

The Druze Minority in the Middle East: Religion, Community Structure, and Policy in Minority–State Relations in Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan

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Abstract

This paper examines the Druze minority across Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan, linking their eleventh-century theological origins (tawḥīd, reason/knowledge, metempsychosis) to kinship-centered institutions that sustain resilience and adaptation. Using multiculturalism and legal pluralism as analytic lenses, it shows how layered identities and overlapping religious–state jurisdictions generate both opportunity and vulnerability. Comparative analysis maps community “types,” governance logics (consociational, security-centered, local substitution), and region-wide trends in education, mobility, and fertility that reshape cohesion and incorporation. Policy recommendations emphasize voice and structured consultation, intercultural education, targeted educational–economic empowerment, and acknowledgment of historical grievances to build trust and parity. The study notes limits of secondary data and urges micro-institutional and longitudinal research to refine durable, rights-consistent minority–state frameworks for the Druze in the Levant.

Keywords

Druze minority; Legal pluralism; Multiculturalism; Minority–state relations; Middle East

1. Introduction

The Druze religious tradition emerged in the early eleventh century in the Levant, amid the Fatimid era’s intellectual ferment, as an offshoot of Ismailism that synthesized Gnostic and Neoplatonic currents into an esoteric doctrinal corpus centered on *tawḥīd* (divine unity), the primacy of reason and knowledge, and metempsychosis (reincarnation) (Al-Dajah &

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Alshalabi, 2020; Abu Reesh, 2025). The figure of al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh is treated in Druze sources as an epiphany of divine wisdom, while communal organization has historically distinguished between the *'uqqāl* (initiates) and the *juhāl* (non-initiates), with *majlis* gatherings serving simultaneously as loci of worship, study, and social cohesion (Abu Reesh, 2025; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019). Periods of persecution and intercommunal tension forged a resilient group identity but also required continual doctrinal and institutional adaptation in encounters with state policy and multi-religious environments (Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Kisthardt, 2013).

Modern political upheavals—colonial and post-colonial nationalisms, civil wars, and shifting sovereignty—have further catalyzed Druze identity work, compelling recalibration between religious commitment, national belonging, and communal structures (Abu Reesh, 2025; Ganley, 2012). Consequently, Druze communities in Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and Syria exhibit a persistent synthesis: preservation of core commitments—*tawḥīd*, an ethic of service, and guarded transmission of esoteric knowledge—alongside pragmatic accommodation to state pressures and multicultural orders (Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019; Falah, 2017).

This study situates the Druze within a comparative, policy-sensitive frame that links theological history to institutional dynamics, explaining both the community's durability and its variable patterns of incorporation or boundary maintenance across distinct state contexts. In doing so, it underscores the need for historically attuned, identity-responsive approaches to minority-state relations in the Druze case (Abu Reesh, 2025; Hazran et al., 2024; Faraj Falah, 2023).

2. Social structure, demography, and regional distribution

The Druze social field is best read as an ongoing negotiation between inherited communal forms and the pressures of modernization and state policy. Its organizational core, dense kinship, reciprocal support, and high social capital-sustains religious-cultural identity and routine community life amid political and security shocks (Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019). Crucially, the Druze are heterogeneous: localized “community types” (rural/mountainous vs. urbanizing; frontier vs. historic cores) yield variation in family organization, institutional participation, and membership thresholds—variation that functions as an adaptive resource for bargaining with the state and shielding communal agency (Abu Reesh, 2025; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019; Falah, 2018). Under “liquid sovereignty,” notably in Syria, displaced youth renegotiate norms of belonging; in Israel, identity work oscillates between incorporation and perceived marginality, conditioned by welfare, employment, education, and questions of loyalty and

belonging (Mason & Khawlie, 2016; Teja, 2019; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Rowe, 2018).

Kinship remains the backbone across Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan, but governance logics differ: consociationalism structures visibility (and dependency) in Lebanon; local repertoires substitute for weakened state functions in Jabal al-Druze; and military–civic incorporation in Israel coexists with spatial–socioeconomic gaps (Falah, 2018; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020). Region-wide trends, fertility decline, intensified mobility, and rising education, both expand capacities and strain traditional solidarities; education operates as a mobility engine and civic asset, yet requires policies that preserve social capital and address regional disparities (Faraj Falah, 2023; Kheir, 2024; Winckler, 2024; Zeedan & Luce, 2021; Kisthardt, 2013; Hazran et al., 2024). Overall, Druze actors balance kinship-based traditions with state rule-sets, while education and mobility, anchored in maintained social capital, can convert vulnerability into effective incorporation (Abu Reesh, 2025; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019).

