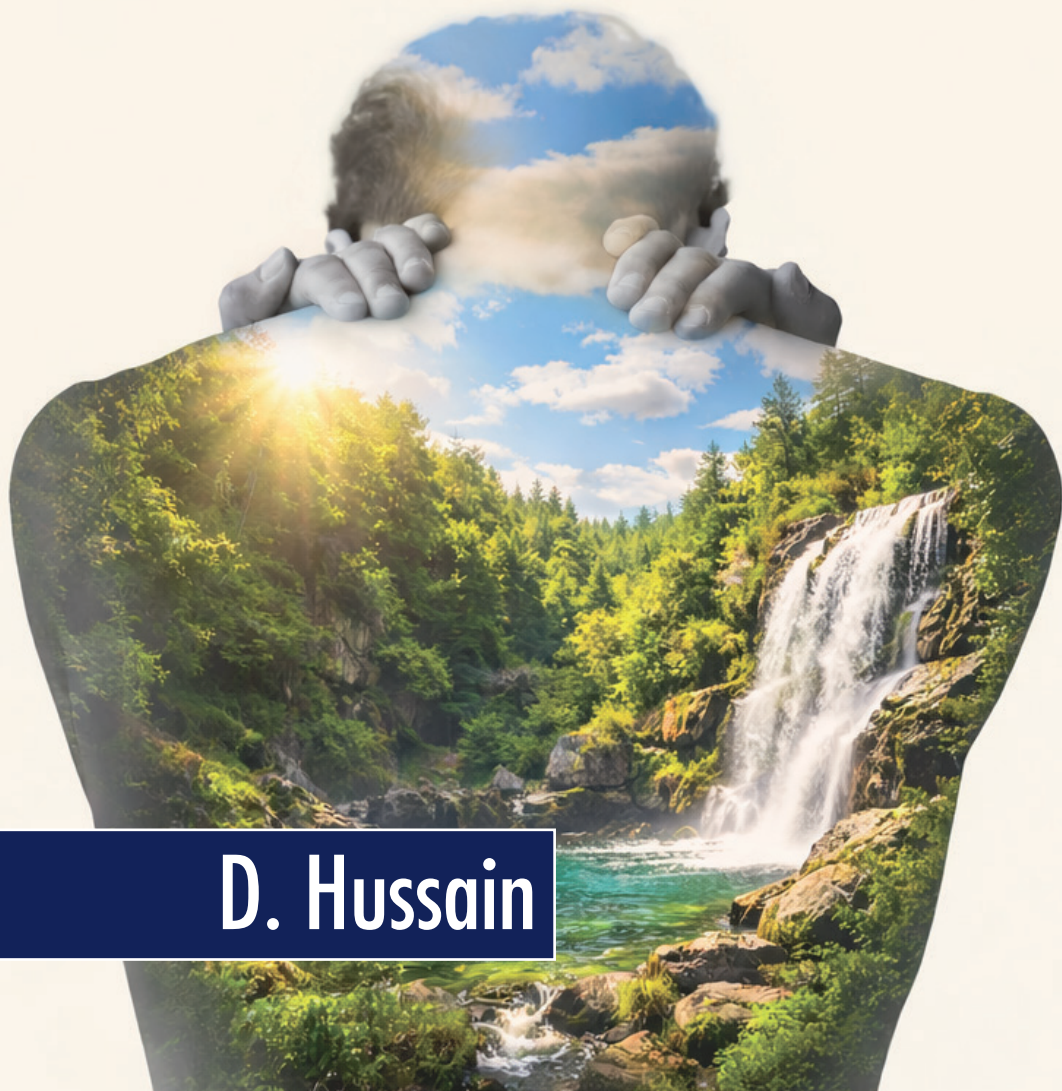




Coscienza e Libertà

SEMESTRALE DI LIBERTÀ RELIGIOSA, LAICITÀ, DIRITTI DAL 1978



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**Natura, diritti e religioni:
analisi comparate**

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Law without the State: Legal Hybridization and the Reconfiguration of Legal Authority in Idlib (Syria)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the reconfiguration of legal authority in Idlib, Syria, following the withdrawal of the state in 2011. Covering the period from 2012 to 2024, it traces the emergence, fragmentation, and subsequent reorganization of non-state judicial practices, showing how diverse legal initiatives developed, competed, and were later reshaped through evolving institutional arrangements of the various military factions under conditions of prolonged conflict.

