Ba'ath Party Elections 2024.. Restructuring and Assad's Control Dynamics

Author: Muhsen Almustafa

Analysis Paper

Omran for Strategic Studies

Is an independent research institution seeks to a leading role in the scientific and intellectual building of both state and society, not only in Syria but in the entire region. The center aspires to become a reference for informing policies and devising strategies.

Omran Center was established in November 2013 as an institution that seeks to be a main reference and a supporting entity to the Syrian cause in the areas of politics, development, economics and local governance. The center publishes studies and papers that complement the work of other institutions interested in the future of

Syria and support the decision-making process, while interacting through specialized platforms to achieve informational and analytical integration and draw a map of the scene on the ground.

The center's outputs depends on analyzing reality and its complex dimensions in a manner that results in deconstructing problematic issues and determining needs and aspirations, which enables us to inform and plan policies for different actors and decision makers.

One of the Syrian Forum program's

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

- The Ba'ath Party elections on May 4, 2024, during the General Conference, were part of Assad's efforts to **reshape and reorganize the power centers** within the Ba'ath Party to align with the regime's requirements and challenges. These elections came after years of implementing new Internal Regulations, modifying the mechanism for selecting the party's candidates in the 2020 legislative elections, and establishing an election committee in preparation for the conference.

- The number of seats on the Central Committee **increased to 125 from 80**, with General Secretary Bashar al-Assad **appointing 45 members**. The members invited by Assad competed against those elected from the branches. As a result, only 49 members from the branches gained seats on the Central Committee, compared to 18 invited members and 13 members from the Ba'ath Party bloc in Parliament. Additionally, Bashar al-Assad directly appointed 45 more members.

- Based on a comprehensive analysis of the Central Committee members, it was determined that **22 of them served on the previous committee**, **77 are employed by state** institutions, and there are also **members from the military** or individuals linked to **militias and security** and military networks, some of whom are under sanctions.

- The provinces of **Latakia, Tartus, and Homs** dominated as a place of origin for Central Committee members, comprising 37.6%, compared to 23.3% for Damascus, Rural Damascus, and Aleppo, while the remaining percentage was distributed among other provinces. Only 20 women were elected to the Central Committee, 11 of whom were directly appointed by Bashar Al-Assad.

- The committee included **68 Sunnis, 40 Alawites, 10 Christians, 5 Druze, and 2 Ismailis**. This sectarian distribution reflects the **demographic makeup** of the country to some extent but also shows deviations, particularly with the significant representation of Alawites, who constitute the core of the ruling elite.

- The elections resulted in an entirely **new central leadership**, consisting of 14 members plus Bashar al-Assad, including 13 members who work in state institutions, among whom 3 hold high-level government positions as Minister of Defense and Prime Minister, 3 military personnel, and 3 sanctioned individuals.

- The election results generally revealed that the party leadership **engaged in misleading tactics and manipulated** the branch representation percentages and results, marginalizing some popular cadres at the branch level by conducting the elections as a single electoral district to create a mechanism for central control.

- The elections, its details, and the dynamics of Bashar al-Assad's intervention suggest a **re-engineering of power centers** within the party and the regime's philosophy regarding the form of political power (Ba'ath) and its ability to overcome stagnation and dominate the new scene, regardless of any political context.

- This restructuring indicates an effort to **integrate high-ranking state officials** into the party's central decision-making body, ensuring close alignment between the state's executive functions and the party's leadership.

Introduction

The Ba'ath Party held its General Conference on May 4, 2024, marking a significant event where the Central Committee and Central Leadership of the party were elected rather than appointed directly. The elections followed the mechanism set by the Supreme Electoral Commission, which was announced at the end of 2023. The conference also saw the unanimous election of Bashar al-Assad as the party's General Secretary.

This conference is the first outcome of a supposed "reform" plan that the party initiated in 2017 when the National Leadership was dissolved and replaced by the "National Council" as an advisory body.[1] In 2018, the party continued its plan by adopting new Internal Regulations, which included the development of some basic designations for the party's bodies and their responsibilities.[2]

The Ba'ath Party remained committed to its previous slogans, even though they had practically expired and were no longer suitable for cross-border influence. The implementation of the plan led to the party's retreat to the local level,[3] which allowed the party's leadership to exert more control and apply the new strategy to align with the challenges posed by the events after 2011.

Signs of change began to appear in the Ba'ath Party's preparations for the 2020 parliamentary elections, where "party nomination" was adopted as a new mechanism for selecting the party's candidates. This nomination process allowed branch members to vote for candidates officially for the first time.[4] This shift from appointment to a voting process represented a change in the "selection" center from the "Central Leadership" to the "party bases".[5] However, the Central Leadership retained the final selection right without adhering strictly to the ranking results, which meant that the leadership could exclude some of the most popular figures within the party, preventing them from running in the parliamentary elections on behalf of the Ba'ath Party.[6]

The recent changes and elections in the Ba'ath Party raise several questions about the reality of the change in the party's methodology and its internal elections. It also raises questions about whether these are merely superficial changes or reflect a real shift in decision-making

---

[1] The "National Leadership" included in its ranks the "regional secretaries" of the Ba'ath Party present in some Arab countries. These parties were required to operate according to the same "internal system" and mechanisms, with their reference point being the "National Leadership" based in Damascus.

[2] The terminology of the party hierarchy became as follows: General Conference instead of National Conference, Secretary-General instead of National Secretary, Central Command instead of National Command, Assistant Secretary-General instead of National Assistant Secretary. While the Central Committee and the titles of the chain of command from the branch to the sub-branch remained unchanged.

[3] Rayan Muhammad: **"Al-Assad approves the Ba'ath structuring projects: national retreat and internal expansion",** Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed website, Publish Date: 09/10/2018, link: https://bit.ly/4dWPsM7

[4] In earlier times, before adopting the party nomination mechanism, the Ba'ath Party leadership conducted nomination processes without resorting to branch-level elections. These processes were more like gauging opinions on who could be nominated for positions.

[5] Abdullah Suleiman Ali: **"Partisan reconciliation between reform and confrontation",** Al-Ba'ath Newspaper, Publish Date: 20/06/2020, link: https://bit.ly/4dXQlEd

[6] The "party nomination" process cannot be considered democratic, even though it initially involves voting. It undergoes a filtering process towards the end and in actual practice, leading to the exclusion of individuals who ranked high in the "nomination." They are replaced by less popular figures within the party. For example, "Mohammad Khair Serioul" was excluded from the list of candidates despite securing the first place in the nomination for Rural Damascus province. Similarly, Musa Abdul Noor, the head of the Journalists' Union, who ranked 12th in the nomination, was replaced by another individual who ranked 19th. For more details, refer to Ammar Yasser Hamo: **"Under the Pretext of 'Party Nomination': The Regime Reveals the Weights of Currents within the Ruling Ba'ath and Overturns Them"**, Syria Direct, Publish Date: 22/07/2020, Link: https://bit.ly/44Y0tsx

mechanisms within the party. Additionally, it explores the regime's philosophy towards the party and Bashar al-Assad's maneuvers within it.

This paper will focus on analyzing this electoral process as an entry point to understand the trajectory of the Ba'ath Party's reformation and its political implications. The analysis will track the elections and their mechanisms, examine the data on the winners and their backgrounds, determine the representation percentages of the Central Committee members and the branches they came from, and trace them to the Central Leadership to verify claims of a change in the party's methodology. It will also provide an interpretation of these elections to understand the state of the party after 2011 and its relationship with the state.

Election Committee for the First Time

At the end of 2023, the "Central Committee"[7] of the Ba'ath Party issued a decision to form the Supreme Committee to oversee the party elections. This decision was based on Article 75 of the party's internal regulations, which allows the Central Committee to undertake this task. The committee consisted of 9 members, chaired by "Khalil Mashhadia," a Shia from Damascus. The remaining members included 5 Sunnis and 3 Alawites from the provinces of Damascus, Homs, Hama, Tartus, and Daraa.[8]

The committee worked on the ground, visiting the provinces and university branches, and established a methodology for the election process. It reviewed and scrutinized several points not covered in the regulations approved by the Central Committee meeting at the end of 2023. The most important issues included the matter of non-confirmed party members in branches with special conditions and how this affected the representational numbers in the expanded meeting.[9] Additionally, the committee addressed whether a candidate who wins at the local conferences should be allowed to withdraw at the branch level.

During the first months of 2024, elections were held at the local level in the sub-branches, then at the branch level, followed by branch conferences to elect representatives from each branch to participate in the "General Conference." Eventually, 405 members representing provincial and major university branches (Damascus, Aleppo, Al-Ba'ath, Tishreen) were elected, along with winners from elections within the Ba'ath Party bloc in the Parliament.

The decision issued in 2014, which required the confirmation of active membership as proof of loyalty to the party and the regime, played a crucial role in excluding those who did not confirm their membership. The variation in the number of confirmed active members in each branch significantly impacted the branch's share of Central Committee members.[10] Consequently, Tartus province had the largest share with 8 members, compared to major provinces like Damascus and Aleppo.

---

[7] The Central Committee is the highest party body after the Central Leadership. It currently has 125 members. The Central Leadership is elected from within its members. It ranks below the Central Leadership and is directly accountable to the party's General Conference.

[8] Researcher monitoring.

[9] In 2014, the then Leadership of the Ba'ath Party undertook an organizational measure called "confirming membership for active members." This process validated the membership of actively involved members, who were subsequently allowed to participate in the recent elections.