3. Analytical/theoretical frameworks

Druze-state relations are best interpreted through a composite lens of multiculturalism, legal pluralism, and the integration–exclusion axis. Multiculturalism supplies a normative basis for affirming minority rights as positive recognitions of cultural distinctiveness and layered identities, especially pertinent in confessionalized orders such as Lebanon and in Israel, while urging policy designs responsive to Druze priorities (Abu Reesh, 2025; Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Chukov, 2024).

Legal pluralism, in turn, clarifies how religious and state legal orders co-exist, interact, and sometimes collide, revealing both vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities as Druze actors navigate overlapping jurisdictions; it functions as a diagnostic and navigational tool for preserving communal institutions while engaging state law (Abu Reesh, 2025; Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Dahrouge, 2023). Empirically, the implications diverge cross-nationally: protests over Israel’s Basic Law (Nation-State) reflect perceived status erosion among Druze citizens, whereas Lebanon’s consociational settlement embeds confessional jurisdictions in constitutional arrangements (Abu Reesh, 2025; Miles, 2021).

Read along the integration–exclusion spectrum, power appears pendular: incorporation into national institutions coexists with marginalizing pressures, underscoring the centrality of trust grounded in clear rules and legitimate expectations, and highlighting advocacy/civic repertoires that safeguard identity under stress (Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019). Comparative perspectives, vis-à-vis Kurds or Christians-sharpen

convergence/divergence in autonomy and incorporation, pointing to context-sensitive policy (Johnson & Zeedan, 2024). Future research should trace intersections of Druze identity with shifting geopolitical currents and policy realignments that strengthen or erode communal resilience (Kisthardt, 2013; Hazran et al., 2024), thereby refining a robust framework for Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan (Firro, 1992).

4. Policy in minority – state relations in Syria

Syria's Druze exemplify the contingencies of minority–state relations in a layered regional order. Periods of calibrated tolerance have enabled tactical collaboration with state authorities, securing access to governance and resources, while waves of unrest have stress-tested that cooperation, prompting recalibrated survival strategies and renewed claims to communal autonomy (Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Faraj-Falah, 2022). State “management” of sects blends bureaucracy with selective enforcement, producing a duality in which communal particularism coexists with pressures to reproduce dominant national narratives; legislative responses to regional shocks (e.g., the Arab uprisings) have repeatedly reconfigured the Druze–state interface (Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019; Falah, 2017; Mabon, 2020). In such multi-religious settings, policy powerfully redistributes authority; historical alliances and rivalries shape administrative reactions, sometimes privileging one group over another. Druze actors therefore cultivate pragmatic repertoires that balance civic loyalty with religious–cultural preservation in a mosaic that continually reshapes the minority–state nexus (Kisthardt, 2013; Hazran et al., 2024).

A. Historical relations:

From Fatimid origins, Druze engagements with states oscillated between accommodation and confrontation—local self-rule in mountain districts, resistance to Ottoman authority, tactical alignments under the French Mandate—while seeking to preserve doctrinal integrity (Hazran et al., 2024; Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020). The 20th century recast the landscape: Lebanese independence and consociationalism amplified Druze voice; Ba'athist Syria sought a unitary civic narrative that integrated minorities, including the Druze; in Israel, post-1948 military service and citizenship fashioned a distinctive idiom of inclusion—yet raised questions of identity and internal contestation (Harris et al., 2011; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024).

B. Current challenges:

Civil war in Syria has produced violence and displacement in Druze localities; Lebanon's consociationalism equilibrium is strained by economic crisis; and across settings, sectarian cleavages, globalization, and modernization amplify anxieties over cultural dilution and intergenerational cohesion (Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Kisthardt,

2013). Friction at the interface of personal-status norms and secular codes persists (Hazran et al., 2024). In Israel, notable incorporation coexists with paradoxical positionality, “loyal citizens,” yet a distinct minority, requiring continued advocacy for recognition and trust-building reforms (Abu Reesh, 2025; Beaujouan & Rasheed, 2019).

C. Policy implications:

A context-sensitive agenda should: (1) enhance representation and structured consultation with Druze leadership; (2) expand intercultural education on Druze religion and culture; (3) prioritize economic empowerment via quality education, vocational training, and public–private job creation; and (4) address historical grievances through acknowledgement and joint memorialization (Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Kisthardt, 2013). Grounded in multiculturalism and legal pluralism, these steps—voice, empowerment, and historical reckoning, reinforce equitable, inclusive minority–state relations and contribute to regional stability (Hazran et al., 2024).

