

From Daraa to Damascus: Regional and Temporal Protest Variation in Syria

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*When protest erupted in Syria on March 2011, there was considerable analysis seeking to explain the initial display of collective action. While this initial showing of dissent caught some off-guard, what was more remarkable is how the protest movement managed to endure, well over a year, despite policies of severe repression, a lack of established opposition organizations, and a lack of regime defections. This paper seeks to explore which factors have sustained the protest movement, as well as the role of these factors at different stages in the 'protest wave' and the relationship these variables share with region-specific waves of protest. I hypothesize that more traditional approaches to understanding protest longevity must be expanded in order to help explain contemporary events of protest, particularly in authoritarian contexts. The time and space aspects, also, must be considered because protest must attain a certain critical mass (in terms of participants, frequency, and dispersion) to present a unified front against an incumbent regime. I utilize a qualitative analysis in which social movement theory is applied to the Syrian case and also use panel data to test my hypotheses concerning the variables I believe to be relevant in Syria, at different stages in the 'protest wave' and in different regions of the country. Both the quantitative and qualitative approaches indicate that there have been several critical elements at play which helped to compensate for the relative lack of resources and opportunities. These factors involve the role of personal networks, collective identity, and the likelihood of success. Protest, however, cannot be explained by simply looking at a movement because bystanders and government actors also matter. The government's policy of repression played a critical role insofar as it was relatively indiscriminate across regions and among various demographics. This factor helped to facilitate a process in which more Syrians came to identify and, consequently, sympathize with the fallen protesters, creating a multiplier effect. In this way, repression is not simply a factor which may increase or decrease protest, but also a critical opportunity which conveys information about the regime that may have otherwise remained hidden.*

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## **PREFACE**

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Professors Luke Condra, Müge Finkel, Ilia Murtazashvili, and Paul Nelson for their support and advice, as well as Professor Annemie Maertens for her patient assistance with STATA and brainstorming. I am also grateful to Aurora A. Matthews for her assistance with editing and Ahad A. Alsalman for his assistance with translation. Finally, I thank Professor Condra whose guidance was essential for this project.

## INTRODUCTION

From the uprisings in the Middle East to ‘los indignados’ in Spain to the ‘Occupy’ movements across the United States, the year 2011 was marked by protests, demonstrations, riots, and revolutions. However, for each event of collective action that attracts media attention and manages to achieve a sustained challenge to the status quo, there are numerous events of dissent that fail to attract enough participants or achieve the longevity required to obtain concessions and achieve their aims. Initial dissent and enthusiasm can be hampered by disillusionment, harsh police coercion, and high opportunity costs such as imprisonment or threats. Given the innumerable obstacles that protesters must overcome, what then are the factors which lead protests to continue, day after day, while encouraging new protesters to join a movement? In the case of the Syrian uprising (2011 – present) this question is particularly pertinent as the protest movement has both endured and grown substantially since the initial outbreak of protest in March 2011. This growth occurred in the face of both repressive government responses, as well as a relative absence of some of the traditional factors commonly perceived as relevant in both sparking and sustaining protest, such as established organizations and networks, resources, and critical windows of opportunity. Based on traditional social movement theory, Syria is a case in which protest should have failed due to a repressive, ubiquitous government security apparatus, and the lack of established networks, organization, and resources.

## 1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION:

Protest, while often triggered by an event and certain favorable, permissive conditions, only achieves longevity and mounts a significant challenge through a dynamic process of reinforcing events and the presence of resources that facilitate mobilization. The determinants of what sustains protest are worthy of analysis because they help to determine whether or not initial collective action is likely to materialize into more widespread events of dissent or, as is sometimes the case, vanish as suddenly as it emerged. These issues are particularly timely and relevant for the case of the Arab uprisings and revolutions, which have generated considerable debate regarding why the protests have occurred when and where they have, and why they have spread so rapidly throughout the region. Equally pertinent is why, unlike Iran's Green Movement (2009) and other failed uprisings, these movements have largely been sustained, overcoming considerable obstacles, and in four countries have managed to achieve their immediate aims (the toppling of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, and the eventual ousting of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen).