[10] There are several levels of membership within the Ba'ath Party, but the statuses of "supporting member" (النصير) and "active member" (العامل) are the most used.

Crowding Out the Results of Branch Elections

On April 22, 2024, the Central Leadership of the Ba'ath Party issued Decision No. 379[11] which amended the previous Decision No.378 outlining the details for the expanded meeting of the Central Committee. This decision stipulated that members of the previous Central Committee and the newly elected members from the branches would be invited to the meeting. Additionally, it allowed Bashar al-Assad, in his capacity as "General Secretary," to invite several "comrades" to the expanded Central Committee meeting. The decision defined the election mechanisms, the agenda for the General Conference, and the number of new Central Committee members, specifying that 80 members would be elected in a single national district, along with 45 members appointed directly by the "General Secretary." Notably, the previous Central Committee consisted of only 80 members.

Subsequently, two circulars were issued, allowing anyone named in the first article[12] of the previous decision to run for Central Committee membership and anyone invited as an "original member,"[13] thereby permitting those invited by the "General Secretary" to attend the conference to also run. This meant that the Central Leadership did not limit the election of the 80 Central Committee members to those who had already succeeded in the branch elections but also allowed those invited by Bashar al-Assad to compete for these seats. Furthermore, Assad had the right to appoint an additional 45 members.

Several governors ran as candidates for the provinces they served, then nominated themselves from their original provincial branches or university branches where they worked.[14] Other governors nominated themselves based on their invitation by the "General Secretary"[15] and ultimately, several succeeded in gaining membership in both the Central Committee and the Central Leadership.

By the end of April 2024, the number of candidates for Central Committee membership was announced, with 344 candidates competing for 80 seats.[16] Of these, 252 were members who had originally succeeded in the branch elections, making up 73.3%, 67 were members invited by Bashar al-Assad, accounting for 19.5%, and the remaining 25 were members who succeeded from the Parliament bloc, representing 7.2%.

All these candidates competed for branch seats, though their methods of entering the Central Committee elections varied. The following figure illustrates the share of each branch, the number of candidates from each, and their distribution percentages.[17]

---

[11] **"Resolution 379" issued by the Central Command"**, the official page of the Ba'ath Party on Facebook, Publish Date: 22/04/2024, link: https://bit.ly/3wUTdBh

[12] **"Circular issued by the Central Command"**, the official page of the Ba'ath Party on Facebook, Publish Date: 25/04/2024, link: https://bit.ly/4dZxXLw

[13] **"Circular issued by the Central Command"**, the official page of the Ba'ath Party on Facebook, Publish Date: 29/04/2024, link: https://bit.ly/3VdZlhk

[14] The Governor of Rural Damascus, "Safwan Abu Saada", ran in the Rural Damascus branch elections and won unopposed, then nominated himself from the Suwayda branch. Similarly, the Governor of Raqqa participated in the Raqqa branch elections and then nominated himself from the Idlib branch. This pattern was also followed by the governors of Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, Latakia, Quneitra, and Tartus.

[15] The Governor of Deir ez-Zor at the time, "Fadel Najjar," and the Governor of Hasakah, "Louay Sayouh," along with others, were also invited.

[16] According to the announcement on the official Ba'ath Party page, 343 members were nominated to run in the Central Committee elections. However, the total number of candidates amounted to 344. For more: https://bit.ly/3yBCR0P

[17] In the paper in general, please distinguish between "from branch" which means the member came from branch elections, and " On behalf of the branch" which indicates that the member was invited to the General Conference and run for this branch.

The Distribution of Candidates for the Central Committee Elections

Branch Quota	Branch	Number of Candidates	Elected from branch	Invited Members	Elected from Parliament	Distribution of candidates
5	Damascus	25	17	6	2	68% / 24%
7	Rural Damascus	30	23	5	2	77% / 17%
3	Quneitra	12	8	4	0	67% / 33%
5	Suwayda	27	22	4	1	81% / 15%
4	Daraa	16	14	0	2	87.5% / 12.5%
7	Homs	28	22	4	2	79% / 14%
7	Hama	26	18	7	1	69% / 27%
8	Tartus	38	34	2	2	89%
7	Latakia	35	25	8	2	71% / 23%
3	Idlib	11	5	4	2	45.5% / 36.3% / 18.2%
6	Aleppo	28	16	8	4	57% / 29% / 14%
3	Raqqa	7	4	2	1	57% / 29% / 14%
3	Deir ez-Zor	11	5	4	2	45.5% / 36.3% / 18.2%
4	Hasakah	18	15	1	2	83% / 11%
2	Damascus University	12	9	3	0	75% / 25%
2	Al-Baath University	6	3	3	0	50% / 50%
2	Tishreen University	7	6	1	0	86% / 14%
2	Aleppo University	7	6	1	0	86% / 14%
80	Total	344	252	67	25	73.3% / 19.5%

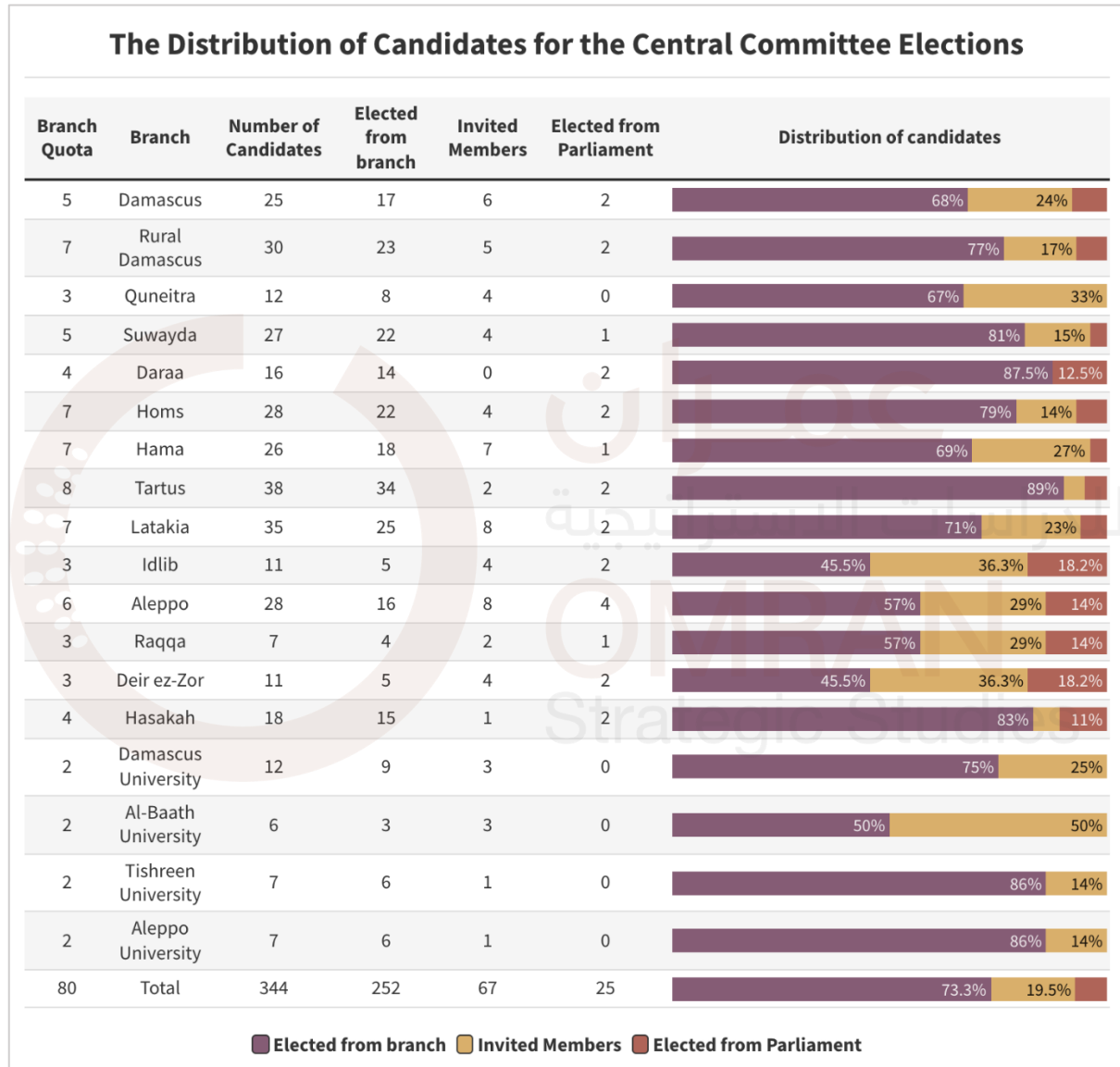■ Elected from branch ■ Invited Members ■ Elected from Parliament

Figure (1): Distribution of Candidates for the Central Committee Elections

General Conference: Appointments Under the Guise of Elections

After months of preparations, the General Conference of the Ba'ath Party was held on May 4, 2024. During the conference, Bashar al-Assad was unanimously elected as General Secretary, and 80 members were elected to the Central Committee. Following this, the General Secretary appointed 45 members directly. Among these appointees were individuals holding high-level state positions, such as the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, the Speaker of Parliament, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, along with General Maher al-Assad, and others. Additional appointees included active or retired officers, individuals linked to militias, and former members of the previous Central Committee. In contrast, several prominent figures were

excluded.[18] Notably, all members of the old Central Leadership, including Hilal al-Hilal, who had served as the Assistant General Secretary for years, were also excluded.