SUMMARY

1. Introduction – 2. Judicial Fragmentation after State Withdrawal (2011 - 2013) – 3. Militarization, Islamization, and Judicial Competition (2014 - 2019) – 4. From Fragmented to a Quasi-State Judiciary: Legal Hybridization under HTS Rule (2019 - 2024) – 5. Conclusion.

1. Introduction

Since the collapse of Syrian state authority in large parts of the country after 2011, law has not disappeared. Instead, it has been reconfigured. In opposition-held areas such as Idlib, courts, councils, armed groups, religious scholars, and local mediators developed overlapping mechanisms of dispute resolution in the absence of a functioning state judiciary. These mechanisms were neither fully improvised nor entirely new: they drew on pre-war legal practices, Islamic legal traditions, and local norms, while adapting to the pressures of armed conflict and political fragmentation.

This article examines how legal authority was constructed and exer-



cised in Idlib governorate between 2012 and 2024¹, focusing on the interaction between non-state courts, armed actors, and local dispute-resolution practices. Rather than viewing these arrangements through a governance framework centered on armed actors, the article examines how the law actually works on the ground and how it was enacted and negotiated once the state withdrew.

This inquiry is informed by legal anthropological scholarship on legal pluralism, which has long emphasized that law operates through the interaction of multiple normative orders rather than within a singular institutional framework. Scholars have shown that overlapping systems - state law, religious norms, customary practices, and locally negotiated rules - coexist and shape legal authority in dynamic ways². More recent work has further highlighted how legal pluralism provides a useful lens for examining governance in contexts marked by political fragmentation and institutional uncertainty, where the boundaries of law are continually negotiated in practice³. Approaching Idlib through this perspective allows the article to examine how judicial authority was assembled through everyday legal work rather than presuming the existence of a unified legal system.

The analysis traces three phases. First, it describes the emergence of fragmented judicial initiatives following the withdrawal of state courts. Second, it examines the period of intense competition among armed factions, during which courts became sites of political and moral contestation. Finally, it ana-

¹ Before the ousting of Bashar al-Assad and his regime in December 2024 by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and its allies.

² J. GRIFFITHS, *What Is Legal Pluralism?*, in *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 18, n. 24 (1986), pp. 1–55; F. von BENDA-BECKMANN, *Who's Afraid of Legal Pluralism?*, in *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 34, n. 47 (2002), pp. 37–82; B.Z. TAMANAHA, *Understanding Legal Pluralism: Past to Present, Local to Global*, in *Sydney Law Review* 30, n. 3 (2008), pp. 375–411; S. FALK MOORE, *Law and Social Change: The Semi-Autonomous Social Field as an Appropriate Subject of Study*, in *Law & Society Review* 7, n. 4, 1978, pp. 719–746; S. ENGLE MERRY, *Legal Pluralism*, in *Law & Society Review* 22, n. 5 (1988), pp. 869–896.

³ K. von BENDA-BECKMAN, *Relational social theories and legal pluralism*, in *The Indonesian Journal of Socio-Legal Studies* 1, n. 1 (2021), pp. 1–20; T. BERGER, *The "Global South" as a relational category: Global hierarchies in the production of law and legal pluralism*, in *Third World Quarterly* 42, n. 9, 2021, pp. 2001–2017; I. SHAHAR, K. CARMIT YEFET, *Rethinking the rethinking of legal pluralism: Toward a manifesto for a pluri-legal perspective*, in *Law and History Review* 42, n. 2, 2024, pp. 223–235.



lyzes the consolidation of legal authority under Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) after 2019, when fragmented factional judicial arrangements evolved into a quasi-state judiciary incorporating diverse legal practices.

Drawing on interviews conducted between 2018 and 2024 with judges, lawyers, mediators, and civil society actors, as well as court documents and public statements, the article shows that HTS's legal order did not simply replace existing practices. Instead, it absorbed, regulated, and reshaped them. Legal hybridization emerged not as an ideological project, but as a practical response to institutional uncertainty challenges in a context of prolonged conflict and fragmented authority.