To help explain this puzzle, this paper aims to explore two distinct, yet interconnected, questions: Which factors sustained large-scale mass mobilization in Syria, especially given the presence of significant obstacles? And, do these factors vary across time and space? Scholars of social movements have identified certain factors that help to facilitate both the initial outbreak of protest as well as factors that help to sustain it. Most prominent among these factors are the presence of both opportunities for collective action, resources that help to sustain the cooperation and build upon the initial event of collective action, and an overarching collective identity which helps to explain gaps in the previous two approaches. The majority of such factors, however,

were not present in Syria. At least not in the way in which such factors have commonly been defined.

## 1.2 ARGUMENT

Understanding the dynamics of protest is a complicated endeavor due to the fact that sequences of protest do not have regular, predictable frequencies, and protest does not necessarily disperse through populations, space, or time in an unvarying way (Tarrow, 1993, 284). However, in the case of Syria, certain factors stand out as being critical in sustaining the protest movement. While Syria was not the only Arab country to experience uprisings in 2011 – present, Syria presents the most striking puzzle. Very few analysts predicted that the Syrian people would mobilize to protest due to a variety of factors including the relative lack of opposition organizations, a powerful state security apparatus, and the country’s restrictive emergency rule (Al-Jazeera, February 9, 2011). However, Syrians did mobilize. Even when faced with high degrees of repression Syrians continued to protest and, what is more critical for this analysis, protest continued to grow both in terms of the number of participants, as well as in terms of frequency and geographic dispersion. What explains this puzzle? Several factors stand out. First, the Syrian movement received several signals – namely foreign support and certain concessions from the Assad regime – that it could be successful. Secondly, the protest movement in the country was able to overcome, to a degree, the lack of resources by taking advantage of personal ties and mosques as sites from which to launch collective action. Finally, one of the most critical and surprising factors has been the role of repression. This aspect has two dimensions. First, like the protest movement, repression gradually affected every region of Syria. While the regime did

use different repressive measures in different regions, each region eventually came to experience rising death tolls and arrests. This is critical because it helped to foster a sense of collective identity. Repression was not targeted merely at ‘radical’ Muslims, the working-class, or a particular region, but rather numerous sectors of society. This ultimately fostered a sense of solidarity among the people of Syrian and improved the chance that bystanders came to identify with the movement. Although it is critical that the claims of the movement resonate with the broader public, this was a case in which the claimants mattered as much as the claims. While scholars normally conceptualize repression as a constraint, in this way, it can also be understood as an opportunity.

### **1.3 WHY SYRIA?**

Given the variety of countries in the Arab world that experienced political protest, it is worth justifying the selection of Syria. First, the duration of the protest period in Syria, which began in mid-March 2011 and is still active during the time of this writing, provides the opportunity to analyze a longer protest cycle than in any of the other countries that experienced uprisings in 2011. This allows for deeper analysis of the variation and provides more observations for statistical analysis. For shorter protest cycles, such as those experienced in Egypt or Tunisia, outliers may greatly skew the data.

Furthermore, the conditions in Syria both leading up to and during the protest have largely been unfavorable based on traditional notions and expectations of when and where protest should both emerge and continue to mount a challenge to the status quo. Although scholars of social movements emphasize the importance of social networks in facilitating both



communication and mobilization, their power is often either greatly diminished or virtually non-existent under authoritarian regimes, like Syria. It is not simply that organizations and networks are lacking, thus limiting a fledgling movement's ability to coordinate and attract new participants, but communication is also extremely difficult in such settings. The mere act of expressing dissent or critical opinions to friends or families may come with a high cost. Charles Tilly (1978), for example, argues that in such settings the emergence of protest is unlikely.