Central Committee Election

The following table displays the results of the elections for the 80 contested seats. It is evident that the success rate of candidates from the branches was lower compared to those invited by the General Secretary in branches such as Damascus, Rural Damascus, Quneitra, Hama, Latakia, and Aleppo, as well as in distant branches like Deir Ezzor and Hasakah. Conversely, the success rate was high in the branches of Tartus and Homs, suggesting that the party leadership played a role in structuring these branches in favor of the invited candidates. The success rates by branch are distributed as follows:
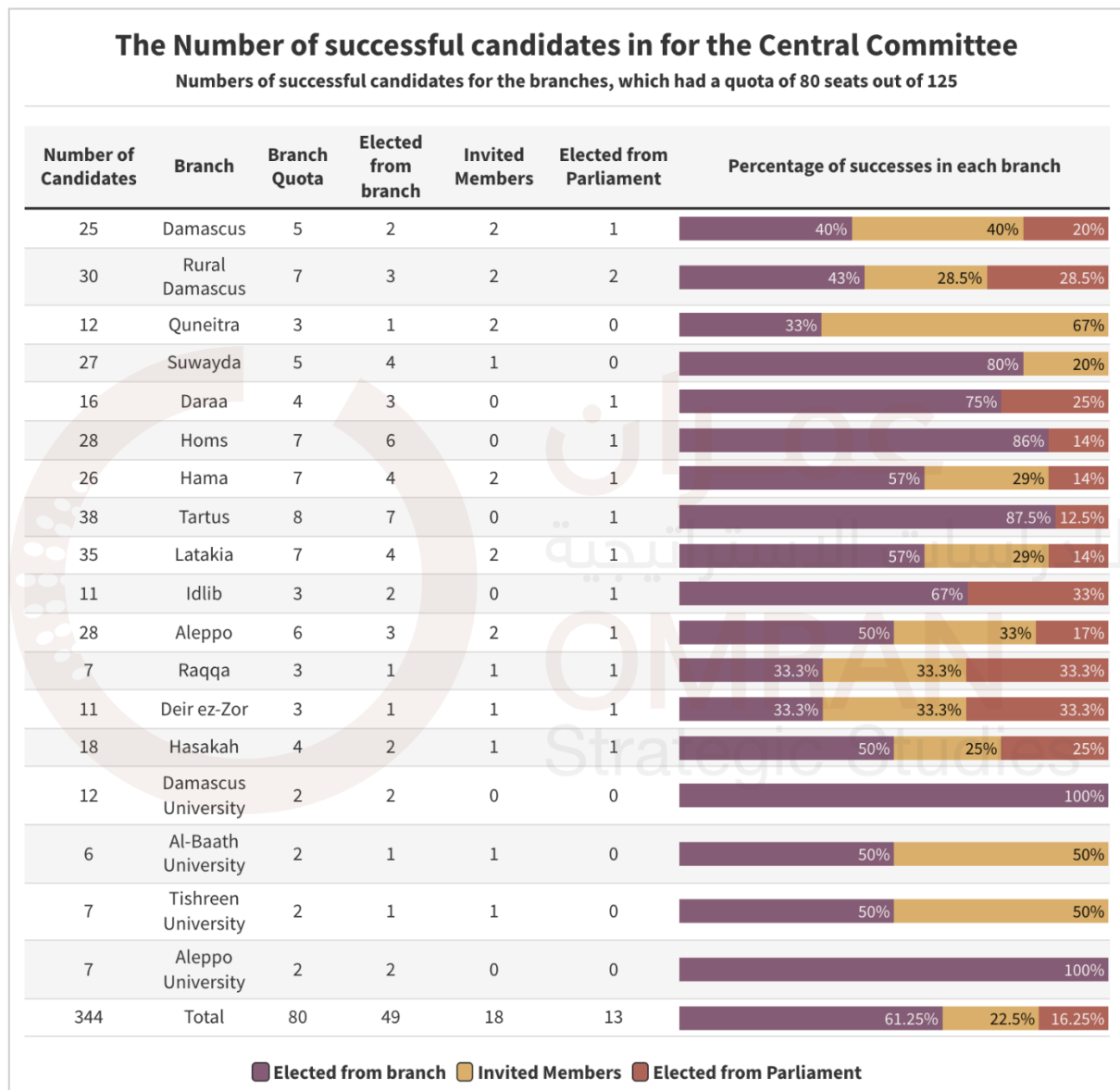
The Number of successful candidates in for the Central Committee
Numbers of successful candidates for the branches, which had a quota of 80 seats out of 125

Number of Candidates	Branch	Branch Quota	Elected from branch	Invited Members	Elected from Parliament	Percentage of successes in each branch
25	Damascus	5	2	2	1	40% / 40% / 20%
30	Rural Damascus	7	3	2	2	43% / 28.5% / 28.5%
12	Quneitra	3	1	2	0	33% / 67%
27	Suwayda	5	4	1	0	80% / 20%
16	Daraa	4	3	0	1	75% / 25%
28	Homs	7	6	0	1	86% / 14%
26	Hama	7	4	2	1	57% / 29% / 14%
38	Tartus	8	7	0	1	87.5% / 12.5%
35	Latakia	7	4	2	1	57% / 29% / 14%
11	Idlib	3	2	0	1	67% / 33%
28	Aleppo	6	3	2	1	50% / 33% / 17%
7	Raqqa	3	1	1	1	33.3% / 33.3% / 33.3%
11	Deir ez-Zor	3	1	1	1	33.3% / 33.3% / 33.3%
18	Hasakah	4	2	1	1	50% / 25% / 25%
12	Damascus University	2	2	0	0	100%
6	Al-Baath University	2	1	1	0	50% / 50%
7	Tishreen University	2	1	1	0	50% / 50%
7	Aleppo University	2	2	0	0	100%
344	Total	80	49	18	13	61.25% / 22.5% / 16.25%

■ Elected from branch ■ Invited Members ■ Elected from Parliament

Figure (2) Number of Successful Candidates in the Central Committee Elections

---

[18] Such as General "Ali Mamlouk," "Luna al-Shibl," "Bouthaina Shaaban," and "Jasim al-Freij." Some of these characters have already finished their roles, and others have begun to play their roles, and it is time for them to be replaced. **Later the Assad regime's claim, Luna al-Shibl was killed in a traffic accident in July 2024.**

Only 49 members out of 252 candidates succeeded in the elections from the branch elections, compared to 18 members out of 67 candidates invited by the General Secretary. Additionally, 13 members out of 25 candidates from the Ba'ath Party bloc in Parliament succeeded, along with 45 members appointed directly by Bashar al-Assad.

Thus, the total number of members introduced by Bashar al-Assad—regardless of their method of attaining Central Committee membership (whether they were invited and succeeded in the elections or were directly appointed)—amounted to 63 members (18 invited and 45 directly appointed), representing 51% of the total Central Committee. This number increases to 76 members, or 60%, when including the 13 members from the Ba'ath Party bloc in Parliament.

The distribution of Central Committee members according to each bloc.[19]

According to blocks	Elected from Branch	Invited Members	Elected from Parliament	Directly Appointed	Success Rates			
From each bloc separately	49 of 252	18 of 67	13 of 25	-	19.4%	26.8%		52%
Out of elected /80/ member bloc	49 of 80	18 of 80	13 of 80	-	61.25%		22.5%	16.25%
Out of the Central Committee bloc	49 of 125	18 of 125	13 of 125	45 of 125	39.2%	14.4% 10.4%		36%

■ Elected from Branch □ Invited Members ■ Elected from Parliament ■ Directly Appointed
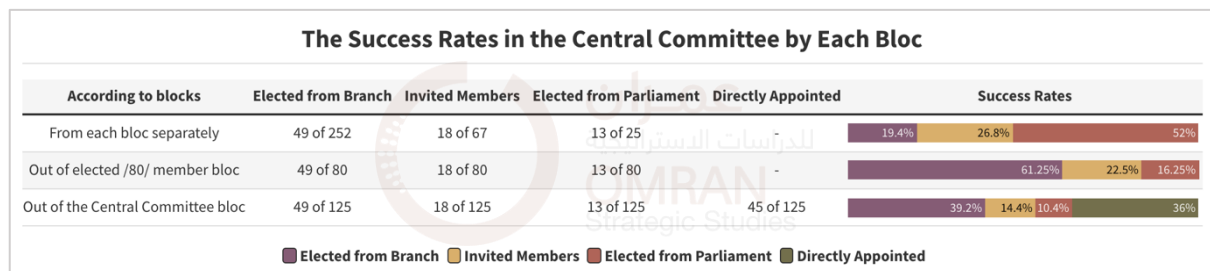
Figure (3): Distribution of Success Rates in Ba'ath Party Central Committee by Bloc

To achieve a deep analytical process, data was collected on Central Committee members including the following variables: name, gender, first-time membership, success from branch, type of invitation, province of origin, sectarian affiliation, date of birth, highest academic degree, last position held, other positions, employment in state institutions, employment in the military institution, direct association with militias, association with security and military networks, business sector, and whether they are sanctioned.[20]

The variable analysis methodology was as follows: for "State employees" "Yes" was assigned to anyone holding an official position at the time of the elections, excluding retirees or union members. For "Military institutions (army/intelligence/police)," "Yes" was assigned to all, even if retired. Regarding "Militia," "Yes" was assigned to those with a direct connection to militias. For "Security and Military Networks," "Yes" was assigned to those with clear ties to these networks, while "No" was assigned to those with unclear connections. In the "Business" category, "Yes" was assigned to those with a registered business.

