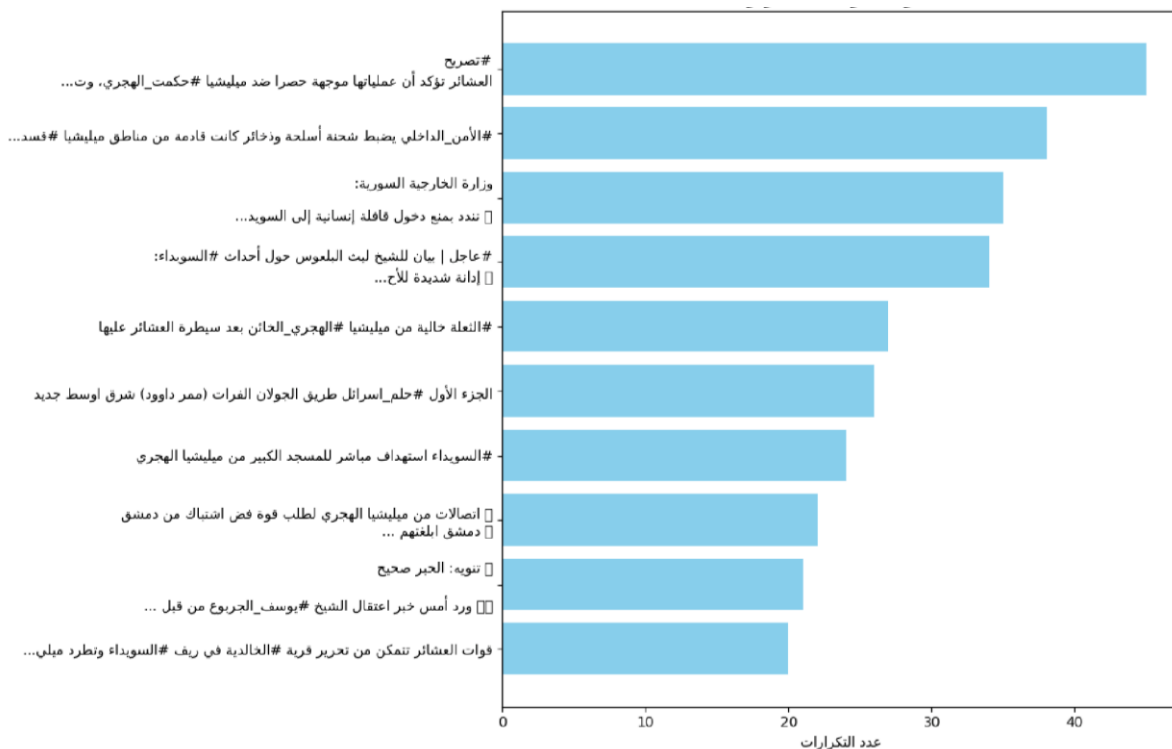


Figure 12: The ten most frequently repeated messages in the analyzed content. The horizontal axis shows the number of repetitions, while the vertical axis lists, from bottom to top, the following messages: “Tribal forces succeed in liberating the village of al-Khalidiya in the countryside of As-Suwayda and expel...”, “Notice: The news is accurate: yesterday, reports were received of the arrest of Sheikh Yousef al-Jarbou by...”, “Communications from al-Hijri’s militia requesting a force from Damascus to separate the fighting parties”, “As-Suwayda: the Grand Mosque directly targeted by al-Hijri’s militia”, “Part One: Israel’s dream—the road from the Golan to the Euphrates (David’s Corridor)”, “al-Tha’la is free of the traitorous al-Hijri militia”, “Urgent: a statement by Sheikh Laith al-Balous regarding the events in As-Suwayda”, “The Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemns the blocking of a humanitarian convoy to As-Suwayda”, “Internal Security seizes a shipment of weapons and ammunition that had come from areas under the SDF militia”, and “Statement: the tribes affirm that their operations are directed exclusively against Hikmat al-Hijri’s militia.”

5.6.2. The Users Posting the Most Repeated Content

The following chart shows the accounts that shared the highest number of repeated posts. The combination of dense repetition with similarity of texts and timing strengthens the hypothesis of amplification networks or coordination among them.