By focusing on the everyday operation of non-state law rather than on abstract models of legal pluralism, the article contributes an empirically grounded account of how judicial authority is assembled in the absence of the state.

2. Judicial Fragmentation after State Withdrawal (2011 - 2013)

The withdrawal of the Syrian state from Idlib in 2011 - 2012 led to the abrupt collapse of formal judicial institutions. Civil, criminal, and Shari'a courts ceased to operate, leaving local populations without access to state-backed mechanisms for dispute resolution⁴. In response, a range of local actors – including armed factions, religious scholars, lawyers, and community figures – began to establish alternative forums to resolve conflicts and stabilize social relations.

The earliest initiatives took the form of ad hoc reconciliation committees created in 2012 by local councils, military groups, and civic actors⁵. These committees addressed everyday disputes through informal mediation, drawing simultaneously on Islamic legal principles, customary practices, and locally negotiated solutions. Their authority rested less on formal legal credentials than on personal reputation, social standing, and proximity to armed power⁶. Over

⁴ Syrian state courts applied a civil law system where Shari'a was «one of the sources of legislation» as stated by the constitution of 1973. The constitution was applied up until 2012 when a new constitution was formally adopted and states that Shari'a is «the main source of legislation» in its article 3 paragraph 2.

⁵ M. EKMAN, *Rule of Law Assessment Report: Syria*, in *ILAC Rule of Law Assessment*, (Sweden: International Legal Assistance Consortium, 2017), p. 9, <https://bit.ly/3yCmprD> (consulted 01/2026).

⁶ WhatsApp interview with a Shari'a scholar and a researcher who participated in the establishment of Shari'a courts, 05 May 2021.



time, as disputes became more complex and communities demanded greater predictability, these informal mechanisms evolved into more structured judicial bodies.

Two distinct trajectories of court formation emerged during this period. One was led by local Shari'a scholars working alongside lawyers and defected judges, often with the backing of the more moderate Free Syrian Army-aligned factions⁷. These courts sought to preserve elements of pre-war judicial practice, including written procedures, differentiated chambers, and recognizable court hierarchies⁸. The second trajectory was driven by Islamist factions with Salafi or jihadi orientations, which rejected legal codification and established courts grounded exclusively in uncodified Shari'a⁹. These courts emphasized moral authority and religious credentials over procedural continuity¹⁰.

In January 2013, efforts to coordinate these separate initiatives resulted in the establishment of the Shari'a Judicial Council. The Council attempted to unify judicial practice across parts of Idlib by providing a common institutional framework, mirroring similar judicial experiments in other governorates, particularly the neighboring Aleppo¹¹. While uncodified Shari'a served as its primary legal

⁷ The armed opposition in Syria emerged in July 2011, when a small number of defected army officers, joined by civilian volunteers, formed multiple military factions operating under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

⁸ Jusoor for Studies, *The Shar'ieen in Syria. The idea and the role*, (in Arabic), 28 February 2017, <https://bit.ly/3jleggZ> (consulted 23/02/26); E. BALADI, *Prominent Judicial Committees were Established in the Liberated Syria: Shari'a Committees...the Rule of the "Sheikh" instead of the Judge and the Beginning of the Decline Stage*, (in Arabic, English translation by me), 19 December 2021, <https://bit.ly/3yIoamX> (consulted 01/2026).

⁹ F. al-ALI, *The Execution of Justice in Northern Syria*, (in Arabic, English translation by me), 19 December 2015, <https://bit.ly/3kQ4Zmf> (consulted 01/2026).

¹⁰ In Idlib, two broad categories of military factions coexisted. The first comprised Salafi and jihadi groups that often referred to themselves as "Islamic factions," including Ahrar al-Sham, Jabhat al-Nusra (later Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham), Jaysh al-Islam, Faylaq al-Rahman, and Jund al-Aqsa. The second consisted of so-called "moderate" factions, such as Harakat Hazm, Thuwar Suria, Nour al-Din al-Zenki, the 13th Division, and Faylaq al-Sham, which was associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Competition over judicial authority was largely confined to Islamic factions, as most moderate groups did not pursue judicial projects; Faylaq al-Sham, for example, never maintained a judicial office.

