

Akkar

DISTRICT SNAPSHOT

SECTION 1: TENSIONS SUMMARY

Akkar, once a district of the North governorate is now since 2009 a standalone governorate with no districts. Akkar has historically been marginalised and underserved. Lebanon's economic crisis has had a severe impact on Akkar, which, according to the World Bank's estimates, already had the highest poverty rate in the country. The impact of the Syria crisis on the governorate has affected Akkar's economy as the area relied substantially on trade with Syria. Akkar's proximity to Syria, with a lengthy shared border, makes the area more prone to insecurity and tensions.



38 cadastres out of 60 are characterized as **high** or **moderate** tensions levels as of October 2024

Akkar's tension landscape is therefore mainly characterized by the following tensions drivers:

- **High poverty and marginalization** with high rates of unemployment and limited economic opportunities, exacerbating social struggles. Gaps in services and inadequate access to basic services also fuel frustration and tensions.
- **Fragmented community composition and intra-sectarian structures** contributing to intra-Lebanese tensions and competition over resources, including historical conflict over land and water.
- **Safety, security, and border challenges** increasing vulnerabilities and heightening security concerns.
- **Land ownership and tenure conflict** where decade long disputes continue to trigger tensions within and between communities.
- **Inter-communal tensions** with a relatively large refugee presence. The district also hosts one of the largest Palestinian refugee camps where intra-Palestinian tensions can occur, sometimes with spillover effects.

SECTION 2: TENSIONS OVERVIEW

Akkar is marked by a notably high poverty rate, the highest in the country, rooted in historical marginalization and the pervasive absence of state presence and services across the district. Additionally, unlike other marginalized areas, Akkar suffers from a quasi-absent support of local actors stepping in to fill a void left by the state, further exacerbating existing hardships. As a result, Akkar faces significant gaps in services, high unemployment, competition over resources and a range of tensions challenges driven by poverty and marginalization. The area's proneness to weather and infrastructural issues, such as recurring floods, continue to pose significant challenges to an already vulnerable population. As witnessed in particular over the last two years (2023/2024), the lack of adequate support to affected communities has a high risk of triggering tensions and deepening existing socio-economic divides, intensifying feelings of neglect and disenfranchisement among citizens and refugees in affected areas.

In terms of the composition of the population, Akkar is a majority-Muslim area, with a significant Sunni community presence. There is also a significant number of Christians, mostly Maronites and Greek Orthodox, specifically living in Qobayat, southern Halba (Minjara, Sheikh Taba), and Kfar Noun areas on the borders with Syria. The Alawite community is also present in the northwestern and westernmost points of the governorate on the border with Syria. Despite this mosaic of communities, inter-sectarian incidents are relatively scarce. However, from

time to time, clan dynamics and political tensions occur, impacting local relationships and the overall stability of the area. Further to this, the area is also subject to decade long disputes over land ownership and tenure which remain unresolved due to lack of governance and land categorization.

Akkar is also widely impacted by its proximity to the Syrian border, with a lengthy shared border, contributing to smuggling and cross-border movements fueling tensions. Over the years, human trafficking has emerged as a critical concern, with Akkar witnessing a notable increase in incidents linked to cross-border movements and smuggling in 2023 and 2024. The competition among local groups over illicit profits from these operations has contributed to rising tensions in the region. More broadly, crime rates in the region fluctuate, often influenced by local conflicts, including personal and familial disputes, exacerbated by economic hardships. Additionally, the widespread presence of arms in Akkar heightens the risk of violence, escalating conflicts into criminal acts.

Akkar hosts a significant refugee population, including displaced Syrians and residents of the Nahr Al-Bared camp, one of the largest Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. In 2007, the violent conflict between the Lebanese Armed Forces and the militant group Fateh al-Islam in Nahr Al-Bared caused widespread destruction and displaced thousands of Palestinian refugees. The devastation led to a long-term humanitarian crisis, with many residents forced to flee and the camp left in ruins. Despite efforts by international and local NGOs to improve conditions, Nahr Al-Bared continues to face challenges, including inadequate access to essential services such as healthcare, sanitation, and education. The impact of the situation in Syria crisis has further exacerbated these pressures, as the influx of Syrian refugees has stretched resources and services even further. Solid waste management and water are particular pressure points.