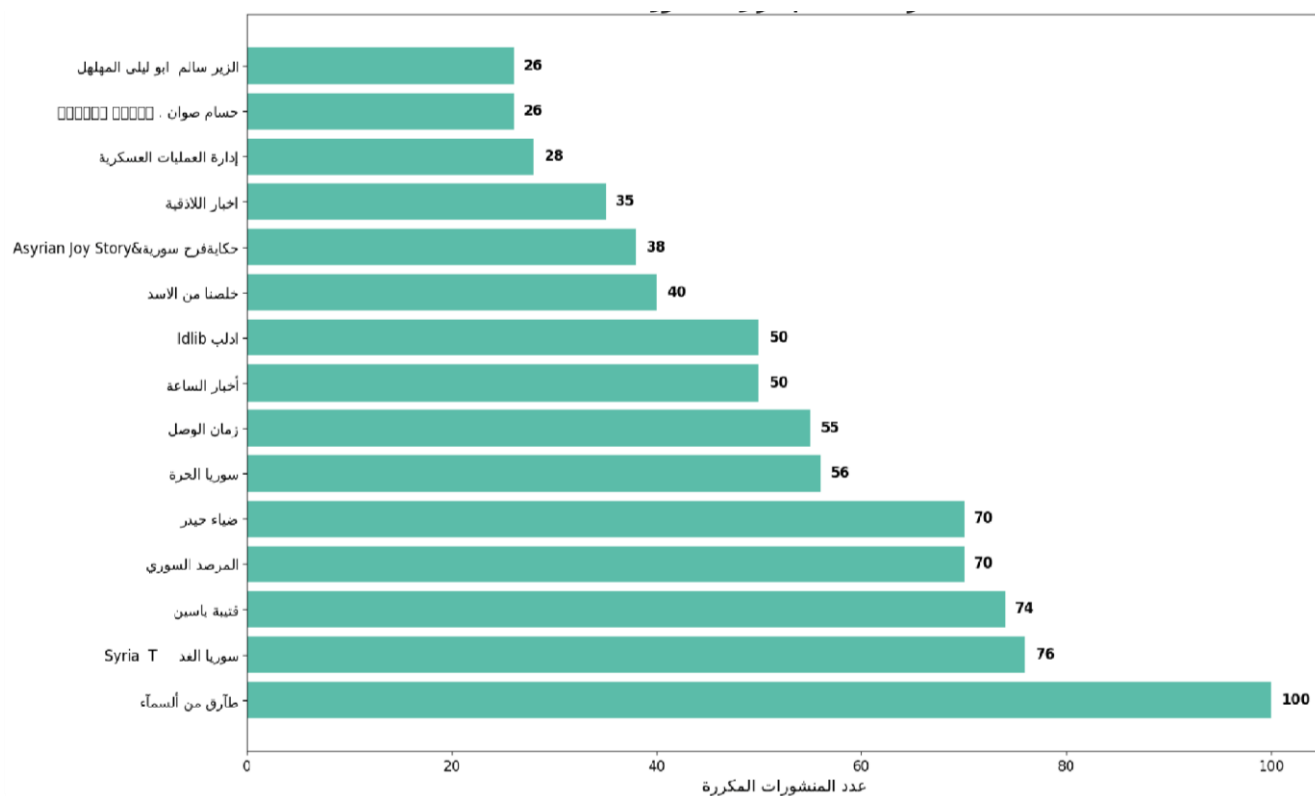


Figure 13: Accounts and pages that posted the highest volume of repeated content in the analyzed sample. The horizontal axis shows the number of repeated posts, while the vertical axis lists, from bottom to top: Tareq from the Sky, Syria al-Ghad, Qutaiba Yassin, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Daa Haidar, Free Syria, Zaman al-Wasl, Akhbar al-Sa'a, Idlib, Khalasna min al-Assad, A Syrian Joy Story, Akhbar al-Laziqiya, the Military Operations Administration, Hossam Sawwan, and al-Zeer Salem Abu Layla al-Muhalhil.

6. How Did Images of Druze Victims Help Fuel the Third Wave of Violence?

Now that the quantitative analysis has shown the intensity with which narratives and hashtags circulated and content was repeated across multiple accounts, understanding the impact of this discourse still depends on examining the materials themselves and the contexts of their use. This section therefore moves from general digital indicators to a qualitative analysis of specific cases, revealing how genuine images of Druze victims were reused, their identities and the circumstances of their deaths altered, to present them as victims from the Bedouin tribes.

These cases illustrate how visual disinformation was transformed from a mere inaccurate relaying of information into a tool for mobilizing the public and justifying retaliatory violence. On the morning of 17 July 2025, Akram Mizher was making his way through the streets of As-Suwayda city, where bodies lay scattered along the roadsides and inside cars and homes, heading to the house of his brother, Jawdat Mizher. Electricity, communications, and internet networks were cut off across most

of the governorate, after forces of the Ministries of Defense and Interior had entered As-Suwayda beginning on 14 July, with operations continuing until dawn on 17 July.

