ETHNIC CLEANSING?
ASSAD'S STRATEGIC TARGETS IN SYRIA

INTRODUCTION

Since March 2011, reports show that fighting in Syria has killed an estimated 465,000 Syrians and wounded millions. As Bashar al-Assad's forces continue to crackdown on opposition in Syria, one must reflect upon the people that are impact by such a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. The horrifying scene that is left behind amid fleeing Syrians, refugees, and internally displaced people is unprecedented. A Geospatial analysis of both demographics and source of attacks can help us answer who exactly Assad is targeting. The goal of this project is to determine the locations of Syrian-government sponsored attacks in Syria and to calculate the impact of attacks on the Sunni population as an opposing identity
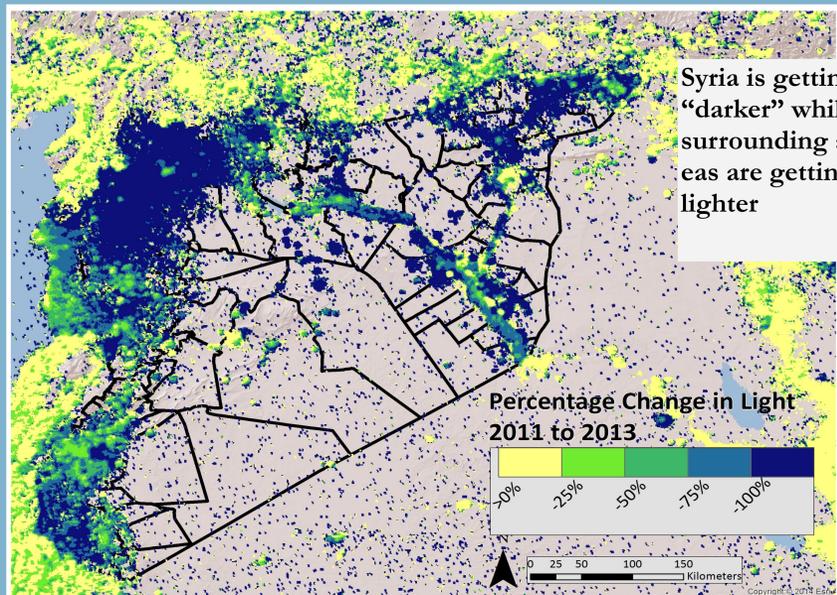
SPATIAL QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This project seeks to answer the following spatial questions:

1. Where are the Assad regime's attacks taking place in Syria?
2. Of those areas of concentration, what are the dominant corresponding ethnicities?

Methodology:

To answer the spatial questions, the dataset used a combination of conflict data, ethnicity data, and data on night-time lights as a proxy for population dynamics. A raster calculation of average nighttime light intensity images in Syria serves to understand the magnitude of those that vacated areas of the country. A Kernel Density analysis of Syrian Government Attacks on the Sunni population reveals "hotspots" of targeted areas in Syria. Joined point data of Sunni demographic data and conflict fatalities serve to answer questions regarding dominant corresponding ethnicities to attacks.
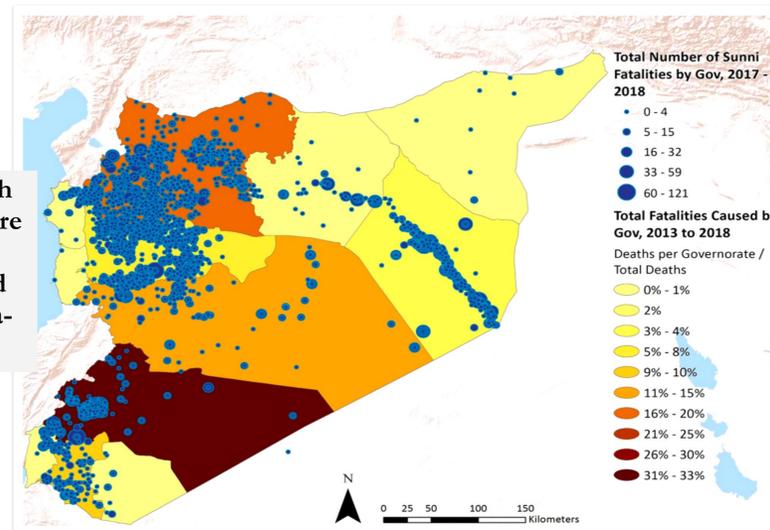

Syria is getting "darker" while surrounding areas are getting lighter

Percentage Change in Light 2011 to 2013

>0%   -25%   -50%   -75%   -100%

Syria Night-time Lights 2011-2013

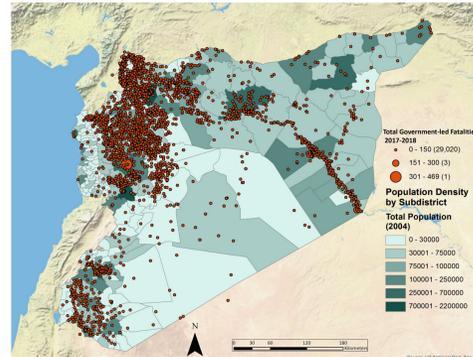*"We don't kill our people...no government in the world kills its people, unless it's led by a crazy person."*

Bashar al-Assad- December 7, 2011

FINDINGS

The provinces with the most attacks are Aleppo, Idlib, Homs, Hama, and the Suburbs of Damascus.