¹¹ R. SCHWAB, *Insurgent Courts in Civil Wars: The Three Pathways of (Trans)formation in Today's Syria (2012 – 2017)*, in *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 29, no. 4 (2018), pp. 801–826.



reference, judges selectively relied on the Unified Arab Law¹² when addressing procedural gaps or complex civil matters. Courts under the Council were organized into civil, criminal, and personal status chambers, reflecting the continued influence of pre-war legal structures despite the absence of the state¹³.

Later in 2013, dominant military factions dissolved the Shari'a Judicial Council and replaced it with the Islamic Committee for Administering the Liberated Areas. This move marked a shift toward greater factional control over the judiciary. Judges were appointed as representatives of specific armed groups, and lawyers were largely confined to advisory or auxiliary roles. Judicial procedures were simplified, with most courts limited to first-instance adjudication and arbitration. These changes reflected both resource constraints and the desire of armed actors to exert direct oversight over legal outcomes¹⁴.

Throughout this period, courts in Idlib operated in a fluid and experimental environment. Judges, mediators, and litigants navigated between different forums, selecting venues based on accessibility, enforceability, and perceived legitimacy rather than formal jurisdiction. Legal practices combined elements of uncodified Shari'a, remnants of Syrian civil law, and customary norms, producing a fragmented but functional judicial landscape.

From a legal pluralist perspective, these arrangements illustrate how normative authority emerges through interaction among multiple legal forums rather than through institutional monopoly¹⁵. This early phase of improvisation and negotiation laid the groundwork for later forms of legal consolidation and hybridization under fragmented authority.

¹² The Unified Arab Penal Law was drafted under the auspices of the League of Arab States in 1996 as part of a broader effort to harmonize criminal legislation across Arab countries along civil-law lines. Although the draft law has informed legal debates and reform initiatives, it has not been formally adopted by any Arab state. League of Arab States, *Explanatory Note to the Unified Arab Penal Law* (Cairo, 1996), <https://bit.ly/3plUkUo> (consulted 01/2026).

¹³ WhatsApp interview with a Shari'a scholar and a researcher who participated in the establishment of Shari'a courts, 17 August 2021.

¹⁴ SCHWAB, *Insurgent Courts in Civil Wars*; ALJUMHURIYA, *The Judiciary in Idlib: Factional and multipolarity*, (in Arabic) 20 July 2018, <https://bit.ly/3tbks4j> (consulted 01/2026).

¹⁵ GRIFFITHS, *What Is Legal Pluralism?*; TAMANAHA, *Understanding Legal Pluralism*; von BENDA-BECKMANN, *Relational Social Theories*; SHAHAR and YEFET, *Rethinking the Rethinking of Legal Pluralism*.



3. Militarization, Islamization, and Judicial Competition (2014 - 2019)

From 2014 onward, judicial practice in Idlib became increasingly entangled with the dynamics of militarization and ideological competition among armed factions. Courts were no longer merely mechanisms for dispute resolution; they became central instruments through which factions asserted authority, claimed moral legitimacy, and competed to shape legal authority within shared social space. The judicial field evolved into a landscape of parallel systems representing rival political projects.

In July 2014, Jabhat al-Nusra (later known as HTS) publicly announced its intention to establish independent Islamic courts as part of its broader governance project¹⁶. Shortly thereafter, the group withdrew from joint judicial arrangements and created its own autonomous court system, known as Dar al-Qada. Initially modest in scale, these courts expanded rapidly, with permanent branches established in towns such as Sarmada, Darkoush, and Salqin. Many were physically integrated into military facilities, underscoring their close relationship with armed authority¹⁷.

Dar al-Qada courts were organized entirely around Islamic legal terminology and institutional forms. Their internal structure included reconciliation offices, personal status divisions, criminal chambers dealing with *hudud*¹⁸ and *ta'zirat*¹⁹, investigative units, and enforcement bodies. Judges were primarily religious scholars with little experience in conflict resolution. Unlike other opposition courts, Dar al-Qada openly implemented *hudud* punishments, a practice justified by its proponents as a demonstration of religious authenticity and judicial resolve. Publicized cases involving executions or corporal punishment

¹⁶ Internet Archives, "al-Jolani", audio recording, 11 July 2014, for the announcement of establishing shari'a courts 09:34 – 11:04, <https://bit.ly/2WOSFue> (consulted 01/2026).