When Akram reached the house, he found his brother Jawdat and eleven members of the family dead inside it. According to his account and the testimony of an injured little girl who survived, members of the government forces entered the house on the evening of 16 July and separated the men from the women before opening fire on the members of the family. The women's bodies were found on the upper floor, while the bodies of the men and the children were found on the first floor.

Akram and his relatives began recovering the bodies in preparation for burial, at a time when the National Hospital in As-Suwayda, having filled with the wounded and the dead, was unable to receive any more victims. But another shock awaited the family once internet service returned: Akram found a photograph from the crime scene, showing the bodies of his brother's daughters, circulating in posts [claiming](#) that they were Bedouin women killed by Druze gunmen in the city of Shahba. Among those who circulated the image was the "Zeno al-Mahamid" channel, which is followed by hundreds of thousands.



Screenshot of a post published by Verify-Sy showing the claim that the image depicted a massacre committed by "Hikmat al-Hijri's" militia against a number of tribal women and girls." The post explains that this claim was false: the victims were members of a Druze family from As-Suwayda city who were killed by "armed men affiliated with the Syrian authorities on 16 July."

This was not an isolated case. The investigation documented the reuse of [dozens of images](#) and videos of Druze victims, some of whom had been killed during the first wave of violence, presented as victims from the Bedouin tribes. The disinformation thus went beyond distorting the context of an image to inverting the identities of victims and perpetrators, and deploying authentic material to underpin a narrative [contrary](#) to the facts it documents.

6.1. From the Facts on the Ground to an Inverted Digital Narrative

In the hours that followed the withdrawal of government forces and the announcement of a ceasefire agreement on 17 July, a narrative surged across social media platforms describing what the Bedouin tribes were facing as a “genocide” or “ethnic cleansing” carried out by the so-called “al-Hijri militias.” This narrative spread at a time when the residents of As-Suwayda were recovering the bodies of the victims of the first wave, while the communications blackout limited the ability of local witnesses and victims to present their account or correct the information in circulation.

This investigation reveals that the third wave of violence that As-Suwayda witnessed—the massing of tens of thousands of tribal fighters and their advance toward the governorate—was not merely a spontaneous response to events on the ground; it came in the context of a wide-ranging campaign of media disinformation and incitement, which contributed to mobilizing public opinion, rallying fighters, and escalating the violence against the Druze community.

According to the chronology of events, the campaign began hours after the withdrawal of government forces from As-Suwayda and the announcement of a ceasefire agreement, and after [the address](#) of transitional President Ahmad al-Sharaa in which he announced the withdrawal of official military forces and the handover of the security file to the Sheikhs al-‘Aql (the Druze spiritual leadership) and the local factions. In the meantime, some Bedouin areas within As-Suwayda witnessed acts of revenge, in which members of the tribes, including civilians, were killed.

Yet local testimonies and field documentation indicate that religious and community figures and local gunmen [intervened](#) in a number of areas to protect Bedouin civilians and prevent the circle of revenge from widening, particularly in the city of Shahba and its surroundings. The Spiritual Leadership of the Druze Muwahhidun, represented by Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, likewise [issued](#) a statement calling for members of the tribes to be respected and left unharmed.

The problem lies in the conversion of these facts into a mobilizing discourse that attributed collective responsibility to the Druze community, conflated the protection of civilians with armed mobilization, and presented unverified claims as established facts. Within a short span of time, claims of the “[beheading](#) of children,” the “rape of women,” and the “burning of civilians alive” were repeated, alongside characterizations such as “genocide,” “ethnic cleansing,” and “[large-scale massacres](#)”.

The timing of this content is especially significant: the surge in posts speaking of a “genocide of the Bedouin” on 17 July coincided with the spread of calls for “faz’a” and “nafir” and for marching on As-Suwayda. Within a brief period, the digital calls turned into actual movements by armed groups arriving from different governorates. The hashtag [#أنقذوا_بدو_السويداء](#) ([#Save_the_Bedouin_of_Suwayda](#)) was likewise used to aggregate images, clips, and posts that presented the events as an organized campaign of extermination, even though many items within it were misleading, undocumented, or attributed to unrelated incidents.

