

HTS's former stomping ground offers window on Syria's future

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham has a history of regional administration and repression, alongside moderate Islamic law enforcement. Does its record reflect its intentions?

[Shimon Sherman](#) / (Dec. 23, 2024 / JNS)

Since its sudden ascent to power in Syria, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) has garnered a broad spectrum of reactions. Some progressive Western circles have hailed the group as a liberator on the verge of bringing multicultural liberal democracy to the former dictatorship. Meanwhile, supporters of the recently toppled regime of Bashar al-Assad and other observers have called it “Islamic State in sheep’s clothing.”

[...]

“It is not a new phenomenon that HTS is trying to present a moderate image. This trend has been seen since 2017 when they severed ties with Al Qaeda,” **Carmit Valensi, a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)**, told JNS.

[...]

“There’s only a partial understanding of what life looked like under HTS. However, liberal democracy had clearly not taken root there,” said **Valensi**. “The organization has been accused of human rights and civil rights abuses.”

[...]

Valensi explained that HTS’s policy on women’s rights was very mixed: “On the one hand, when you look at videos of Idlib under HTS’s rule most of the women are wearing hijabs and it seems like a traditional Islamic society. On the other hand, according to recent data released from Idlib, over 60% of students in the province were women.”

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