This comprehensive data collection allows for a detailed analysis of the composition and backgrounds of the Central Committee members, providing insights into the power dynamics, regional and sectarian representation, and the influence of various institutions and networks within the Ba'ath Party's leadership, as follows:

---

[19] In Figure (3), the first row: When calculating the percentages for each bloc separately, the total percentages do not need to add up to 100% because the calculations were made for separate blocs. In the second row: In this case, the total percentage will be 100% because the number of successful candidates was calculated for a single bloc, which is the 80 elected members representing the branches. In the third row: Here too, the total percentage is 100% because the calculations were made for a single bloc, which is the total 125 members of the Central Committee, including the appointed members.

[20] The data collection process relied on a variety of tools: official websites and pages of the Ba'ath Party, the Parliament, the Council of Ministers, various ministries, election publications of the candidates, the Observatory of Political and Economic Networks, as well as several phone and social media interviews with followers of the Ba'ath Party elections.

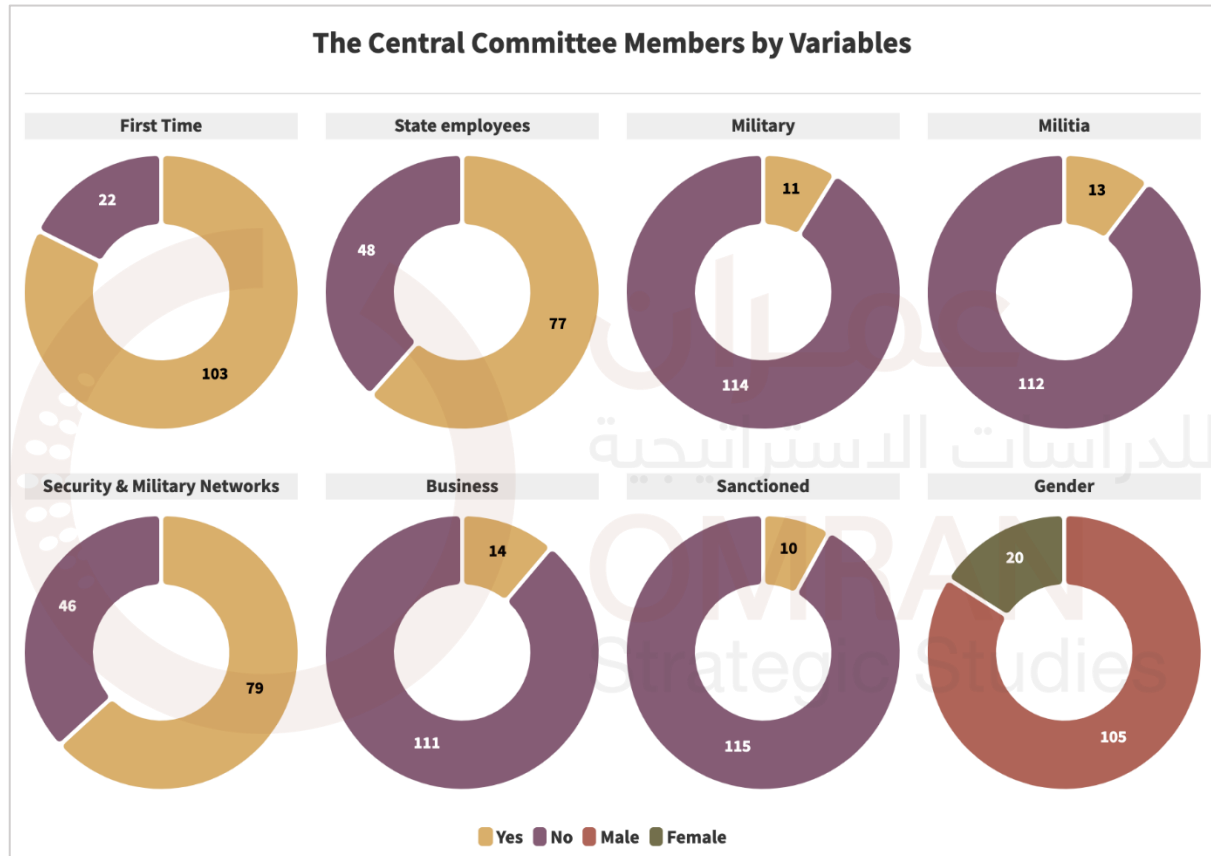**Distribution of Central Committee Members by Various Variables**

Figure (4): Distribution of Central Committee Members by Various Variables

It is observed that 18% of the Central Committee members are returning from the previous Committee. Additionally, 62% of the members of the new Central Committee were employed in state institutions at the time of the elections.[21]

Military personnel, including retirees, make up 9%, and those directly associated with militias account for 10%. 63% of the members are connected to security and military networks, which includes military personnel, provincial party branch secretaries, those linked to militias, and others whose connections to these networks have been confirmed. The remaining members may also have ties to these networks, but these connections have not been confirmed.

Businessmen make up 11% of the committee, while those under Western sanctions represent 8%. The number of female members in the committee is only 20, with 11 of them appointed directly by Bashar al-Assad. This appointment contributed to raising the female representation percentage from 7% to 16%, which is still a small proportion for a party that claims modernity and adopts a secular orientation like the Ba'ath Party.

---

[21] The new governors of Rural Damascus and Hama (Ahmad Khalil and Maan Aboud) have not been included among the members working in state institutions because their appointments came several days after the elections, according to the methodology mentioned previously.

Distribution of Central Committee Members by Religious/Sectarian Affiliation

The Central Committee Members by Religious/Sect

The Branch	Branch Quota	Religious/Sect
Damascus	5	Sunni 1, Alawite 4
Rural Damascus	7	Sunni 6, Alawite 1
Quneitra	4	Sunni 3, Christian 1
Suwayda	5	Druze 5
Daraa	3	Sunni 3
Homs	7	Alawite 7
Hama	7	Sunni 6, Ismaili 1
Tartus	8	Alawite 8
Latakia	7	Sunni 1, Alawite 6
Idlib	3	Sunni 3
Aleppo	6	Sunni 6
Raqqa	3	Sunni 3
Deir ez-Zor	3	Sunni 3
Hasakah	4	Sunni 4
Damascus University	2	Sunni 1, Alawite 1
Al-Baath University	2	Sunni 1, Alawite 1
Tishreen University	2	Alawite 2
Aleppo University	2	Sunni 2
Directly Appointed	45	Sunni 25, Alawite 10, Christian 9
Total	125	Sunni 68, Alawite 40, Christian 10

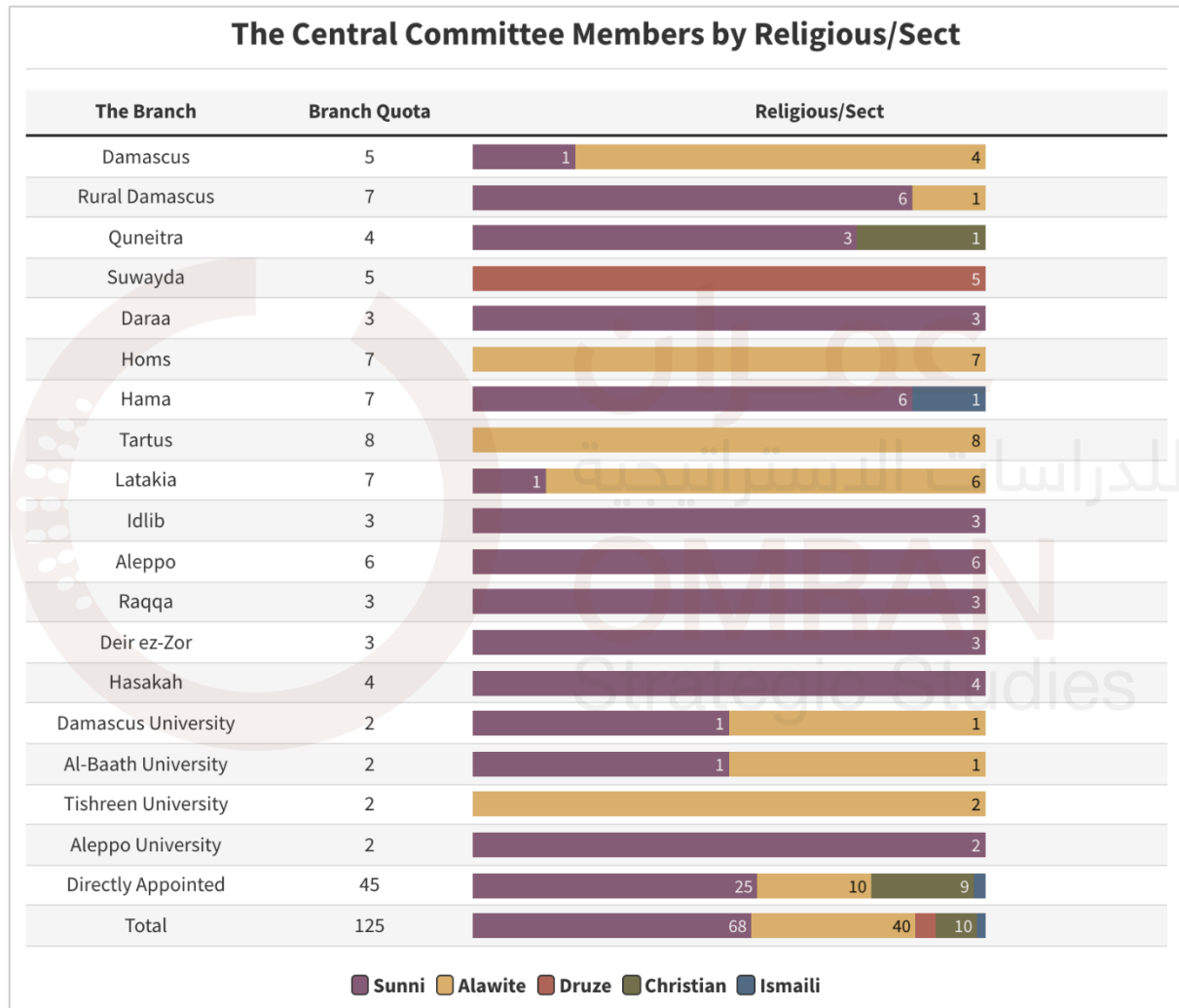■ Sunni ■ Alawite ■ Druze ■ Christian ■ Ismaili

Figure (5): Distribution of Central Committee Members by Religious/Sect

It is also noted that the Damascus branch shows a peculiar deviation in representation based on sectarian affiliation, with only one Sunni compared to four Alawites. This suggests either the displacement of Sunni figures from Damascus branch or a general erosion of their influence.