The repetition of the vocabulary used, the recycling of the same visual material, the proximity of posting times, and the use of an emotive discourse built on fear-mongering and sectarian alarm together constitute indicators of organized amplification or discursive coordination. By contrast, the sweeping violations committed against Druze civilians during the first wave received limited coverage from—or were altogether absent on—several of the platforms and accounts that led the “genocide of the Bedouin” narrative.

6.2. Indicators of a Coordinated Incitement and Disinformation Campaign

Analysis of the content published on the evening of 17 July shows that a number of influencers and media figures who adopted the transitional authority’s narrative, or produced coverage closely aligned with it, published, within a few hours of one another, material of similar content centered on the claim that the Bedouin tribes were being subjected to “genocide” at the hands of the Druze factions. Among the names identified by the investigation are [Jamil al-Hassan](#), [Hadi al-Abdullah](#), [Ahmad Hammoush](#), and [Muhannad Abu Zaid](#), whose accounts published clips and posts that garnered wide engagement and included claims of children being beheaded and of mass killings and displacement, alongside the use of images or clips some of which were later shown not to belong to Bedouin victims or to have been taken out of context.



الاعلامي مهند أبو زيد
17 يوليو 2025
مجازر جماعية بحق بدو السويداء
[#انقذوا_بدو_السويداء](#)



Screenshots of the posts published by Jamil al-Hassan, Hadi al-Abdullah, and Muhannad Abu Zaid.

When this media barrage is subjected to legal and human rights characterization, the application of the “six-part threshold test” set out in [the UN Rabat Plan of Action](#) (which analyzes: the context; the speaker; the intent; the content or form; the extent and nature of the speech’s dissemination; and the likelihood of imminent harm) makes abundantly clear that this discourse goes far beyond the bounds of legally protected freedom of expression. Charging the atmosphere with horrific, unsubstantiated accusations such as “genocide” and “the beheading of children,” in an environment of acute security and sectarian tension, and by actors with millions of followers, constitutes direct incitement to violence and hostility. The content may amount to advocacy of sectarian or religious hatred constituting incitement to hostility or violence within the meaning of [Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), and freedom of opinion cannot be invoked to justify it.

These claims take on an additional dimension when compared with what has been reported about the 2024 “Deterrence of Aggression” battle, in which a number of these media figures and influencers who took part in covering the military operations appeared speaking of a centralized media operation and a [distribution](#) of roles and messages during the battle.

Tracking these influencers’ sustained activity in crafting the narrative around issues of Syrian public affairs—from the events on the coast and in northeastern Syria to the files of transitional justice, the economy, and other issues occupying public opinion—shows that they adopt a unified narrative across all these issues. This provides indications of the possible existence of an organized media structure that has relied on coordination among influencers, activists, and media figures in prior and subsequent military and security contexts, making it essential to examine whether the synchronized posting patterns that appeared on 17 July arose spontaneously or within a more organized framework.

6.3. The Media Between Documentation and the Reshaping of Facts

The documentation shows that the visual material circulated during the As-Suwayda events was not always a neutral reflection of the facts. In some cases, images of victims were reused to change their identity and the party responsible for their killing; in other cases, operations in which people were led away and detained were depicted as “rescues,” or detainees were presented as persons undergoing legal procedures before being killed.

The danger of these practices is not limited to disinformation or the breach of professional standards; it extends to shaping public perception of the violations. When victims are presented as “outlaws,” or scenes of the dead and wounded are suppressed, or participants in an assault are conferred the status of “rescuers,” media material can contribute to justifying the violation, downplaying its gravity, or weakening the demand for investigation and accountability.

Such conduct represents a flagrant disregard of the [Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists](#) issued by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), specifically its first principle, which places the highest ethical responsibility on journalism and states that “Respect for the facts and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.” Manipulating the facts and altering the identity of victims is a fundamental violation of this principle, and a conversion of journalism from an instrument for revealing the truth into a means of concealing it.

Taken together, the testimonies point to a troubling pattern of entanglement between certain media practices and the security and military operations during the As-Suwayda events. In a number of pieces, the function of independent oversight and fact-checking receded in favor of accompanying the forces and cementing their narrative, while the voices of victims were absent or treated as a secondary element in a story that the camera scripted rather than documented. This calls for an independent investigation into the documented facts, a serious professional review of the performance of the outlets and platforms concerned, and guarantees that media work does not become a tool for concealing violations or reproducing a discourse that justifies them.

6.3.1. The Saraya Family Massacre

Among the most prominent examples is the case of the Saraya family. During the first wave of violence, [a video](#) documented armed elements affiliated with the Ministry of Defense leading unarmed civilians from the family to Tishreen Square in As-Suwayda city, before summarily executing them. The crime resulted in the killing of seven civilians, among them four brothers and one of their relatives; among the victims was a young man holding US citizenship.