Thirdly, Syria is unique due to the degree of repression employed by the government. By November 2011, the end of the period of analysis for this study, over 3,000 protesters had been killed by government forces (Kennedy, October 21, 2011) and tens of thousands of dissidents had been arrested (NPR, November 8, 2011). Although repression may refer to vast array of tactics and strategies, for the purpose of this analysis, the variable is defined by the number of deaths and arrests due to the fact that these elements are both easy to measure and other 'soft' measures of repression (i.e. surveillance) were prevalent even prior to the outbreak of protest.

While the impact of repression on protest is still debated among scholars and analysts, the dominant notion for some time was that repression was likely to deter protest, particularly high levels of repression (Tilly, 1978; Jenkins and Perrow, 1977; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, 1996). Goldstone (1998) predicts that high levels of repression often lead to failed revolutions. Even scholars who acknowledge that repression may lead to further mobilization through the mechanism of increased legitimacy and sympathy for the movement while simultaneously eroding the legitimacy of the status quo regime have found that moderate coercive policies may fuel protest but greater degrees of repression simply make the costs of publically expressing dissent too high (Opp, 1994). Syria, in theory, should have been a case where deterrence of dissent was successful. "Successful deterrence emerges if organizing protest is costly (e.g.

information cannot flow freely, activists are restricted in their movements and actions, social networks are dispersed or severed, and the punishment through repression is severe” (Pierskalla, 2010, 127).

Although presenting some significant obstacles for the generalizability of this study’s findings, the decision to focus on a single country was based on the fact that the literature on protest lacks country-specific cases and tends to utilize cross-national comparisons both for the sake of generalizability, as well as the requisite of having a sufficient number of observations to successfully test the data and obtain meaningful results (Davenport, 2007; for examples of country specific cases see Rasler, 1996 and Inclán, 2009) because many historical events of protest, like Bloody Sunday and the Soweto Riots, were day-long events that do not yield enough tangible information for researchers to test their hypotheses.

Others scholars point out that while cross-country comparisons are useful, country-specific analyses also serve an important purpose; Earl and Soule (2010 citing Koopmans, 1997), referring to the study of the relationship between protest and repression, point out that the study has been “obscured by the comparison of radically different types of repressive actors, forms of repression, and measures of subsequent mobilization, which are likely to affect the research findings” (76-77). The comparison of protest across different time periods and regions can be problematic as each country may have its own unique relationship with protest and factors that can serve as catalysts or deterrents for widespread, prolonged protest may be present or absent to varying degrees. Protest may emerge and spread differently in two countries in which one has a strong opposition movement and established networks, while in the other country, the opposition movement is ineffectual and activists and opposition leaders are typically jailed and coordination is very difficult.

Furthermore, and arguably more significant, is the time dimension. Regarding time spans, comparison of recent protest events to ones that occurred decades ago also may obscure the precise nature of the relationship between these two variables, as the role of mass media has greatly facilitated rapid communication and news transmission. For this reason, news of deaths, injuries, and arrests travel faster than they did in the past and governments cannot easily hide massacres from the outside world. For the above reasons, Earl and Soule (2010) suggest that the preferred method is to test hypotheses within “theoretically similar locations, periods, and types of repression as to limit causal heterogeneity attributable to unmeasured alternative sources”(76-77), avoiding cross-movement and cross-country comparisons.

In order to improve the internal validity of this case study, following the country analysis of Syria, I will also analyze five different regions of Syria- Homs, Damascus, Aleppo, Daraa, and Hama. The advantage of this approach is that sub-national variation holds constant many other potential causal variables that may have confounding impacts on the findings of the study (Culpepper, 2005). While multi-country studies that use regression techniques may use a variety of control variables, including country dummies, to overcome this problem, there are limitations to this approach as sometimes “the institutional and cultural features that make the country dummies significant are themselves integral to the causal story that is being told” (Culpepper, 2005).