The representation of the Tartus, Latakia, and Homs branches reveals a clear dominance of Alawites, largely due to the strong Alawite presence and the reluctance of most Sunni members in these branches to confirm their membership after 2014. Conversely, there is an almost total absence of Alawite members in other branches, particularly in the southern or northern regions.

Total Distribution of the Central Committee by religious/sect

The Quota	Coming from	Religious/sect
80	Branch	Sunni 53.8%, Alawite 37.5%, Druze 6.3%
45	Directly Appointed	Sunni 55.6%, Alawite 22.2%, Christian 20%
125	Total	Sunni 54.4%, Alawite 32%, Druze 4%, Christian 8%

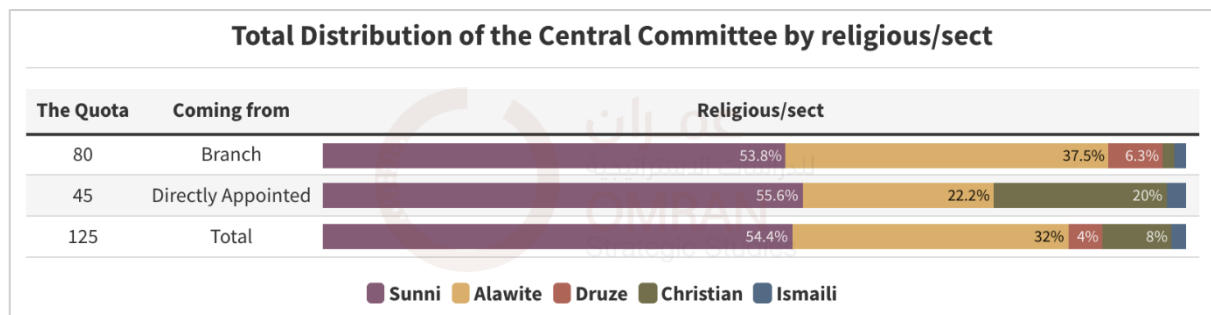■ Sunni ■ Alawite ■ Druze ■ Christian ■ Ismaili

Figure (6): Total Distribution of Central Committee Members by Religious/Sect

From a general perspective, Sunnis hold a reasonable representation in the Central Committee at 54.4%, although this does not fully reflect their demographic proportion. In contrast, Alawites make up 32% of the committee, a significant percentage that reflects not only their commitment to confirming their membership and demonstrating loyalty but also their widespread political affiliation with the party**. This is despite the fact that the Ba'ath Party is not the only path for Alawites to ascend within the state, as the military, security apparatus, and other state institutions also play key roles.**

Christian representation is notably low, constituting only 1.3% of the 80 members elected from the branches,[22] with only one member elected from the Daraa branch. However, Bashar al-Assad appointed 9 Christian members out of the 45 he directly appointed, indicating a direct intervention to increase Christian representation in the Central Committee. This move appears aimed at portraying the party as having broader support among the remaining Christian population in Syria.

Assad's interventions seem intended to correct and enhance the party's imbalances in certain areas, such as by appointing Christian members, increasing the number of women, or appointing 25 Sunni members. Consequently, the percentage of Alawites decreased from 37.5% of the branch seats to 32% of the total composition.

Notably, the ten Alawites appointed by Assad were placed in key positions, including his brother Maher al-Assad. General Maher al-Assad leads the Fourth Division. Haytham Satayhi has served as the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Ba'ath Party since the establishment of this position in 2017. Abdul Latif Imran has been the Director and Editor-in-Chief of the Ba'ath newspaper since 2009. Ali Abdul Karim Ali is the former ambassador to Lebanon and currently serves as an advisor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Qais Khidr is the Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers. General Ali Ayoub is the former Minister of Defense. Brigadier General Victoria Ibrahim is the Director of the Women's Military College.

These appointments reflect strategic placements of Alawites in influential positions, showcasing the consolidation of power within a specific group aligned with Assad's inner circle. The prominent roles occupied by these individuals emphasize the influence of Assad's appointees across various sectors, including military, media, government, and foreign affairs. This concentration of power within Assad's loyalist group indicates a deliberate effort to maintain control and reinforce the regime's stability through trusted allies in crucial positions.

Conversely, Assad did not appoint any Druze members directly, instead allowing Safwan Abu Saada, the former governor of Rural Damascus, to run in the Rural Damascus branch elections and then represent the Suwayda branch.[23]

This strategic positioning and intervention by Assad illustrate his efforts to maintain a balance and project an image of inclusivity within the party, while simultaneously ensuring that key positions remain under his influence and control.

---

[22] "Rodina Elias Azar" had successfully ranked third in the Daraa branch elections for her sub-branch.

[23] For more details, see reference number (14). It is noted that Safwan Abu Saada has become a member of the Central Leadership of the Ba'ath Party.

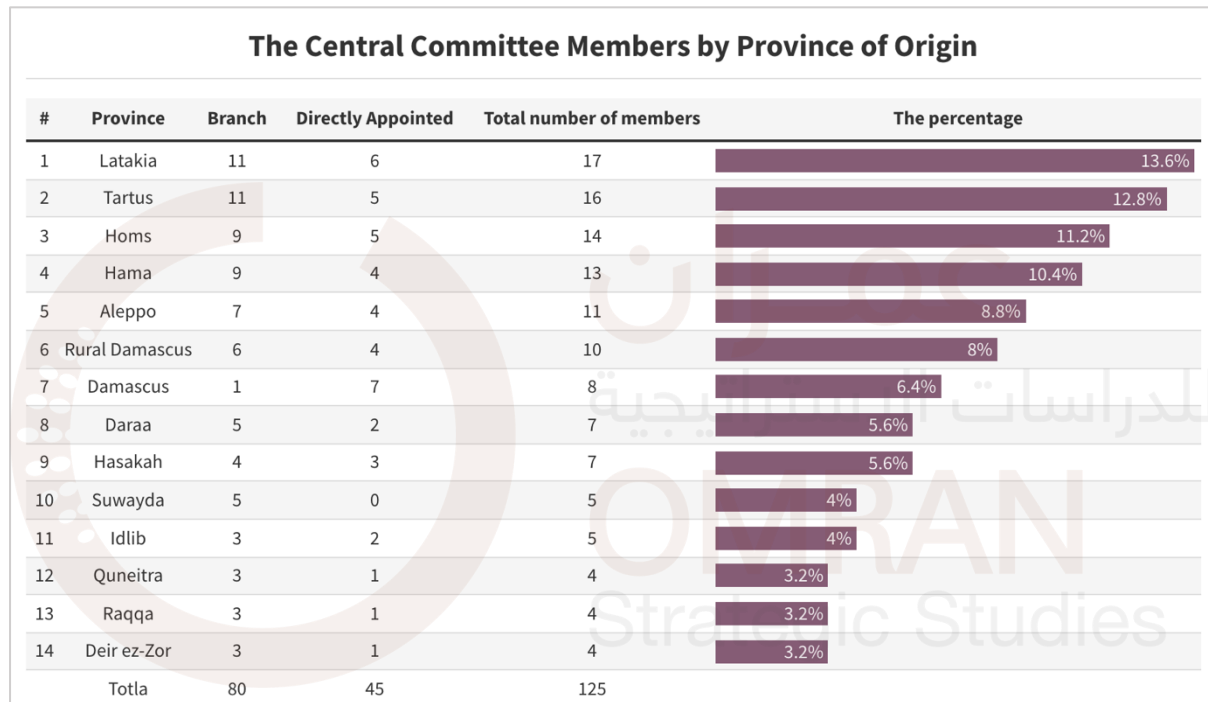## Distribution of Central Committee Members by Province of Origin

The Central Committee Members by Province of Origin

#	Province	Branch	Directly Appointed	Total number of members	The percentage
1	Latakia	11	6	17	13.6%
2	Tartus	11	5	16	12.8%
3	Homs	9	5	14	11.2%
4	Hama	9	4	13	10.4%
5	Aleppo	7	4	11	8.8%
6	Rural Damascus	6	4	10	8%
7	Damascus	1	7	8	6.4%
8	Daraa	5	2	7	5.6%
9	Hasakah	4	3	7	5.6%
10	Suwayda	5	0	5	4%
11	Idlib	3	2	5	4%
12	Quneitra	3	1	4	3.2%
13	Raqqa	3	1	4	3.2%
14	Deir ez-Zor	3	1	4	3.2%
	Totla	80	45	125	

Figure (7): Distribution of Central Committee Members by Province of Origin

The province of Latakia holds the highest representation among Central Committee members, accounting for 13.6%, followed by Tartus with 12.8% and Homs with 11.2%. Together, these provinces constitute 37.6% of the committee, indicating a geographic skew in representation, with more than a third concentrated in the coastal provinces and Homs. This disproportionate representation is primarily due to the high number of members who confirmed their membership in these branches. In contrast, the combined representation of Damascus, Rural Damascus, and Aleppo is only 23.2%, with Hama at 10.4%. The remaining 28.8% is distributed among the other seven provinces.

