

Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War

A Geopolitical Study

by [Fabrice Balanche \(/experts/fabrice-balanche\)](/experts/fabrice-balanche)
Feb 5, 2018

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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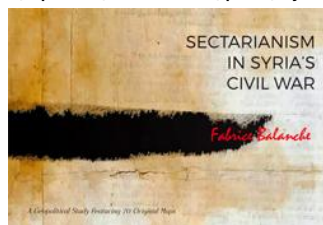
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This study, illustrated with 70 original maps and graphics, fosters a deeper understanding of the role sectarianism has played in Syria's war and reassesses the notion that the regime's divisive efforts singlehandedly transformed the secular and democratic revolution of 2011 into the brutal sectarian conflict of today.

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Syria's sectarian fragmentation was not created when the war began in 2011; its genesis lies in an inherited Ottoman millet system accentuated by the "divide to reign" policies of Hafiz al-Assad. The war has compelled Syrians to cling to their sectarian identities more tightly, whether out of socioeconomic self-interest or simply to survive. Examining these identities is thus crucial to answering the most fundamental questions about the ongoing upheaval. In many ways, the Syrian conflict has been taken out of the hands of Syrians themselves, becoming a proxy war between regional and international forces that often exploit the country's divided society for their own benefit.

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THE AUTHOR

Fabrice Balanche, a visiting fellow at The Washington Institute from 2015 to 2017, is a geopolitical cartographer specializing in the Middle East, with particular emphasis on Lebanon and Syria. He is an associate professor and research director at Université Lyon 2, as well as director of the Research Group on the Mediterranean and the Middle East (GREMMO).



Featuring 70 maps by the author and Mary Kalbach Horan.

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