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW: FROM DISSENT TO MASS MOBILIZATION**

### **2.1 RELEVANT FACTORS FOR UNDERSTANDING PROTEST**

Protest is commonly defined as group activities carried out by non-state actors with the purpose of expressing dissent publicly with societal and/or political conditions, institutions, and/or norms (Rucht, 1998, 30). Protest may also be defined as falling under the umbrella of “contentious politics” (Tarrow, 1994), and may include demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, and rallies. Sidney Tarrow (1994) defines actions as contentious if utilized by “people who lack regular access to institutions, mobilize in the name of a new or unaccepted claim, and behave in ways that fundamentally challenge others” (2).

In order to guide this analysis, two primary schools of thought concerning protest drivers, resource mobilization theory, and political opportunity structures, will be examined and then applied to the case of Syria. Upon first glance, it may appear that many of the factors which these approaches emphasize are lacking in Syria; however, this is addressed due to the fact that this paper proves to challenge the relatively narrow definition that both camps rely on to define relevant variables in understanding protest. These approaches, as outlined below, do not need to be understood as being mutually exclusive as they each complement one another and often interact to both ignite and sustain protest. Moreover, while these approaches may provide a useful framework, there are two principal problems: 1) they give little attention to agency, and 2)

they do not specifically address the dynamics of protest waves. Finally, Tarrow's (1993) model of protest cycles will also be included in order to take into account both spatial and temporal variation in protest.

In social movement literature, protest is often understood as being intrinsically linked to a variety of processes, both internal and external to the movement. A protest movement may undergo shifts and transformations from developments originating from within (i.e. activists share ideas, participants' modify goals and strategies, communication networks are improved). These shifts and changes, however, are tied closely to external developments, such as government responses to collective action, shifts in popular opinion, and foreign support or condemnation (Meyer, 2004). There is no singular factor that fully explains why protests emerge, why they escalate, why they die off, or why, and far less deeply analyzed, they fail to materialize in the first place (Sawyers and Meyer 1999 as quoted in Meyer, 2004, 135). Rather, protest should be understood as an interaction of a variety of sometimes simultaneous internal and external, macro and micro processes that, for their part, influence one another. The critical element for this analysis is that protest must be viewed as a continual exchange and interaction between the movement and forces external to it, namely the government and bystanders.

### **2.1.1 POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES**

The political opportunity structure (POS) approach or the political process model (PPM), as it is also known, views the presence (or absence) of specific opportunities that may exist both internally or externally to the movement as critical to both facilitate and develop protest (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 21; Kitschelt, 1986, 58). Such factors constantly evolve as potential dissidents, at any given time, experience window of opportunities (i.e. political

liberalization, the sharing of tactics from activists in neighboring countries) and lost opportunities (i.e. the victory of hard-liners in the government, the implementation of marital law) (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001, 41). These opportunities may be furnished by sources external to the movement or they may be created and shaped by the activists themselves as they transform favorable (and even unfavorable, as the case may be) situations into opportunities for collective action.

Though defined differently by various scholars, Doug McAdam (1996), for example, defines political opportunity as the relative openness of the institutionalized political system, stability or instability of elite arrangements, presence or absence of elites in government, and the state's capacity or propensity for repression. Sidney Tarrow considers the "availability of influential allies" another important form of opportunity (Tarrow, 1994). Such opportunities have tended to be defined quite narrowly, and largely ignore the capacity of individuals to overcome or transform such constraints. While the presence of specific windows of opportunity may be evident to scholars in retrospective analysis of cases of protest, in the moment activists may fail to perceive such factors as opportunities. Furthermore, even factors that are commonly understood as constraints may be seized by activists in order to foster collective anger against the regime and attract broader participation.

The first three factors outlined by McAdams (1996) – along with Tarrow's (1994) inclusion of foreign allies – are linked to important drivers of protest: the likelihood of success. The more open the political system, the easier it will be for the protest movement to influence political structures. If elites are divided, the protest movement may be able to exploit the divisions; or the presence of sympathetic elites in government (or abroad) may help the protest movement gain credibility and recognition. In the case of Syria, few political elites sided with

the protest movement. In such a situation, the support of foreign allies, particularly those who are powerful and can exert considerable influence on the incumbent regime, is significant to enhance the perceived efficacy of the movement. The final factor-repression is particularly relevant in the case of Syria. The government of Syria chose to respond to the protest movement through a policy of civilian killings, mass arrests, and other coercive tactics such as raids and cutting off entire towns and villages' electricity and water supply.