Bashar al-Assad's appointments have also played a role in correcting the geographic imbalance in the distribution of Central Committee members. For example, he appointed seven members originally from Damascus, compared to only one member who came from branch elections, Mohamed Katbi. Notably, Katbi had been invited to attend the conference and run on behalf of the Damascus branch without participating in the branch elections.

Distribution of Central Committee Members by Age Groups

The Central Committee Members by Age Groups

According to	Percentages of age groups				
Available Data	16%	32.8%	12%	12%	27.2%
Estimated Data	23.2%	46.4%	17.6%	12.8%	

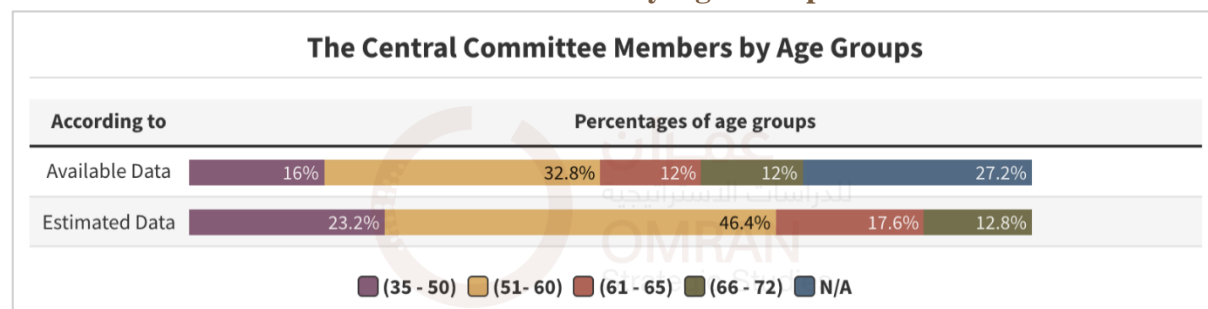Legend: (35 - 50) ▮ (51 - 60) ▮ (61 - 65) ▮ (66 - 72) ▮ N/A

Figure (8): Distribution of Central Committee Members by Age Groups

The age group of 51-60 years constitutes the majority of the Central Committee members, making up just under half of the committee. This age range includes Al-Assad himself. Overall, members over the age of 50 comprise the vast majority of the Central Committee, exceeding 75%.[24]

Central Leadership Election

During the General Conference, the newly formed Central Committee convened and "elected" the members of the Central Leadership, consisting of 14 members plus the "General Secretary." Aside from Bashar al-Assad, the Central Leadership was entirely new. It included the Speaker of Parliament, Hammouda Sabbagh, the Prime Minister, Hussein Arnous, and the Minister of Defense, General Ali Mahmoud Abbas, who were chosen by virtue of their positions. Additionally, it included three governors and the President of Al-Furat University, who were later relieved of their positions to dedicate themselves to party work.[25]

#	Name	Invitation Type	By	Province of origin	Religious/Sect	Year of birth	Party Position	Last Position in State	Last Academic Degree	Variables
1	Bashar al-Assad	Invited Member	Secretary General	Latakia	Alawite	1965	Secretary-General	President of the Republic	Bachelor in Medicine - Military Sciences	
2	Ibrahim Al-Hadid	Elected from the branch	Aleppo University	Homs	Sunni	1956	Assistant Secretary-General	lecturer at Aleppo University & secretary of the party branch at the university	PhD in Medicine	
3	Hammouda Sabbagh	Invited Member	Secretary General	Al-Hasakah	Christian	1959	-	Speaker of the Parliament	Bachelor in Law	
4	Hussein Arnous	Invited Member	Secretary General	Idlib	Sunni	1953	-	Prime Minister	Bachelor in Civil Engineering	
5	Ali Abbas	Invited Member	Secretary General	Rural Damascus	Sunni	1964	-	Minister of Defense	Military Sciences	
6	Fadel Najjar	Invited Member	Aleppo	Aleppo	Sunni	1963	Head of Organization Office	Former Governor of Deir ez-Zor	Bachelor in Law	
7	Safwan Abu Saada	On behalf of the branch	As-Suwayda	As-Suwayda	Druze	1972	Head of Professional Unions Office	Former Governor of Rural Damascus	Bachelor in Law	
8	Mahmoud Zanboua	On behalf of the branch	Damascus University	Daraa	Sunni	1956	Head of Economic Office	Former Governor of Hama	PhD in Economics	
9	Mohamed Arabi Katbi	Invited Member	Damascus	Damascus	Sunni	1968	Head of Education and Pioneers Office	Head of the Baath Pioneers Organization	PhD in Psychology	
10	Taha Al-Khalifa	Elected from the branch	Deir ez-Zor	Deir ez-Zor	Sunni	1958	Head of Higher Education Office	Former President of Euphrates University	PhD in Agricultural Sciences	
11	Samir Khadr	Elected from the branch	Tartus	Tartus	Alawite	1964	Head of Preparation, Culture and Info Office	Member of the Tartus Branch Leadership	Bachelor in Electrical Engineering	
12	Fadel Wardah	Invited Member	Hama	Hama	Ismaili	1977	Head of Youth Office	Leader of National Defense Militias in Salamiya	Bachelor in Law	
13	Yasser Shaheen	Invited Member	Secretary General	Latakia	Alawite	1960	Head of Workers Office	Former Director of Physical Preparation in the Army	Master's in Administration and Strategic Studies	
14	Ayman Al-Daqqaq	Elected from the branch	Hama	Hama	Sunni	1966	Head of Farmers Office	Civil Judge in Hama Judiciary	Bachelor in Law	
15	Jumana Al-Nouri	Invited Member	Secretary General	Damascus	Sunni	1969	Head of Popular Organizations Office	Member of the Damascus Provincial Council	Bachelor in Economics	

■ State employees ■ Military ■ Militia ■ Security & Military Networks ■ Business ■ Sanction

Figure (9): Central Leadership Members of the Ba'ath Party

---

[24] There are 34 members whose actual ages could not be determined. In the first row of Figure (8), the distribution percentages are based on the available data. In the second row, each of the 34 members was placed in the closest age group based on an approximate age estimate, which was inferred from their photos and the nature of their work.

[25] **"Decree 96 and Decree 97 of 2024"**, SANA, Publish Date: 07/05/2024, link: https://bit.ly/4aI8SBQ

The previous table allows for the classification of Central Leadership members based on their attendance at the General Conference:

- Members who attended as a result of winning branch elections.
- Members who attended by invitation from Bashar al-Assad and then ran in their respective branches without participating in branch elections.
- Members who were invited and directly appointed.

This restructuring indicates an effort to integrate high-ranking state officials into the party's central decision-making body, ensuring close alignment between the state's executive functions and the party's leadership. The inclusion of governors and a university president, who were subsequently removed from their administrative roles to focus on party activities, reflects a strategy to bolster the party's influence and control over key administrative regions and institutions.

It also helps to understand the different pathways through which individuals reached the Central Leadership, shedding light on the influence and control mechanisms within the party. It illustrates how Bashar al-Assad's strategic invitations and appointments play a crucial role in shaping the leadership structure, ensuring loyalty, and consolidating his power within the Ba'ath Party.[26]

Distribution of Central Leadership Members by Age Groups

The Central Leadership Members by Age Groups

According to	Percentages of age groups			
Available Data	6.67%	46.67%	20%	26.67%

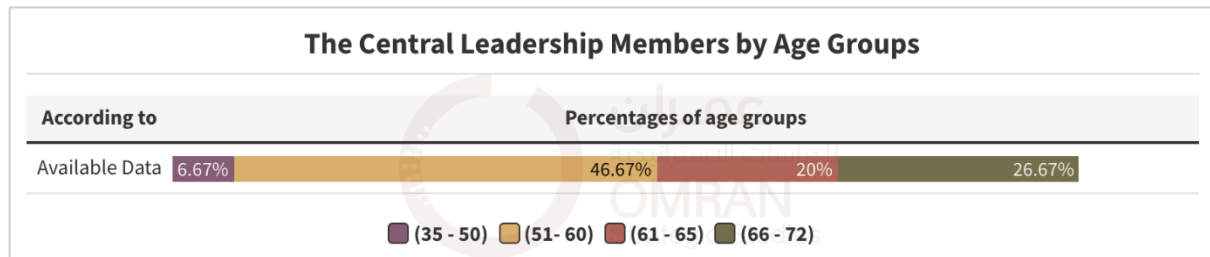■ (35 - 50) ☐ (51- 60) ■ (61 - 65) ■ (66 - 72)

Figure (10): Distribution of Central Leadership Members by Age Groups

The age group of 51-60 years forms the majority of the Central Leadership members, constituting just under half of the leadership, similar to the distribution within the Central Committee. Members over the age of 50 make up an overwhelming 93% of the Central Leadership. Additionally, there is a notable proportion of members who are over 60 years old, and even those over 66, indicating a clear exclusion of younger age groups from the Central Leadership.