The situation in Akkar remains fragile, with community insecurity and intra-communal tensions, often driven by personal and familial disputes, continuing to affect stability.

Key Tensions Drivers	Analysis
 High Poverty and Marginalization	<p>Akkar's history of socio-economic marginalization and grievances continues to shape its present dynamics. It remains one of the poorest areas of the country and socio-economic issues continue to trigger both vertical and horizontal tensions.</p> <p>The 2019 protests and roadblocks, which saw widespread participation from Akkar's residents, highlighted long-standing economic struggles and marked a moment of significant mobilization. These challenges remain relevant today, as deteriorating living conditions and limited state representation persist. More recently, Akkar, a region closely associated with the LAF due to the large number of its members originating from there, has seen renewed demands for economic justice. Notably, protests by retired army personnel in February 2024 underscored these frustrations and may intensify if the economic situation worsens. The persistent municipal vacuum and the inability of local authorities to address basic service needs continue to drive frustrations, potentially prompting residents to escalate their grievances to larger cities beyond Akkar.</p> <p>The region has also witnessed a resurgence of social and political activism, with residents organizing protests over critical issues such as waste management and access to healthcare. These movements reflect the growing frustration and the community's increasing determination to advocate for their rights.</p> <p>In addition to unemployment and livelihoods challenges, gaps in services continue to trigger tensions. Water and solid waste management continue to be pressing issues, where residents and authorities face continuous challenges. The accumulation of waste on the streets highlights the broader problems of disposal and dumping of solid waste. These issues continue to trigger both inter- and intra-communal tensions, particularly as local authorities struggle with their limited capacity to devise effective solutions. Disputes over available solid waste facilities, such as the Srar waste management facility, are also common. Akkar is also struggling with wastewater management and water pollution. Notably, these issues contributed to cholera outbreaks in 2022 and 2024, which originated in the region and which triggered broader tensions. Additionally, the practice of tree cutting is another tensions trigger, raising concerns among residents.</p>

Key Tensions Drivers



Fragmented Community Composition, Political Tensions and Intra-Sectarian Structures

Analysis

Political tensions have long driven social unrest in Akkar, often intensifying around key events such as elections, assassinations, or other politically significant occurrences. For example, tensions were notably high during the 2022 parliamentary elections. In addition, intra-sectarian tensions in Akkar primarily arise from clan and family disputes within the Sunni community and political rivalries amongst Christian factions. Given the region's intricate political landscape, it is common that conflict or tensions become politicized.

Political tensions within municipal councils across various villages in Akkar have significantly impacted local governance. These tensions have led to the resignation of mayors, council members, or entire municipal councils in some cases, leaving certain areas without functional municipalities. Interference by political actors has further fueled these disputes, complicating efforts to ensure effective governance in the region.

Akkar has experienced an increasing presence of competing political and religious actors. Following the Tleil explosion, financial support was extended to victim families by political parties previously less active in the area, indicating the growing political engagement in the region. Additionally, security forces have uncovered dormant extremist cells in various parts of the governorate, highlighting persistent security challenges.



Safety, Security, and Border Challenges

Over the last few years, crime has significantly increased in the area, mainly due to the dire economic situation and rising poverty levels and a further increase in crime as economic conditions worsen, especially in overcrowded and poor areas. In addition, cross border movement, including the smuggling of people and goods contributes to both intra- and inter-communal tensions in Akkar. These tensions occasionally escalate into armed clashes with authorities, further intensifying tensions. Economic competition between locally produced and imported goods from Syria has at times contributed to inter-communal sensitivities in Akkar. For instance, the sale of non-local medications in some pharmacies led to actions by authorities following community concerns.



Land Ownership and Tenure Related Tensions

Land ownership is a continuous trigger for intra-Lebanese tensions between neighboring villages in Akkar, often resulting in armed clashes. Despite the issue being referred to legal channels and a clear directive from the Council of Ministers to resolve it, no lasting solutions have been reached to date. The recurrent clashes have significantly heightened tensions and elevated security risks in the area, impacting the operations of Lebanon Response Plan partners in recent years, with access to these areas frequently disrupted.