¹⁷ WhatsApp interview with a shari'a scholar and a researcher who participated in the establishment of shari'a courts, 17 August 2021.

¹⁸ *Hudud* are fixed punishments prescribed in Islamic jurisprudence for a limited category of serious offenses – such as theft, illicit sexual relations, false accusation, highway robbery, and apostasy – understood as violations of God's claims. These penalties are doctrinally defined and traditionally include corporal punishments such as flogging, amputation, and, in specific juristic interpretations, stoning or capital punishment.

¹⁹ Islamic discretionary penalties apply to offenses that do not fall under *hudud*, or to offenses classified as *hudud* crimes when one or more of the required conditions for their application are not met, rendering *hudud* penalties inapplicable.



reinforced the courts' reputation for uncompromising adherence to Shari'a²⁰.

The expansion of Dar al-Qada intensified debates within opposition-held areas over the nature of law itself. Some factions and legal professionals argued for codified Shari'a as a means of ensuring consistency, predictability, and broader social acceptance. Others rejected codification outright, viewing it as an illegitimate human intervention in divine law²¹. While framed in doctrinal terms, these disagreements functioned primarily as markers of political alignment and tools for differentiating authority within a crowded judicial landscape.

This competition became particularly pronounced in the rivalry between Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham²². Although the two groups initially cooperated in joint judicial initiatives, their relationship deteriorated as Jabhat al-Nusra pursued an independent governance project²³. Between 2014 and 2017, Dar al-Qada courts operated alongside the Islamic Committee's courts, which were largely backed by Ahrar al-Sham and applied uncoded Shari'a through faction-appointed judges. The coexistence of these systems produced overlapping jurisdictions and frequent conflicts over case authority, enforcement, and legitimacy.

From 2016 onward, both actors underwent significant transformations. Jabhat al-Nusra formally severed its ties with al-Qaeda, rebranding first as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham and later as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Its leadership adopted a more pragmatic discourse focused on local governance rather than transnational jihad²⁴. Ahrar al-Sham, meanwhile, repositioned itself closer to

²⁰ WhatsApp interview with a sharia scholar and a researcher, 09 July 2021.

²¹ WhatsApp interview with a practicing lawyer in Idlib, 23 September 2021; WhatsApp Interview with a former judge and a member of the Free Syrian Judiciary Council, 13 July 2021; WhatsApp interview with a lawyer and a member of the Free Bar Association in Aleppo, 26 July 2021.

²² Ahrar al-Sham is a Sunni Salafi militant organization that initially operated in Idlib in opposition to the Syrian regime before expanding its presence to other parts of Syria.

²³ Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN) initially participated in negotiations to join the Islamic Committee (IC) but withdrew approximately five months later. In the same period, it also exited the Shari'a Committee in Aleppo – often referred to as the “quartet court” after the four factions that established it – as well as Dar al-Adl in Hauran (covering Daraa and Quneitra). These withdrawals marked a shift from legal cooperation with other armed factions toward direct competition over judicial authority. See SCHWAB, *Insurgent Courts in Civil Wars*, cit.

²⁴ J. DREVON, P. HAENNI, *How Global Jihad Relocalises and Where it leads: the case of HTS, the former AQ franchise in Syria*, Working Paper, (Florence: European University Institute, Middle East Directions, Wartime and Post-Conflict in Syria, August 2021), <https://bit.ly/3k05Yn4> (consulted 01/2026).



the local Free Syrian Army-aligned factions²⁵ and supported the creation of the Supreme Judicial Council in 2017. The SJC applied the Unified Arab Law and sought to establish a codified Shari'a-based judiciary extending beyond Idlib²⁶.

Between 2017 and 2019, residents of Idlib navigated a polarized judicial environment in which rival courts claimed authority over the same social space. HTS-affiliated courts frequently refused to recognize SJC rulings, reopened cases, and encouraged litigants to seek retrials under their jurisdiction. Choices about where to file cases were shaped less by legal doctrine than by perceptions of enforceability, security, and the political power backing each court²⁷.

This period illustrates how the law functioned as a site of contestation rather than consolidation. Judicial institutions did not replace one another in a linear fashion; instead, they coexisted, competed, and overlapped. Authority was produced through practice – through the ability to summon defendants, enforce judgments, and manage violence – rather than through formal legal coherence. These dynamics set the stage for the post-2019 phase, when HTS, having eliminated rival judicial bodies, sought to reconfigure existing rival judicial projects into a centralized system of governance.