This age distribution highlights a preference for more experienced and long-serving members within the party's top leadership, emphasizing stability and continuity in governance. The limited representation of younger members suggests a potential challenge in introducing new ideas and perspectives within the leadership, potentially impacting the party's adaptability and responsiveness to changing dynamics.

---

[26] Note the third column, "Invitation Type", and the fourth column, "By" to distinguish between these categories.

Distribution of Central Leadership Members by (Province, Branch, Sect, and Gender)
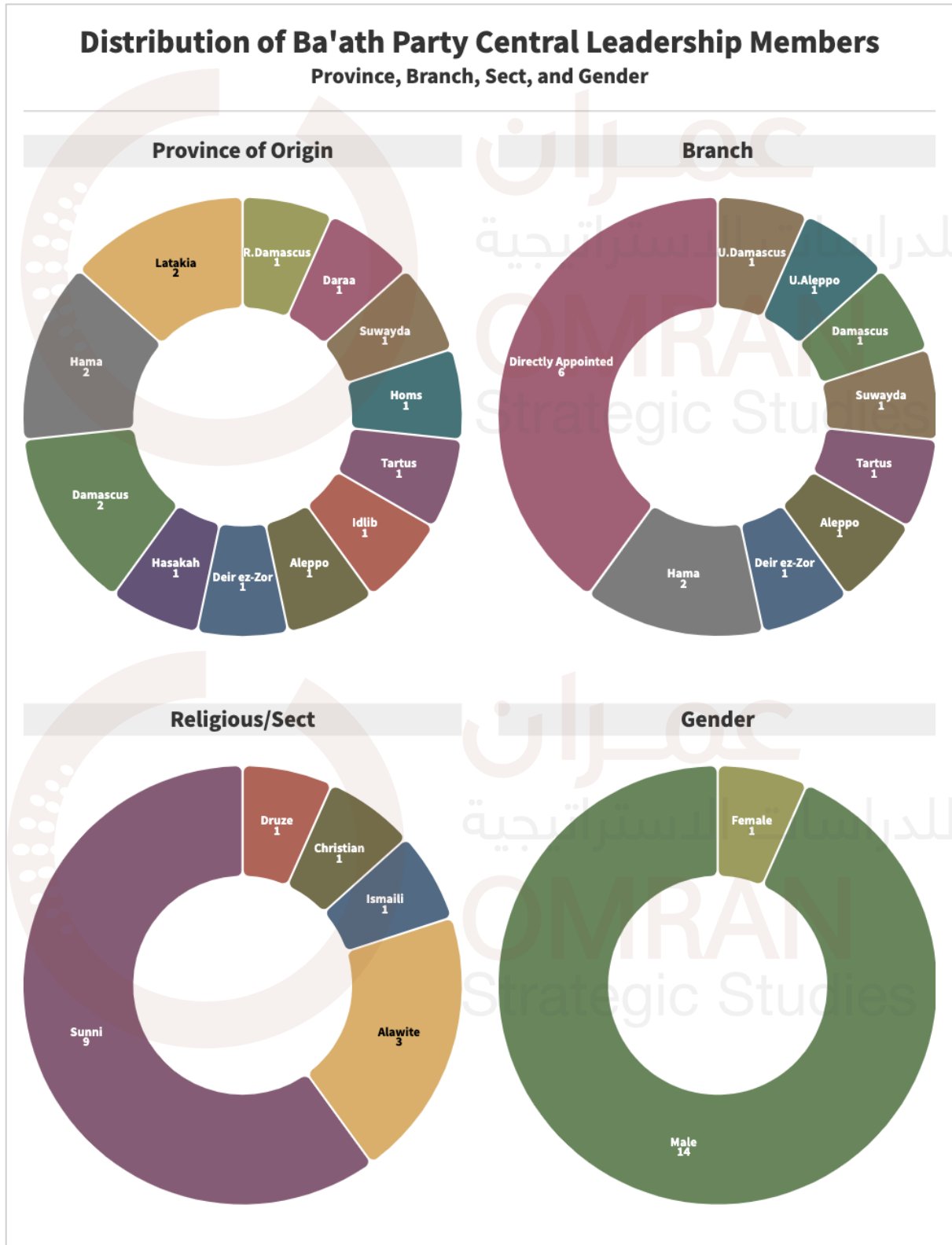

Distribution of Ba'ath Party Central Leadership Members
Province, Branch, Sect, and Gender

Province of Origin

- R.Damascus 1
- Daraa 1
- Suwayda 1
- Homs 1
- Tartus 1
- Idlib 1
- Aleppo 1
- Deir ez-Zor 1
- Hasakah 1
- Damascus 2
- Hama 2
- Latakia 2

Branch

- U.Damascus 1
- U.Aleppo 1
- Damascus 1
- Suwayda 1
- Tartus 1
- Aleppo 1
- Deir ez-Zor 1
- Hama 2
- Directly Appointed 6

Religious/Sect

- Druze 1
- Christian 1
- Ismaili 1
- Alawite 3
- Sunni 9

Gender

- Female 1
- Male 14

Figure (11): Distribution of Central Leadership Members By (Province, Branch, Sect, and Gender)

The geographical distribution by province of origin or the branch from which members were nominated, whether elected from the branch or invited, was carefully considered. This includes religious/sectarian affiliation but not gender, nor does it apply to those who ascended to the Central Leadership through the overall election process.

Six members elected from branches reached the Central Leadership, including Safwan Abu Saada and Mahmoud Zanboua, who ran in the provinces where they were governors, then ran from their original branches for the Central Committee. This means their popularity was not tested in the branches they originally belonged to. Additionally, Taha Al-Khalifa, the President of Al-Furat University, was included.

Ibrahim Al-hadid, who became the "**Assistant General Secretary**" and the second in command in the party after Bashar al-Assad, **failed to garner the highest number of votes in the sub-branch he ran for in the Aleppo University branch**, coming in second behind Imad Marei, who ran for Central Committee membership but failed in the elections.[27]

Of these six elected members in the Central Leadership, excluding the four mentioned above, only two members reached the Central Leadership by securing the highest number of votes in the branch elections they participated in: Ayman Al-Daqqaq and Samir Khadr.

This suggests a broad appointment process in the Central Leadership, **implying that everything had been pre-arranged, with the 119th branch affiliated with the General Intelligence Directorate, known as the "Ba'ath Party Security Branch," orchestrating the election process. This is especially evident since Bashar al-Assad met with several of those he appointed to the Central Committee before the General Conference.[28]**

In total, eight members, including Bashar al-Assad, reached the Central Leadership by invitation to the General Conference. Among them, three members were invited and then nominated themselves from their respective branches: Fadel Najjar, Mohamed Katbi, and Fadel Wardah. The others were directly appointed to the Central Committee as holders of high-level positions, along with Jumana Al-Nouri and Yasser Shaheen.

These observations underscore the complex dynamics of power consolidation within the Ba'ath Party, where appointments and strategic invitations play a crucial role in shaping the leadership landscape.

---

[27] According to the monitoring data, 16 members succeeded in the Central Committee elections despite not securing top positions in their respective sub-branches. These members include Ibrahim Al-hadid, Mujahid Ismail, Bayan Othman, Omaima Khaddour, Turki Aziz Hassan, among others.

[28] A defector officer (who requested anonymity) confirmed that Branch 119 has not been disbanded and continues its operations.

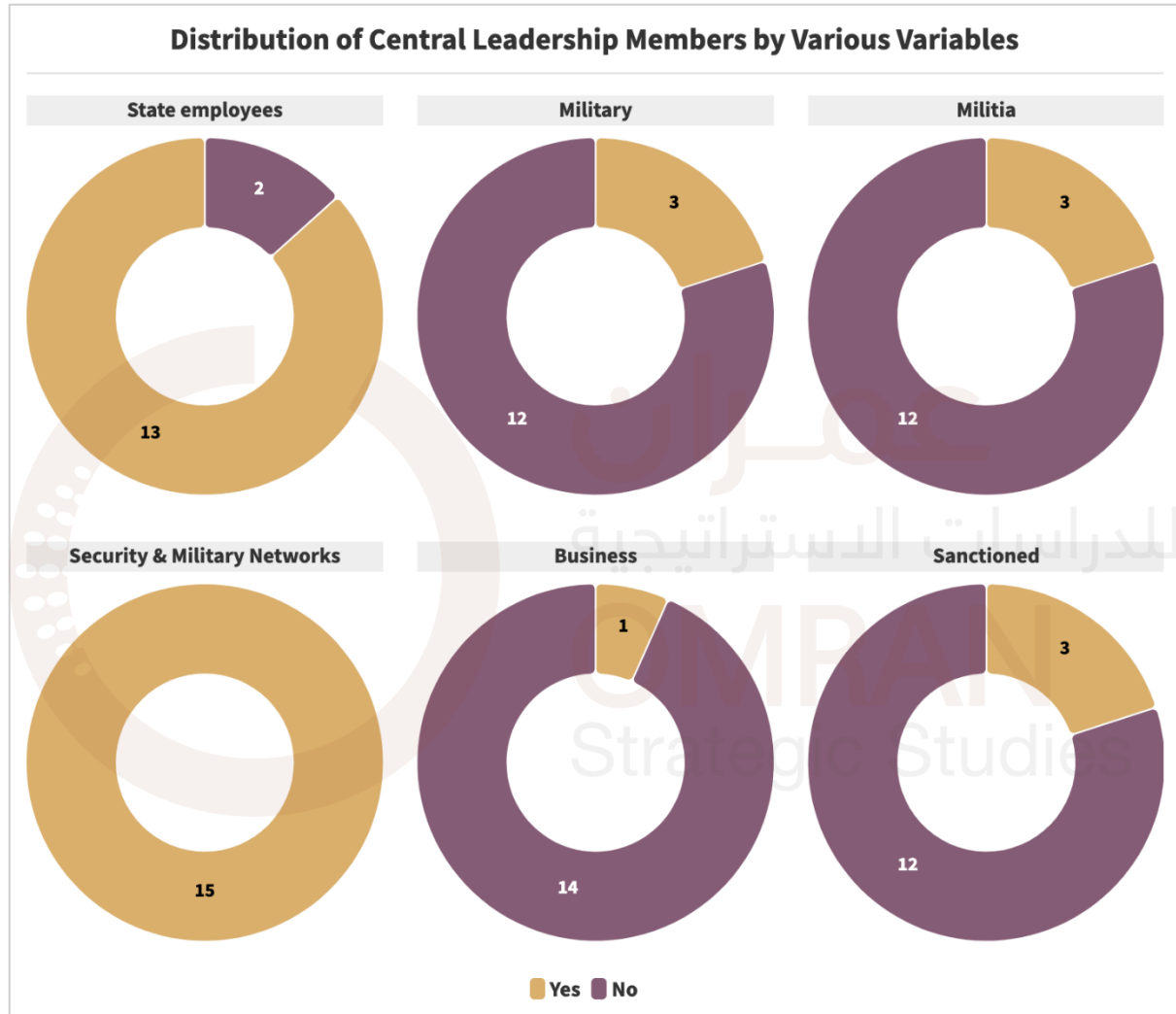## Distribution of Central Leadership Members by Various Variables