Hours after the crime, images of the victims’ bodies began to spread on social media platforms as though they documented the killing of members of the Bedouin tribes at the hands of Druze gunmen. The sister of the four brothers confirmed, in an interview with the investigation team, that the family knew the identity of the victims and the circumstances of their killing, even as their images were being used in posts speaking of “massacres against the Bedouin.” Among those who republished this [narrative](#) was the media figure Ayman Abu Nuqta, who ran the “Ahrar Houran Gathering” platform and later took over the management of the Daraa branch of the SANA agency.



A post recasting the bodies of victims from the Saraya family as members of the Bedouin tribes.

The significance of this incident lies, on the one hand, in the inversion of the victims' identity, and, on the other, in the additional indication it provides that gunmen from the Bedouin tribes within As-Suwayda took part in the first wave of violence alongside the government forces. According to [a report](#) published by the As-Suwayda Documentation and Media Center, it was possible to identify one of the gunmen hailing from the Bedouin tribes in As-Suwayda, who appeared in commemorative photographs taken at the site of the massacre carrying his weapon, while the bodies of the Saraya family victims were visible behind him. These materials point to the presence or participation of local elements at the sites of the violations committed against Druze civilians, in contradiction with the narrative that later portrayed the events as an assault on members of the tribes.

6.3.2. An Infant's Body Turned into a Tool of the Disinformation Campaign

On the night of 16 July, the infant Selina Zayed Gharz al-Din, three months old, was killed alongside her mother, Walaa Gharz al-Din, near the Harat Tarabiyeh junction in As-Suwayda city. According to her father's testimony, the two were killed by direct gunfire from members of the government forces during the first wave of violence.

In the hours that followed, distressing photographs of the infant's body spread, among them a photograph showing her inside a cardboard box. The images were then [recirculated](#) on 17 July as belonging to a child from the Bedouin tribes killed at the hands of Druze gunmen. The "Zeno al-Mahamid" channel on Telegram contributed to spreading this narrative, before the image and the claim attached to it moved on to dozens of accounts and pages.



A post dated 17 July 2025 featuring the child Selina Gharz al-Din. The post claims that “al-Hijri’s Druze forces are killing Bedouin children in As-Suwayda.”

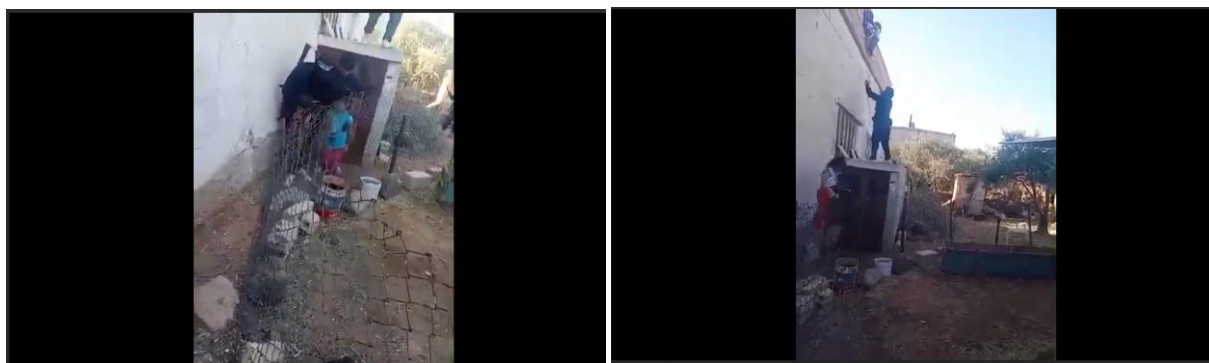
This case is one of many recurring instances of disinformation linked to the As-Suwayda events: the use of a genuine image of a real victim, followed by the alteration of her identity and of the party responsible for her killing. The image of Selina was thus transformed from evidence of the killing of an infant and her mother during the entry of government forces into material used to underpin a counter-accusation bearing no relation to the truth of their deaths.

6.3.3. From “Rescue” to Abduction: The Case of Majida Ridan and Her Family

A video spread that appeared at first glance to document the rescue of women and children from a village in the As-Suwayda countryside. It showed gunmen bringing members of a family out of a house that had come under attack, with Qusai al-Shammari presenting himself as rescuing them from “al-Hijri’s militias.” But the testimony of Majida Turki Ridan, who was among the women appearing in the footage, offered a radically different account.