5. Policy in minority–state relations in Lebanon

The Druze trajectory in Lebanon is shaped by intersecting historical, social, and cultural forces within a consociationalism architecture that simultaneously enables representation and constrains minoritarian agency. Civil-war legacies and fluctuating state capacity have produced cyclical shifts in policy toward the Druze, compelling calibrated pragmatism: elites engage formal institutions while safeguarding communal distinctiveness and cultivating strategic alliances to enhance bargaining power (Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Kisthardt, 2013; Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020). This adaptive repertoire unfolds in a dense confessional matrix that can obscure minority needs; the enduring policy challenge is to advance communal interests without diluting a distinctive Druze identity. Regional turbulence, especially spillovers from Syria and tensions with Israel, intensifies volatility, rendering “liquid sovereignty” a salient descriptor of shifting state authority and raising pointed questions of legitimacy toward minorities (Mason & Khawlie, 2016; Kastrinou, 2014; Hazran et al., 2024).

A. Consociationalism:

In Lebanon, institutionalized power-sharing embeds Druze representation in the confessional order, normatively designed to prevent majority domination and incentivize inter-sect cooperation; in practice, it may entrench communal boundaries and attenuate cross-confessional national identity (Rosiny, 2013). Cross-national contrasts are instructive: in Israel, Druze incorporation (military service, local executive roles) operates within state structures but is refracted through Arab–Jewish relations; proposals to “export” Taif-like formulas to conflict settings (e.g., Syria) reveal

the difficulty of transplanting consociational logics across contexts, whereas Jordan's steadier approach couples practical governance with identity respect (Johnson & Zeedan, 2024).

B. Political identity:

Druze political identity is dynamic, locally differentiated, and molded by institutional environments. In Lebanon it is closely tied to consociationalism, with shared cultural symbols (e.g., narratives of perseverance) reinforcing cohesion and strategic agility; in Syria, cycles of inclusion and repression demand continual calibration between cultural safeguarding and civic loyalty; in Israel, service-based incorporation coexists with negotiations over religious-cultural separateness. Gendered and generational change—especially women's expanded roles and youth mobilization via education—recasts leadership and representation (Johnson et al., 2024; Tørhaug, 2004; Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020).

C. Community responses:

The Druze deploy a pragmatic toolkit across political, economic, and cultural domains. In Lebanon, deft use of power-sharing mechanisms sustains representation; in Israel, education-driven mobility correlates with higher civic satisfaction, illustrating adaptive pathways that improve individual and collective outcomes; across settings, “differentiated non-assimilation” preserves identity while leveraging state-sponsored cultural initiatives to strengthen institutions and solidarity (Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Van Praag et al.; 2010; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019; Kheir, 2024; Kisthardt, 2013). The cumulative policy lesson is clear: minority-responsive designs that institutionalize voice, protect distinctiveness, and enable equitable participation are pivotal to Druze-state relations and to Lebanon's broader stability (Hazran et al., 2024; Faraj Falah, 2023).

6. Policy in minority-state relations in Israel

Druze-state relations in Israel are marked by a distinctive incorporation trajectory rooted in a historical partnership, especially sustained military and public-sector service, that confers institutional access while embedding the community within a security-centered civic paradigm. This pathway generates recurrent tensions between communal-religious belonging and national citizenship; loyalty-building policies have reshaped intracommunal cohesion and representation, sharpening debates over cultural preservation within a democratic order (Abu Reesh, 2025; Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Faraj-Falah, 2022). Situated within broader frames of multicultural recognition and legal pluralism, Druze rights remain uneven in practice—across resource allocation, land-recognition, and political participation—revealing persistent structural inequalities and the collision of citizenship with ethno-religious identity (Faraj-Falah & Maman,

2019; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Kisthardt, 2013). Internal heterogeneity and regional volatility further drive policy oscillations between inclusion and exclusion, underscoring the need for strategies that treat communal distinctiveness as a civic asset and deepen belonging through dialogue- and recognition-oriented policy (Abu Reesh, 2025; Hazran et al., 2024; Faraj Falah, 2023; Kheir, 2024; Faraj Falah, 2018).