Governments, particularly those led by dictators, tend to assume that both “serious” and “effective” repression will work to deter protest (Francisco, 2005). Repression may also be perceived as far less costly than actually offering substantial concessions or yielding to some of the protesters' demands. Some scholars have argued that the likelihood that a government will utilize repressive policies is largely based on the degree to which the regime views protest as threatening to the status quo (Davenport, 1995, 690). Christian Davenport argues that this perception is primarily based on four distinct factors: system type, coercive capability, economic development, and dependency on the global economy (Davenport, 1995, 690-692).

However, the dynamic relationship between protest and repression, despite a myriad of cross-discipline literature, remains unclear. On one hand, repression may be understood as a cost that may lower protest participation (Opp, 1994). On the other hand, repression may increase the incentives to protest by increasing the level of political discontent (Opp, 1994). This may occur because protest is perceived as either unjust or illegitimate or due to the fact that “integration in protest-encouraging networks” may increase the incentives to engage in collective action (Opp, 1994, 104). Research confirms that repression has had several very distinct impacts on protest. Some scholars have found support for a positive relationship, in which coercion increases protest (Francisco, 1996; Lichbach and Gurr, 1981; Gurr, 1970). Other scholars argue that the

potentially negative effect of repression on protest can be mitigated or negated if repression results in a micromobilization process as dissidents' actions demonstrate the commitment of others, making their aims appear desirable and increasing the social rewards for participating in collective action (Opp and Roehl, 1990). The negative relationship between protest and repression has, in the past, been maintained by rational choice theorists (among others), who hold that government sanctions, such as bans and arrests, can limit the ability of opposition groups to assemble resources, such as people and money (Tilly, 1978; Jenkins and Perrow, 1977; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, 1996).

Other scholars have found support for different effects, based on the degree to which governments employ repressive policies and tactics. For example, some scholars have found support for the view that repression deters protest, but only to a point. In this case, repression initially makes it more difficult for the opposition to carry out rebellious activities and capitalize on resources. However, at some point a threshold is crossed in which additional members of the population, outraged at the government's strong-arm tactics, join the protest movement, as illustrated in a "U-shaped" relationship (Lichbach and Gurr, 1981; Francisco 1995; Francisco, 2004). The "inverted-U" hypothesis finds the reverse: protest is most likely when coercion is moderate and least likely when it is absent or severe (Opp, 1994).

Repression as a possible explanatory variable for protest, however, should not be considered in isolation as it is rarely the only constraint (or opportunity) influencing an individual's decision to participate in protest. Moreover, repression in and of itself, is rarely sufficient to drive a protest movement and is unlikely to ever adequately sustain it. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 is a clear example of repression's ability to spark surges in protest (Rasler, 1996; Goldstone, 1998). However, the presence of economic, religious, and social grievances



among vast segments of the population was also key to ensuring the longevity and strength of the protest movement (Goldstone, 1998, 139). Members of clergy resented the Shah's policy of secularization, merchants disliked the growing strength of the dominant industrial-technological economy, civil servants and citizens felt aggrieved over the rampant corruption, and students were critical of the Shah's monopolization on power (Goldstone, 1998, 139). Furthermore, the repression in Iran had another important feature that helped to result in widespread mobilization: the coercive policies implemented by the state were not directed at one particular group but rather many segments of society which ultimately created a national cross-class coalition against the Shah (Goldstone, 1998, 140).

