

March 2024

Call for proposals: Research paper on the impact of the Syrian war on the Alawite community

Background

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a political foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany. With more than 100 offices worldwide, KAS fosters international cooperation and development and promotes the principles of liberal democracy and social market economy. The KAS Lebanon Office, founded in 2015 in Beirut, works on topics with political, social and economic relevance in Lebanon. In addition to that, KAS Lebanon deals with issues of forced displacement, flight and migration in the Levant. Especially the repercussions of the civil war in Syria are felt throughout the region and need to be addressed if tenable solutions for greater stability and prosperity ought to be found. In this regard, the KAS Lebanon Office seeks to implement projects and further knowledge that address the root causes of flight and migration as well as related ramifications for affected populations in the region.

Research Context

The Alawite community in Syria, constituting just around 10 percent of the nation's population, has traditionally been regarded as the steadfast support base for the ruling Assad family, itself belonging to the sect. Since Hafez al-Assad strategically elevated the religious minority to consolidate his political power, the Alawites have been under a state-sponsored system of political patronage, enjoying preferential access to public sector, military, and intelligence positions. Following the onset of the civil war in 2011, the Assad regime's reliance on the sect in army units and militias across the country grew further. This political and military instrumentalization of one community further fueled sectarian sentiments among predominantly Sunni protesters, reinforcing Assad's narrative as the sole guarantor of security for Alawites (and other minorities) against Islamic radicalism in Syria. Despite the perception of the Alawites being closely intertwined with the Assad regime, only a small fraction has reaped political and economic benefits, while the majority of them face challenges mirroring those of their fellow Syrians, contending with economic downturns, displacement and security concerns. Additionally, the Alawite community has suffered disproportionate losses of young sect members due to their conscription into the army and prolonged reserve duty. At the same time, a relatively small number has fled abroad throughout the war, choosing instead to move to Alawite majority areas within Syria that remained relatively safe. As a consequence, today, comparatively few members of Alawite families reside abroad who could send back remittances and thereby alleviate some of the economic difficulties faced by those relatives remaining in Syria. While dissent and opposition from within the community against Assad has always existed, dissatisfaction with his rule has grown as living standards in Syria deteriorated. The February 2023 earthquake, which also impacted Alawite towns and villages along Syria's coastal region, stands as a recent example that triggered renewed criticism from within Assad's loyalty base and original homeland, as its inhabitants lamented the lack of assistance provided by their government. Criticism is often voiced on social media, since younger generations in particular appear increasingly disillusioned with the Syrian regime. Although Assad has used state repression to clamp down on dissidents and project an image of strength and victory towards the outside, internal challenges and dissatisfaction within his traditionally staunchest supporter base contradict this narrative.

Understanding the effect of the war on the Alawite community of Syria is vital not only for fostering post-conflict cohesion in the future but also for finding potential entry points for localized solutions at present. Here, the identification of constructive local forces including civil society actors and organizations, religious leaders and dignitaries, who enjoy legitimacy among their constituencies and may thus facilitate bottom-up community rebuilding processes and reconciliation, is of great significance.

Objective

The commissioned research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic and political transformations that have occurred within the Alawite community as well as in the group's relation with other relevant groups/actors since the outbreak of the war. Aspects that should be explored include but are not limited to:

- **Giving a brief historic background** (pre-2011) to contextualize the situation of Alawites in Syria
- **Analyzing the impact of the war on the Alawite community**, looking at relevant socio-economic and political aspects including:
 - Changes in dynamics within the Alawite community such as possible alterations in identities, loyalties, functions, flight/migration behavior
 - Changes in dynamics with other (religious/ethnic) communal groups in Syria and level of sectarianization
 - Alawites relationship with the Syrian regime as well as connections to other relevant political and/or militant groups
- **Identifying current actors**, groups, and organizations that hold authority/legitimacy within the Alawite community
- **Analyzing their potential role in finding localized solutions** towards community rebuilding, reconciliation, and (post-conflict) social cohesion
- **Providing recommendations for European/German policymakers** for exploring novel approaches towards localized solutions based on the research findings

Deliverables

A research paper with approximately **6,000 – 8,000 words** on the above-mentioned topic to be delivered until the **16th of June 2024**. The presumed total workload is anticipated to range between 12 to 15 working days.

Submission

We invite interested researchers and scholars to submit:

1. A two-page **research abstract** with a clearly formulated research structure, methodology and budget.
2. An up-to-date **curriculum vitae** describing their experience and any other relevant information

The application should be submitted by email to **anne.bauer@kas.de**. The deadline is the **31st of March 2024**.