A. Integration: participation in society and the military:

IDF service has long expressed civic allegiance and facilitated mobility, expanding access to higher education and professional employment while consolidating a differentiated Druze identity distinct from other Arab citizens (Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Faraj-Falah, 2022). Yet integration raises difficult questions, cultural-religious accommodation in a predominantly Jewish polity, distributive parity, and public standing. Cohesion anchored in kinship and solidaristic norms undergirds effective engagement with state institutions; local leadership structures mediate rights-claims and heritage protection. Youth-focused educational initiatives illustrate careful navigation between modernity and religious-cultural specificity. Still, loyalty expectations, shaped by male conscription, are unevenly experienced, catalyzing debates over service as a vehicle of cohesion versus personal and communal autonomy. Incidents of discrimination and unequal opportunity indicate that struggles for full recognition persist even under comparatively inclusive regimes (Abu Reesh, 2025; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Kisthardt, 2013; Hazran et al., 2024; Faraj Falah, 2023; Kheir, 2024; Firro, 1992).

B. Identity complexities: navigating multiple affiliations:

Druze practice yields a multilayered identity—religious, ethnic, national—whose balance shifts across rural-mountainous and urbanizing contexts and across Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan. In Lebanon, consociationalism tightens the coupling of religious identity and political representation; in Israel, formal recognition does not insulate from nationalist frictions and civic discipline. The result is recurrent re-articulation of identity and a spectrum of internal responses (cooperation ↔ contestation), while robust participation in education, labor markets, and public service sustains a complex yet durable identity further shaped by diaspora and cross-cultural ties (Abu Reesh, 2025; Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Kisthardt, 2013; Firro, 1992).

C. Policy implications: enhancing rights and belonging:

A coherent program should: (1) deepen legal pluralism via clear coordination between religious and state law, respecting identity while clarifying personal-status competencies, and ensure equal access to forums and land/property enforcement (Abu Reesh, 2025; Johnson & Zeedan,

2024); (2) promote inter-state cooperation on minority protections (regional complaint mechanisms, structured dialogue) so Druze perspectives are not eclipsed in national priority-setting (Abu Reesh, 2025; Mahmoud & Rosiny, 2015); (3) invest in targeted educational–economic empowerment (scholarships, vocational training, employment incentives) to address labor-market gaps and strengthen mobility (Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020); (4) expand intercommunal dialogue—curricula foregrounding Druze history/culture and exchange programs, to reduce stereotyping and widen civic consensus (Faraj-Falah, 2022; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019); and (5) institutionalize sustained Druze participation in decision-making pipelines to improve transparency, policy efficacy, and shared ownership (Abu Reesh, 2025; Teja, 2019).

7. Policy in minority–state relations in Jordan

Minority–state relations in Jordan, as reflected in the Druze case, hinge on how public policy structures everyday life and socio-economic standing. A historically small minority, the Druze have cultivated a distinctive identity woven into Jordan’s national fabric; civic loyalty has yielded a mixed pattern of political engagement alongside social constraints, typical of minorities that continually negotiate the boundary between incorporation and marginalization (Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Quntar, 2016). While the state has promoted cohesion, parts of the community remain wary that rapid, state-led development could erode cultural distinctiveness (Timani, 2021; Quntar, 2016).

Governance dynamics are fine-grained: limited self-administration exists, yet state authority ultimately prevails, underscoring the premium on minority inclusion for regime stability. “Inclusionary” narratives that celebrate Druze loyalty can, paradoxically, narrow communal autonomy. The policy task is therefore twofold: recognize minority specificity while deepening participation; and close gaps between legislative aspiration and implementation through more equitable frameworks (Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Kisthardt, 2013; Hazran et al., 2024; Quntar, 2016).

A. Stability:

Druze settlement, especially in Ajloun and Karak, has long contributed to national stability. Core values of loyalty and solidarity align with Jordan’s state ethos and gain salience amid regional turbulence (Syria’s war; the Israeli–Palestinian conflict). Military and public service exemplify the community’s stabilizing role, while adaptation without surrendering religious distinctiveness demonstrates resilience and political agency. Patronage-linked representation and civil-society engagement have reduced grievances and reinforced cohesion; recent refugee inflows and shifting alignments complicate policy, yet Druze cross-community ties, education,

and local economic initiatives continue to bolster both communal welfare and the national interest (Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Timani, 2021; Quntar, 2016; Kisthardt, 2013).

B. Representation:

Regionally, Druze political participation is historically contingent and community-embedded. In Lebanon, civil-war mobilization generated distinctive political awareness (Zeedan & Luce, 2021); in Israel and Jordan, divergent opportunity structures highlight incorporation versus stability narratives (Skorokhod, 2023). In Syria's fluid arena, proliferating non-state actors and foreign intervention have compelled strategic recalibration, with legal pluralism and multicultural practice enabling rights-based advocacy and heightened visibility (Timani, 2021; Quntar, 2016; Amrani, 2010). These variations show how Druze communities shape, and are shaped by, political environments.