Majida was at the family home in the village of Rdeimet al-Liwa in the northern As-Suwayda countryside, together with her husband, her son, her son’s wife, her daughter, and her three granddaughters, when tribal gunmen stormed the village during the third wave of violence. According to her statement, the attackers killed her husband, Marwan al-Khatib, her son Rabi’, and her son’s wife, Ru’a al-Atrash, then forcibly led her, her daughter, and her granddaughters out of the house. She says that traces of blood were still on the family members’ clothes, and that the bodies of her relatives remained where they lay, when the filming of the [clip](#) began.

Majida added that Qusai al-Shammari coached the women on what to say in front of the camera, pressing them to adopt a story according to which he had come to rescue them. After the filming stopped, the family was not taken to a hospital or a place of safety; instead, the family members were taken to the Hama countryside and handed over to another armed tribal group, which held them in captivity for more than ten days before their release as part of an exchange facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross.



Screenshots from the video recordings that presented the removal of the women and children as a rescue operation.



Screenshots from the site of the attack, showing the violent context that was concealed from the circulated filmed account.

During the family's captivity, Majida met another civilian named Hassan Salim al-Halabi. According to her testimony, al-Halabi was later transferred to General Security and held in Adra prison for months, before being released in February 2026 as part of another exchange.

This case does not concern a mere difference over the interpretation of a video; it reveals, according to the survivor's testimony, the production of a media narrative from inside a crime scene, after members of the family had been killed and before their abduction and unlawful confinement began. The footage conferred the status of "rescuers" on participants in the attack, and concealed from the public the killing, the forcible removal, and the captivity that followed the filming.

According to what the investigation documented, Qusai al-Shammari—who was one of the most prominent influencers to appear during the attacks of July 2025, and [images](#) of whom with officials of the transitional government circulated repeatedly after the July events—was [detained](#) for approximately two months and then released, without any announcement of the findings of the investigation or of the proceedings initiated against him. He also later appeared in a Syria TV report in the capacity of a "[relief activist](#)". These facts raise questions about the seriousness of accountability, and about the continued granting of public space to a person whose name, together with the testimonies of victims, is linked to grave allegations requiring an independent and transparent investigation.



Qusai al-Shammari in the car during the kidnapping of Majida, her daughter, and her granddaughters

6.3.4. The Severed Head: A Druze Victim Presented as a Bedouin Victim

On 18 July, [an image](#) of a severed head spread, attached to posts claiming that it belonged to a Bedouin civilian killed by Druze gunmen, and presented as further proof of the alleged “genocide” against the tribes. Yet a review of the image and an interview with the victim’s family showed that the head was that of Zaydan Hamza Dahbar, a nineteen-year-old Druze young man who lived in As-Suwayda and hailed from the Jabal al-Summaq area in Idlib governorate.

According to his mother, tribal gunmen abducted Zaydan from his home during the third wave of violence, before he was killed. The family learned of his fate only after the image of his head spread in posts claiming that he was a Bedouin civilian killed at the hands of the Druze.

In this case too, the disinformation was not limited to altering the victim’s identity; a victim of the tribal attack was used to justify the attack itself.

6.3.5. From Inciting Killing to a “Political Activist”

The investigation documented a post republished by the media figure Qutaiba Yassin on 17 July 2025, in which its author, Haidar al-Sahnawi, called for attacking the Bedouin neighborhood in the city of Shahba and killing its residents. Yassin used the post at the time to present al-Sahnawi as belonging to “al-Hijri’s militia” and as an indication of the existence of calls to target the tribes.

Yassin later deleted the post, as did al-Sahnawi from his own page. Less than a year later, al-Sahnawi appeared alongside Yassin in an interview in [a documentary film](#) titled “What Lies Behind the Separatist Project in As-Suwayda?”, which presented him as a political activist in the local movement, within a narrative hostile to Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri. Sources close to him also reported that he had joined the General Security apparatus of the transitional government.



The deleted post republished by Qutaiba Yassin, containing an explicit call to attack the Bedouin neighborhood in Shahba.

This incident lays bare the contradiction in the way the same person was deployed in the media: his post was first used to substantiate a collective accusation against the authority’s opponents, and he was later presented in the capacity of a political activist once his account fit the editorial frame of the new material. Such a practice calls for a greater degree of transparency regarding the backgrounds and public records of sources, especially where the content in question includes a call to kill civilians on the basis of their social identity.