Inter-Communal Tensions and Tensions in Refugee Camps

Inter-communal tensions in Akkar are often linked to competition over limited resources, such as water and waste management, as well as low-skilled job opportunities. These tensions have, at times, led to evictions or the introduction of restrictive measures in certain areas. However, such measures are not always strictly enforced, partly due to the reliance on Syrian labor within the local economy and the limited capacity of local authorities to enforce them effectively.

Looking at the presence of Palestinian refugees, the situation in the Nahr El-Bared camp remains sensitive and could potentially contribute to tensions. Protests by Palestinian refugees against UNRWA highlight ongoing challenges within the camp. Reductions in UNRWA funding could deeply impact Palestinian refugees across Lebanon, including those in Akkar. Strained service provision may lead to increased pressure on local Lebanese communities, already grappling with economic hardships, and heighten competition for limited resources. This could exacerbate tensions between communities, as both groups face growing challenges in accessing essential services.

SECTION 3: TENSIONS HOTSPOTS

Some 6 out of 11 Unions of Municipalities in Akkar are identified as tensions hotspots, due to a range of various factors and triggers. Tensions hotspots include:

Bebnin

The area faces high community insecurity, including onward movements, personal disputes, thefts, and indirect shootings. Inter-communal tensions are frequently reported, particularly due to resource pressures such as water and solid waste management. Access challenges have also been noted by Lebanon Response Plan partners over the years.

Fnayeq

Intra-communal tensions persist between Fnayeq and Akkar el Aatiqa, primarily over disputes regarding the ownership of Al Qamouaa. Additional intra-communal tensions with other areas and smuggling activities further affect the security situation.

Berqayel

Solid waste management issues, particularly the accumulation and burning of garbage at the Berqayel crossroads, have created inter-communal tensions. Intra-communal tensions are also reported, and the area is affected by incidents in nearby Bebnin. Smuggling and onward movements contribute further to insecurity.

Halba

The area faces multiple challenges, including intra-communal tensions (personal and familial disputes), solid waste issues, a high concentration of refugees, and non-compliance with measures imposed by authorities (e.g., fee collection). The absence of a municipality exacerbates these issues.

Bireh

Community insecurity incidents, such as thefts, are reported in the area. Inter-communal tensions arise from job competition and the high number of shops operated by Syrians. Negative perceptions toward refugees, pressure on resources (e.g., tree cutting), rising rental fees, and solid waste challenges (e.g., removal of bins) further strain the community.

Muhamara

The area experiences intra-communal tensions (familial disputes), frequent requests for municipal support, illegal encroachments, and roadblocks. Community insecurity, including drug-related activities, SWM issues, and onward movements, continue to affect the local situation.

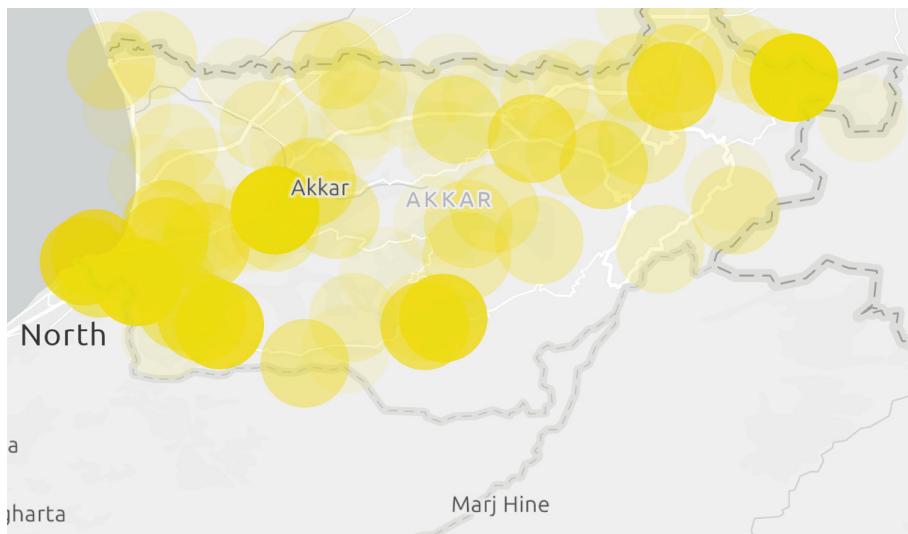


Figure 1: Heat map of reported safety and security incidents