Figure (12): Distribution of Central Leadership Members by Various Variables

Most of the Central Leadership members hold positions in state institutions, and several are directly linked to the military and militias. All have clear and direct connections with security and military networks. Three of them are on Western sanctions lists: Bashar al-Assad, Hussein Arnous, and General Ali Abbas. However, Fadel Warda, the leader of the National Defense Militia in Salamiyah, is not sanctioned.

It is also noted that all 14 "elected" Central Leadership members are part of the Central Committee, except for retired General Yasser Shahin, who was invited to the General Conference and ran on behalf of the Latakia branch but failed in the elections. His name also does not appear among the 45 members appointed by the "General Secretary."[29] Despite this, he became a member of the Central Leadership, contradicting the election mechanism and process, as every Central Leadership member is supposed to be a member of the Central Committee.

---

[29] **"List of candidates for the Latakia branch"**, link: https://bit.ly/3X2Fkf4, "List of successful candidates for the Latakia branch", link: https://bit.ly/3Km0cWX, "List of those appointed by the Secretary-General" link: https://bit.ly/3R5Y8Gx, Source: The official page of the Ba'ath Party on Facebook.

These factors illustrate the complex and intertwined relationships between the party leadership, state institutions, and the military-security apparatus, underscoring the influence of Bashar al-Assad's strategic decisions in maintaining control over the Ba'ath Party's leadership.

Results: The Ba'ath as Assad Wants It

The Ba'ath Party leadership employed deception and manipulation in managing the electoral process, exploiting media campaigns to establish the Supreme Electoral Commission and branch elections leading up to the General Conference. Only 49 members elected by the branches made it to the Central Committee, including some who failed to secure the highest votes in their original branches. However, they succeeded after the party implemented elections within a single electoral district to create a mechanism for central control at the higher levels of the party. This led to the exclusion of locally influential candidates who were not well-known nationally and even prevented some from running for the Central Committee despite winning in branch elections.

Opening candidacy for Central Committee membership to those invited by the "General Secretary" allowed them to compete with branch winners for the allocated 80 seats. Additionally, Bashar al-Assad, as General Secretary, appointed 45 more members, significantly reducing the impact of the elections and concentrating 36% of the Central Committee seats through his direct appointments. His appointments extended to the Central Leadership of the party, either by inviting members to run or directly appointing them.

One prominent result was the concentration of the party's influence in the provinces of Latakia, Tartus, and Homs, accounting for 37.6%. This trend reflects a demographic reengineering of the party, with people from these provinces, particularly Alawites, constituting more than a third of the confirmed active members. This indicates a deliberate effort to eliminate and exclude Sunni Ba'athists in major provinces and cities due to the membership confirmation decision and their declining "belief" in the party's role, especially after 2011. The revolution directly influenced their withdrawal from the party, alongside displacement enforced by the regime through military and security institutions or even through the Ba'ath Brigades and other supporting militias.

Almost all branches were proportionally represented according to the demographic composition in terms of sectarian affiliation, except for the Damascus and Homs branches, and to a lesser extent, the Latakia and Tartus branches, where there is an almost absolute Alawite dominance. The Damascus branch exemplifies a deviation in representation both in sectarian affiliation and province of origin. The Damascus branch had only one Sunni from Damascus compared to four Alawites, two of whom were from Tartus, another from Latakia (Fadi Ahmed, known as "Fadi Saqr," leader of the National Defense Militia in Damascus), and Bassam Abu Abdullah from Masyaf in the Hama countryside.

The election results do not indicate a shift towards greater flexibility within the party but rather reaffirm absolute control and disciplined governance that prevents any internal change unless it aligns with the regime leadership's desires. Assad's appointments occasionally tried to correct

the discrepancies between the religious/sectarian representation of the party and its geographic and gender representation as much as possible.

However, these appointments also created a solid bloc within the party, reinforcing centralized decision-making akin to Assad's centralized power in the state, mainly through three means: Alawite dominance, the security and military institution, and militias and networks. This bloc is expected to be relied upon in the future.

The elections showed a trend towards militarizing the party (military and security networks) alongside militarizing society, linking them within loyalty networks to the regime. This is evident from the 63% of members with connections to security and military networks, including military personnel, party branch secretaries, and those associated with militias, among others. Additionally, there was an increased percentage of Alawites in the Central Committee and geographic concentration in the coastal provinces and Homs, along with new members in the party and the appointment of some outspoken figures like journalist Ziad Ghosn and Abed Fadlallah.

Despite the party leadership not allowing branches full freedom to choose their Central Committee representatives, the elections provided an opportunity for the leadership to understand the prevailing currents within each sub-branch and branch and assess the popularity of their members. This helped prepare for the upcoming Parliament elections scheduled for July 15, 2024, as the Central Leadership used the preparations and results of the General Conference elections and the primary elections to select the Ba'ath Party candidates for the Parliament election.

The Ba'ath Party elections and the General Conference held at the Ministry of Tourism's Conference Palace raised questions about the party's funding sources and how its expenses were covered, especially for this event. Did the party cover the costs from its budget, or did the regime government bear the financial burden? This is amid the party's lack of financial transparency and no clear mechanisms to verify its funding sources, considering that "Article 8 of the Constitution has been deleted, and the Ba'ath Party is no longer the leader of the state and society."

This process and its details, along with Assad's intervention dynamics, indicate two things: First, it is more about reshaping power centers within the Ba'ath Party than about a "democratic and reformative process," where democratization and reform are not the goals but establishing control and power mechanisms. Second, it relates to the regime's philosophy regarding the Ba'ath Party as a political power and its ability to overcome inertia on one hand and play roles that reinforce its dominance of the scene regardless of the political context inside or outside the country on the other hand.

In other words, Assad approaches party changes from the necessity of absolute control and reliance on networks within the party, transforming it from a merely formal political vessel focused only on mobilization and state seizure to a disciplined political force aligned with Assad's compass and directions, capable of "interaction and leadership" within any potential political scene.

Conclusion

Bashar al-Assad claimed in his speech during the General Conference, "We have taken a step forward, the important thing is not to stay in the same place." However, the reality showed a quick regression after the elections. A few days later, the party leadership reverted to using the "party nomination" mechanism in its branches to select its candidates for the Parliament elections scheduled for July 15, 2024. This indicates that the party moved backward instead of forward, as the nomination process will reinstate the exclusionary practices previously employed against some of its cadres.

In his speech, Assad addressed the party's relationship with the government, stating, "Government policies should stem from the party's vision without one canceling the other." He added, "What is happening has protected the party from the procedural work issues that the government undertakes, thus avoiding placing responsibilities on the party that it does not bear." His words suggest a kind of evasion by both himself and the party from taking responsibility for any governmental policy failures, despite many Central Leadership members holding official positions and the Ba'ath Party controlling more than 75% of the government. Assad himself appoints ministers and their deputies.

Externally, the elections carried several messages, primarily that the Ba'ath Party practices internal elections like other political parties and that its leaders, including Assad himself, attain their positions through elections. The elections were meant to suggest that political life in Syria, though troubled, has not ceased, and that the political system can continue managing all complex issues at local, regional, and international levels.

Internally, these elections, especially after Bashar al-Assad was unanimously elected as General Secretary, only reinforced his grip on the party, mirroring his control over all state institutions and the three branches of government. The manipulation of the electoral process and the exclusion of some party cadres from the branches show that the approach has not changed and that the changes in mechanisms are merely superficial, reflecting no real transformation within the party.

This superficial and exclusionary approach raises questions about how Syrians can engage with a party like the Ba'ath that controls the state and its institutions while practicing manipulation and exclusion even within its internal procedures. Consequently, how can the future of political life in the country be imagined with the Ba'ath Party remaining in power and continuing to play its role as the leader of the state and society?