4. From Fragmented to a Quasi-State Judiciary: Legal Hybridization under HTS Rule (2019 - 2024)

By 2019, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) had defeated or marginalized rival armed factions and dismantled competing judicial bodies across most of Idlib governorate²⁸. This consolidation marked a turning point in the organization of legal authority. Courts were no longer primarily instruments of factional competition but became central components of a broader project of governance²⁹. Yet the emergence of a dominant authority did not eliminate existing

²⁵ A. ABAZEID, *The Great Rivalry between Ahrar al-Sham and Tahrir al-Sham* (in Arabic, English translation by me), *Abazeid.net*, March 9, 2017, <https://abazeid.net/2017/03/09/ن-ي-ب-ر-ي-ب-ك-ل-اس-فان-تل-ا-ري-ر-ح-ت-و-م-اش-ل-ا-ر-ا-ر-أ> (consulted 01/2026).

²⁶ WhatsApp interview with a writer and researcher specialized in jihadi groups, 03 May 2021.

²⁷ WhatsApp interview with a Shari'a scholar and a researcher, 05 May 2021.

²⁸ A. ABAZEID, *A defeat in the end. An agreement that makes the last areas of the "National Front for Liberation" under the control of the Salvation Government...*, Twitter, 10 January 2019, accessed 04 September 2021, <https://bit.ly/3yNsWzA> (consulted 01/2026).

²⁹ Drevon and Haenni, *How Global Jihad Relocalises and Where it leads*.



legal practices. Instead, it triggered a process of legal hybridization in which fragmented factional judicial arrangements were gradually reconfigured into a quasi-state judiciary.

Once HTS secured territorial and judicial dominance, it faced a new challenge: administering justice on a sustained basis across a densely populated territory affected by prolonged conflict. Uncodified Shari'a, which had previously served as a marker of ideological distinction and moral authority, proved insufficient for managing routine disputes, coordinating enforcement, and ensuring administrative consistency. Judges, lawyers, and court administrators increasingly relied on a broader repertoire of legal tools to address these challenges³⁰.

Under the umbrella of the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG), which was established by HTS as its executive and administrative arm, courts were reorganized along institutional lines that closely resembled the pre-war Syrian judiciary. Multiple levels of litigation were established, and specialized chambers were created to handle civil, criminal, personal status, and administrative cases. Procedural practices governing summons, hearings, documentation, and appeals often mirrored those of the former state courts. While verdicts continued to be formally justified in Shari'a terms, everyday judicial practice reflected the practical demands of governance rather than strict adherence to doctrinal purity³¹.

At the level of substantive law, hybridization became increasingly visible. Alongside uncodified Shari'a, judges and lawyers drew – often implicitly – on codified Islamic law, Ottoman legal precedents such as the *Ottoman Majalla*³², and contemporary Arab civil codes. These sources were particularly important in areas where classical jurisprudence offered limited guidance or where consistency was necessary to manage large caseloads. Legal practitioners described this eclectic use of sources as a pragmatic necessity rather than a principled shift in ideology³³.

³⁰ WhatsApp Interview with a practising lawyer in Idlib, 16 September 2021.

³¹ WhatsApp interview with a practising lawyer in Idlib, 23 July 2021.

³² The *Ottoman Majalla* (*Majallet al-Ahkam al'Adliyye*), compiled and promulgated between 1869 and 1876, constituted a state-sponsored codification of Islamic law based on the Hanafi school of Sunni jurisprudence. Designed primarily as a civil code regulating transactions, contracts, and obligations, the Majalla represented an early attempt to reconcile Islamic jurisprudence with modern legal codification.

³³ *Ibid*; WhatsApp interview with a practising lawyer in Idlib, 22 July 2021.



This transformation was accompanied by internal debates within HTS itself. Since severing its ties with al-Qaeda in 2016, the group experienced recurring tensions between hardline elements opposed to institutionalization and more pragmatic actors tasked with administering civilian life. These tensions were reflected in discussions within the Ministry of Justice concerning the permissibility of codifying aspects of Shari'a in public interest. By the early 2020s, public conferences and internal memoranda increasingly framed codification not as a betrayal of Islamic principles but as an administrative requirement for governance³⁴.