6.4. Media at the Scene of Violations: From Relaying the Official Narrative to Constructing an Exculpatory Narrative

A review of material broadcast by official media outlets and by platforms that adopted the transitional authority's narrative, together with testimonies gathered by the investigation, shows that the role of certain media actors went beyond relaying official statements, to participating in the production of scenes and narratives that presented procedures and possible violations as legitimate security or humanitarian operations.

From the first hours, official discourse focused on characterizing the operations as part of the efforts to "extend state authority," "restore security and stability," and "[confine weapons to the hands of the state](#)". At [a press conference](#) he held on 19 July 2025, former Information Minister Hamza al-Mustafa affirmed that the state was "committed to confining weapons to the hands of the state and integrating all formations into the army," and that its policy rested on "one country, one government, one army."

The description of the local armed forces as "[outlaw groups](#)" likewise recurred in statements by the Presidency and the Ministries of Interior and Defense. On 16 July, the Ministry of Defense [announced](#) that "outlaw groups" had resumed attacking army and Internal Security forces despite the conclusion of a ceasefire agreement.

Relaying the government's narrative is a legitimate part of journalistic coverage, but it does not exempt [media institutions](#) from the duty of verification, independence, and making space for other accounts. The dominance of official statements, at the expense of civilian testimonies and independent sources, helped entrench a one-sided picture that presented the events as a confrontation between the state and outlaw adversaries, and obscured their social and political dimensions and the violations committed by government forces or the groups allied with them.

Some testimonies also reveal the presence of journalists and cameramen at sites that witnessed killings or summary executions, without the facts they witnessed being reflected in their subsequent coverage. In her testimony about a massacre that claimed members of her family, "Shan" said that journalists entered the scene accompanied by General Security personnel while the bodies and the wounded were still on site. She added that some of the wounded were alive, but one cameraman did not want to film them, saying he did not wish to portray the incident as a massacre, while another correspondent busied himself filming a person drawing his last breaths as the family pleaded for him to be given first aid.

The testimony concerns the massacre of the Radwan family in their home west of the Military Police building on al-Mihwari Street, on 13 July 2025. The correspondent Malek Abu Obeida, who works with the "Syria Alan" (Syria Now) platform affiliated with the Al Jazeera channel, was accompanying the transitional authority's forces. According to the material reviewed by the investigation, he acknowledged in [a video](#) broadcast on his personal page that he had been a witness to the incident, without

presenting it in his coverage as a massacre attributable to the transitional authority's forces or reflecting the full extent of what he had seen at the crime scene.

This incident raises questions about the limits of the professional role when the camera turns from an instrument for exposing a violation into an element present within its scene, without faithfully documenting the victims' suffering or holding the responsible party to account. This criticism does not rest on demanding that the journalist intervene on the ground in a manner that would expose him to danger, but on his duty not to distort what he witnessed, and to preserve his independence from the force he accompanies.

6.4.1. A Filmed Interview with a Man Before He Was Killed: The Case of Adham Abu Mahmoud

Another testimony shows how the camera was used to produce a false narrative. Adham Abu Mahmoud, a civilian who was helping to give first aid to the wounded and transport victims in his own car to the National Hospital, was stopped by a General Security patrol near the Tishreen roundabout. According to the account of his relative "Rana," after his detention he was forced to appear in [a video recording](#), during which he was asked in front of the camera whether he had been beaten, after which the security personnel announced that he would be "referred to the judiciary."



A still from the video recording in which Adham Abu Mahmoud appeared after his detention.



An image documenting the killing of Adham Abu Mahmoud.

The witness said that Adham was killed after the filming ended, summing up what happened in these words: “They forced him into a filmed interview, and said he would be referred to the judiciary; then they executed him once the filming was over.”

This video recording was not a means of verification or documentation; it was part of the production of a media image intended to display formal compliance with legal procedure at the very time violations were being committed outside the framework of the law.

6.4.2. Rewriting the Fate of Detainees and the Missing

The testimonies also reveal the role of some local platforms in reproducing official or quasi-official narratives concerning detainees. In the case of four young men from the Harfoush family who disappeared after their arrest, Jalal al-Harfoush, one of their relatives, said that their photograph was published in a news item claiming the arrest of three fighters from al-Hijri’s militias in the village of Tal al-Hadid. The family insists, however, that the young men were arrested in Deir al-Shaer, and that the photograph itself was taken there.



A post recasting young men from the Harfoush family as fighters arrested in a location different from the place where they were detained.

