

Loyalty & Authoritarian Leaders

The Case of Bashar al-Assad

Wesley Carr

Introduction

- Who is Assad
- Why Loyalty matters
- Key question: Why do people stay loyal?
- Focus areas: military, fear, ideology, external support



Military Loyalty

- Alawite dominated officer corps
- Family and patronage networks
- High cost of defection
- Dependence on Assad



Fear & Survival

- Violence + repression shape choices
- “Better the devil you know” mindset
- Collapse = chaos or extremist rule
- Loyalty often performed, not believed



Ideology & Symbolic Loyalty

- Performing loyalty publicly
- Propaganda & rituals reinforce stability
- “The good life” narrative
- Survival shapes identity



External Support & Normalization

- Support from Russia & Iran
- Regional normalization by Arab states
- Strengthens Assad's image of inevitability
- International backing reinforces internal loyalty



Conclusion

- Loyalty = complex & multi-layered
- Military, fear, ideology, external support, adaptation
- Survival often drives public loyalty
- Helps explain authoritarian resilience in Syria