Legal hybridization under HTS rule should therefore not be understood simply as an instrumental strategy of control. It emerged from the interaction between inherited legal forms, professional legal practice, ideological constraints, and the expectations of local communities accustomed to state-based adjudication. Even as HTS centralized judicial authority, it remained dependent on legal practices that predated its rule. The resulting judiciary was neither a revival of classical Islamic law nor a replica of the modern state system, but a contingent assemblage shaped by conflict, institutional capacity, and political necessity.

5. Conclusion

This article has examined the evolution of legal authority in Idlib since 2011, focusing on how judicial practices were reshaped following the withdrawal of the Syrian state and the subsequent initiatives to reorganize legal authority by various civil and military actors. Rather than approaching law in Idlib as either a collapse into disorder or a straightforward imposition of Islamist rule, the analysis has shown how legal institutions developed through a series of pragmatic adaptations to changing political and social conditions.

In the immediate aftermath of state withdrawal, judicial practices emerged through improvisation. Local committees, armed factions, religious scholars,

³⁴ WhatsApp Interview with a practising lawyer in Idlib, 16 September, 2021; al-MAJLIS, *The Salvation Government holds a Conference to Codify Shari'a in Idlib*, (in Arabic, English translation by me), 09 July 2021, <https://bit.ly/3n1vXKt> (consulted 01/2026); K. al-KHATIB, *A Conference of "Codifying Shari'a" in Idlib Makes the Salfi who are Against 'Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham Angry*, (in Arabic, English translation by me), 07 July 2021, <https://bit.ly/3n83djr> (consulted 01/2026).



and legal professionals experimented with different forms of dispute resolution, combining elements of Islamic law, pre-war legal procedures, and customary norms. Legal authority during this period was unstable and fragmented, resting on personal reputation, proximity to armed power, and the ability to resolve disputes effectively.

As armed groups consolidated influence, courts became sites of political and ideological competition. Between 2014 and 2019, rival judicial systems co-existed, each claiming moral and legal authority while contesting the legitimacy of others. Law during this phase functioned less as a neutral mechanism of justice than as a tool through which factions articulated competing claims to legal authority, disciplined populations, and differentiated themselves from competitors.

The consolidation of power by HTS after 2019 did not resolve these tensions by eliminating legal plurality. Instead, it reorganized them. Faced with the demands of governing a large civilian population, HTS transformed fragmented factional judicial arrangements into a quasi-state judiciary by selectively incorporating existing legal practices and administrative routines. Courts continued to invoke Shari'a as their formal foundation, but their operation increasingly relied on codified law, inherited procedural frameworks, and professional legal expertise. This process of legal hybridization was not articulated as a coherent legal doctrine but unfolded through everyday judicial practice.

Beyond its empirical focus, the case of Idlib contributes to broader discussions on the relationship between law and statehood by illustrating how recognizable forms of legal order can persist in the absence of formal state institutions. Rather than viewing law as dependent on institutional continuity, the findings suggest that legal authority may be sustained through the alignment of professional practices, institutional routines, and locally accepted normative frameworks. This perspective resonates with socio-legal approaches that treat law as a field of practice shaped through ongoing negotiation rather than as a fixed institutional structure.

The trajectory observed in Idlib also underscores the analytical value of legal pluralism for understanding legal transformation under conditions of political uncertainty. The coexistence of Shari'a-based reasoning, inherited procedural forms, and locally grounded dispute resolution practices did not



represent a temporary breakdown of order but rather a durable mode of normative organization. Examining how these elements were combined in everyday adjudication highlights the capacity of legal actors to sustain institutional continuity through adaptation, reinforcing the importance of practice-centered approaches in the study of law beyond state frameworks.

The case of Idlib illustrates how law persists under conditions of state collapse not as a unified system, but as a negotiated and evolving set of practices shaped by power, necessity, and social expectations. Legal hybridization in this context was neither accidental nor transitional; it was the primary means through which judicial authority was constructed and sustained. Beyond Syria, these findings speak to broader questions about law and governance in contexts of contested political authority, where legal order emerges not from institutional continuity, but from the continual reworking of available normative resources in response to political uncertainty and everyday needs.