Total Number of Sunni Fatalities by Gov, 2017 - 2018
- 0 - 4
- 5 - 15
- 16 - 32
- 33 - 59
- 60 - 121

Total Fatalities Caused by Gov, 2013 to 2018

Deaths per Governorate / Total Deaths
- 0% - 1%
- 2%
- 3% - 4%
- 5% - 8%
- 9% - 10%
- 11% - 15%
- 16% - 20%
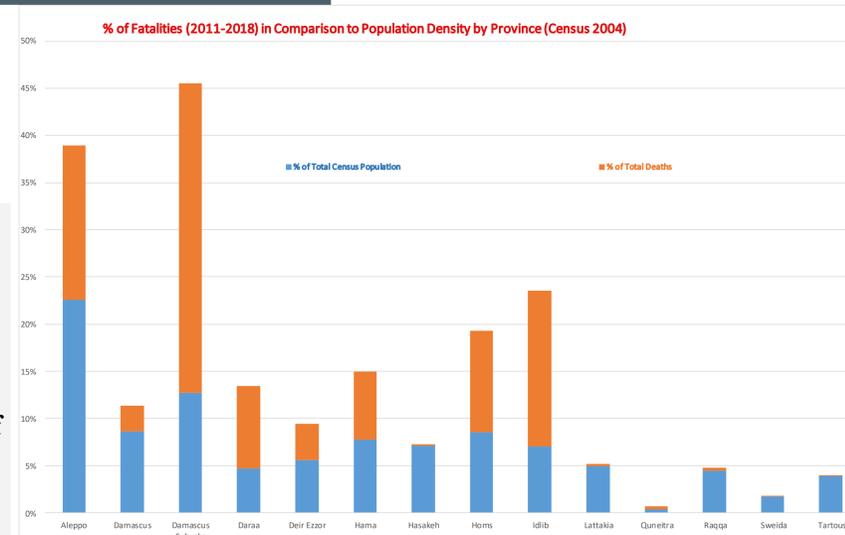- 21% - 25%
- 26% - 30%
- 31% - 33%

Percentage of Total Fatalities Caused by Syrian Government

Total Government-led Fatalities and Population by Sub district

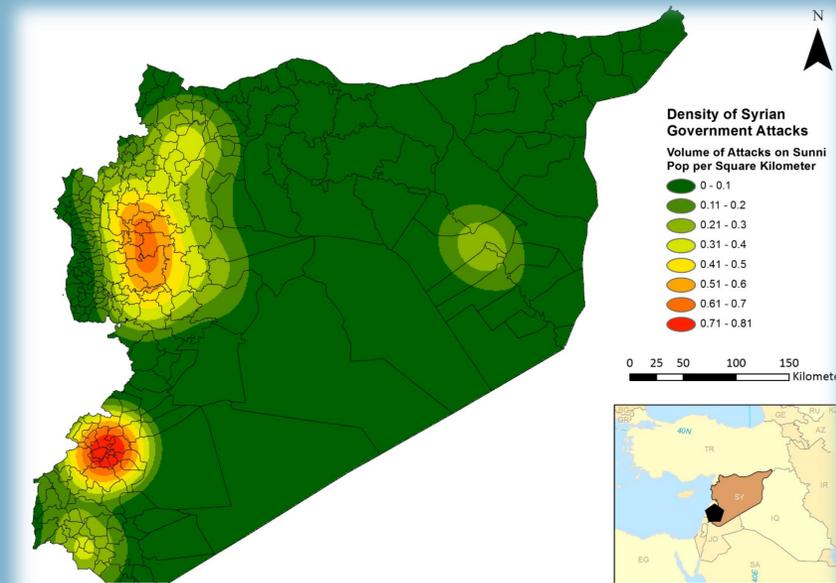The Assad regime and affiliates are targeting areas with a large concentration of Sunnis

% of Fatalities (2011-2018) in Comparison to Population Density by Province (Census 2004)

■ % of Total Census Population   ■ % of Total Deaths

Percentage of Fatalities Per Province

CONCLUSION

A spatial Analysis of conflict and ethnic data concludes the following:

. Syria is getting "darker" while surrounding areas are getting lighter.

. Of the locations that are getting dark, a large Sunni population resides.

. The Assad regime and affiliates are targeting areas with a large concentration of Sunnis.

. The provinces with the most attacks are Aleppo, Idlib, Homs, Hama, and the Suburbs of Damascus.

Density of Syrian Government Attacks

Volume of Attacks on Sunni Pop per Square Kilometer
- 0 - 0.1
- 0.11 - 0.2
- 0.21 - 0.3
- 0.31 - 0.4
- 0.41 - 0.5
- 0.51 - 0.6
- 0.61 - 0.7
- 0.71 - 0.81

Density of Attacks on Sunni Population

Limitations

This project was limited in scope to using limited ethnic data on Sunni population in Syria. Availability and lack of complete and reliable conflict data severely limited the scope of this project. The most recent census data conducted in Syria was in 2004. This project would have benefited from more recent census and ethnicity data.