Such posts can contribute to obscuring the trajectory of a detention and conferring legitimacy on the arrest of persons whose fate remains unknown to their families. Presenting detainees as “fighters” without evidence also weakens concern for their rights, as though they were not civilians, and affects the public’s perception of the need to disclose their places of detention and to investigate whether they may have been subjected to enforced disappearance or other violations.

7. Recommendations

Syrians for Truth and Justice recommends the adoption of urgent and integrated measures to address the impact of the hate speech and media disinformation that accompanied the As-Suwayda events, and to ensure that official institutions and media and digital platforms are not used for incitement, for the justification of violations, or for obscuring the responsibility of their perpetrators.

7.1. To the Syrian Transitional Government

- Subject official media institutions and the media bodies affiliated with ministries to professional editorial standards and independence; prohibit their use as an instrument of propaganda, armed mobilization, or the justification of military operations; and enact clear legislation to that effect.
- Open investigations into the cases in which media coverage was used to produce narratives justifying killing, detention, or abduction, or to compel detainees and victims to appear in video recordings, while ensuring that no security, military, or media official proven to have been involved in these practices escapes accountability.
- Prohibit the participation of journalists and cameramen in the interrogation of detainees, and ban the filming of persons deprived of their liberty or the publication of their images and confessions before they are brought before the judiciary, given the violation this represents of the presumption of innocence, of dignity, and of the right to a fair trial.
- Protect civilians from all communities, and ensure that the protection of one group, or the response to violations committed against it, is not used as a pretext for armed mobilization, collective retaliation, or the targeting of another group, while affirming, in both discourse and practice, the individual nature of criminal responsibility.
- Guarantee the protection of journalists, human rights defenders, victims, and witnesses who expose violations or contradict the official narrative, and ensure that they are not subjected to threats, prosecution, or campaigns of defamation and accusations of collaboration or separatism.
- Develop a national policy for countering hate speech grounded in the standards of international human rights law—one that does not turn into a tool for criminalizing criticism or political opposition—confining restrictions to content that constitutes direct incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence, under clear and precisely defined legal conditions.

- Ensure that official statements and the remarks of officials do not employ generalizing or stigmatizing terminology in a manner that conflates civilians with combatants or attributes criminal responsibility to an entire population group.

7.2. To Media Outlets, Digital Platforms, Journalists, and Influencers

- Adopt the “six-part threshold test” set out in the UN Rabat Plan of Action as a mandatory assessment tool before publishing sensitive material in times of crisis, and train editorial staff to apply this test so as to discern the dividing line between legitimate freedom of expression and hate speech and sectarian incitement, ensuring that media coverage does not become a tool that increases the likelihood of imminent harm or violence on the ground.
- Adhere strictly to the Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists issued by the International Federation of Journalists, and in particular to its first principle, which affirms that “Respect for the facts and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.”
- Independently verify the identity of victims and perpetrators and the date and location of images and video clips before publishing them, and refrain from using material of unknown origin, or material issued by the parties to the conflict, without indicating its source and the limits of its verification.
- Cease using characterizations that contribute to mobilizing the public and justifying violence and collective stigmatization—such as “genocide,” “ethnic cleansing,” “collaboration,” “treason,” and “separatism”—as though they were established facts without a documented basis.
- Distinguish between civilians and combatants, and between political or military actors and the communities to which they belong, and refrain from generalizing the words or deeds of individuals or factions to the Druze, the Bedouin, or any other Syrian component.
- Publish clear corrections when information is proven to be wrong, or the identity of victims or the context of images is shown to have been inverted, rather than merely deleting the original post, and inform the public of the nature of the error and the extent of its spread.

7.3. To the International Community and the Entities Supporting Syrian Media

- Support independent investigations, documentation mechanisms, and the preservation of digital evidence related to the As-Suwayda events, and ensure that the role of incitement and disinformation is included in the assessment of the responsibilities of the parties and actors who contributed to creating the environment of violence.

- Condition the support provided to Syrian governmental and media institutions on respect for human rights standards, editorial independence, and non-discrimination, and avoid funding entities proven to have been involved in incitement or in covering up violations.
 - Support long-term training programs for journalists and media institutions in digital verification, conflict-sensitive coverage, the protection of victims, and hate speech, provided that they are coupled with accountability mechanisms and not merely token training activities.
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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.

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SUWAYDA PRESS



About Suwayda Press

is an independent news network founded by journalists from the As-Suwayda Governorate in southern Syria. It is dedicated to covering news and issues in southern Syria, documenting human rights violations, and advocating for women's rights through professional reports across the political, economic, and social spheres.

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