C. Future scenarios:

Coming trajectories will reflect demographic change, youth aspirations, and regional shifts. In Lebanon and Israel, factionalism and policy realignments may either fragment or consolidate Druze cohesion; in Jordan and Syria, economic dislocations and geopolitical pressures could spur more assertive advocacy and novel coalitions (Timani, 2021; Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Quntar, 2016). International norms on minority rights and state integrity present both constraints and openings; accordingly, sustained monitoring and systematic analysis are essential for anticipating Druze-state dynamics in Jordan's complex socio-political environment (Quntar, 2016; Dostal, 2015; Groenewold et al., 2012).

Summary and conclusions

This study has traced how the Druze community's historical-theological formation, kinship-centered social organization, and contemporary policy interfaces co-produce a durable yet adaptive minority across Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan. Originating in the early eleventh century from an Ismaili matrix that blended Gnostic and Neoplatonic strands around *tawḥīd*, the primacy of reason/knowledge, and metempsychosis, the Druze formed a dual communal structure ('uqqāl/juhhāl) anchored in *majlis* as sites of worship, learning, and cohesion (Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Abu Reesh, 2025; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019). Recurrent persecution and intercommunal tensions forged resilience but also required doctrinal and institutional recalibration in response to state policy and plural religious environments (Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Kisthardt, 2013). In the modern era, nationalist projects, civil wars, and shifting sovereignties intensified identity work, yielding a persistent synthesis: preservation of core commitments alongside pragmatic

accommodation to state orders (Abu Reesh, 2025; Ganley, 2012; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019; Falah, 2017).

The main findings converge on three points. First, Druze social life operates as an ongoing negotiation between kinship-based institutions and the pressures of modernization and administrative rule. Dense kinship, mutual aid, and high social capital sustain routine life under political shocks, while localized “community types” (rural/mountainous vs. urbanizing; frontier vs. historic cores) function as adaptive resources in bargaining with the state (Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019; Falah, 2018). Under “liquid sovereignty,” notably in parts of Syria, youth renegotiate norms of belonging; in Israel, identity work oscillates between incorporation and perceived marginality along welfare, labor, and education gradients (Mason & Khawlie, 2016; Teja, 2019; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Rowe, 2018). Second, multiculturalism and legal pluralism provide the most informative analytical lenses: multiculturalism legitimates affirmative recognition of layered identities; legal pluralism clarifies the co-existence—and collisions—of religious and state regimes, as seen in protest over Israel’s Nation-State Basic Law versus Lebanon’s embedded confessional jurisdictions (Chukov, 2024; Dahrouge, 2023; Miles, 2021). Third, read along the integration–exclusion axis, Druze incorporation often coexists with marginalizing pressures, underscoring the centrality of trust, clear rules, and legitimate expectations, and the importance of advocacy/civic repertoires that safeguard identity under stress (Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019).

From these findings, the study concludes that historically attuned, identity-responsive policy is indispensable. Inclusive designs that institutionalize voice and structured consultation with Druze leadership, expand intercultural education, invest in targeted educational–economic mobility, and acknowledge historical grievances are most likely to yield equitable, stable relations (Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Hazran et al., 2024; Kisthardt, 2013). Crucially, education and mobility can convert vulnerability into effective incorporation only when social capital is maintained and regional disparities are addressed (Faraj Falah, 2023; Kheir, 2024; Winckler, 2024; Zeedan & Luce, 2021).

The analysis faces limitations. Reliance on secondary sources with uneven country coverage and variable methodological rigor, restricted access to micro-level administrative data (e.g., land allocation, benefit distribution, or court outcomes), and the rapid evolution of conflict settings—especially in Syria—constrain causal inference and temporal generalizability (Kisthardt, 2013; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024). Intra-communal variation by gender, class, and locality is recognized but not fully disaggregated.

Future research should therefore pursue (a) micro-institutional studies linking personal-status adjudication, local governance, and household welfare under legal pluralism (Dahrouge, 2023); (b) longitudinal panels on education-to-employment pathways and social-capital dynamics in Druze localities (Winckler, 2024; Zeedan & Luce, 2021); (c) comparative evaluations of trust-building instruments—consultative councils, complaint mechanisms—and their equity impacts across the four polities (Johnson & Zeedan, 2024; Hazran et al., 2024); and (d) gendered and youth civic repertoires under “liquid sovereignty,” including diaspora linkages and cross-border networks (Kheir, 2024; Teja, 2019). Advancing along these lines can refine policy frameworks that translate Druze adaptive capacity and communal cohesion into durable, rights-consistent minority–state relations across the Levant.

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