While scholars of the POS approach have classified repression as a constraint, this may rob this relevant factor of its potential to explain protest surges. While it is true that repression increases the cost of mobilization by instilling fear among participants and potential participants and signaling that the state is powerful, the use of repression may also foster a sense of outrage and indignation among the opposition (Lichbach and Gurr, 1981; Francisco 1995; Francisco, 2004), and may signal that the government is weak (Rasler, 1996). Not only may it demonstrate the weakness of the government but it also may expose factors that were suspected but not necessarily known (the government's abuse of human rights for example). Repression may serve as an opportunity insofar as it has the capability to unify various groups in a society against the incumbent regime while also providing legitimacy to the opposition movement. The idea that repression may be an opportunity is not necessarily new. Though not dealing specifically with repression, McAdam (1982, 48 as cited on Oliver, 1989, 10) notes the "cognitive liberation" or a "sense of injustice" (Turner and Killian, 1972, 259 as cited by Oliver, 1989, 10) may also be integral in explaining the emergence of collective action. Oliver, in considering the impact of

actions and events on protest, points out that “one of the most important ways in which collective actions are affected by prior actions is the creation of an occasion for deciding” (Oliver, 1989, 7). This “occasion for deciding” can be prompted by a critical event, which makes protest more attractive – like we saw under the rubicon of opportunities – but also may not be an actual opportunity in this sense. Instead it might be a point in which a population becomes significantly outraged which we later see in the case of several events early in the protest wave in Syria.

On the flipside of repression are concessions that “can be understood as any right, prerogatives, or benefits gained from the state by collective action efforts” (Almeida, 2007 as quoted by Inclán, 2009, 799). Concessions are not all equal. Some scholars divide concessions into two separate categories: procedural versus substantive concessions. The former refers to “low-level accommodation that reflect the government’s attempt to negotiate with designated leaders of the opposition” (i.e. release of political prisoners, mass pardons) and the latter refers to higher-level accommodation in which “the regime attempts to co-opt the challenging group leaders and their political platforms” (Rasler, 1996, 138). Concessions in Syria have come from both categories, but also are differentiated in terms of whom they attempted to target. Certain concessions, such as permission for teachers to wear the *niqab* and the closure of a casino, were meant to appease more conservative Muslims, while other concessions, such as the repeal of emergency law or mass pardons, targeted activists demanding greater political rights.

Governments select to offer concessions to quell dissent, either by meeting some of the protest movement’s demands or by co-opting powerful elements of the movement. Protesters may come to see protest as unnecessary as the government begins to address at least some of their demands. However, concessions do not necessarily lead to a decline in collective action. Concessions may be understood to impact protest both on a large scale and in terms of the

individual choice to participate in protest. Some scholars, such as Karen Rasler (1996), find support for the notion that concessions may increase protest, particularly when they are interpreted as signaling the weakness of the regime. In this sense, concessions may increase “the expected value of the collective good for many people at the same time” (Rasler, 1996, 135). Concessions also tend to have a positive effect on protest particularly if they are combined with repressive policies or used inconsistently (Khawaja, 1993; Francisco 1995).

Though neither McAdam (1996) or Tarrow’s (1994) definition of political opportunities include concessions, if they are interpreted as signaling the efficacy of the movement, they should be included in any conceptualization of opportunity. If, on the other hand, they are viewed by claimants as signaling that they can achieve their aims without collective action, they may be conceptualized as a constraint. Regardless of their ultimate effect, they should be included because as Ronald Francisco (1995) notes, concessions are tied to the dissidents’ relationship with the state and as noted earlier, this relationship is critical throughout the protest cycle as each move of the protest movement is met by a counter move from the regime.

### **2.1.2 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION THEORY**

Rational choice theory views collective action as a rational calculation to “obtain a collective good, which the individual cannot do on his [sic] own” which makes both cooperation and coordination necessary (Oberschall, 1994, 79). The emphasis of this approach is how “differing mixes of benefits and sanctions [from both the government and its opposition] affect the political preferences and behavioral choices” of individuals (Mason and Krane, 1989, 177).

Some rational choice theorists tend to emphasize the role that resources play in facilitating and fostering collective action (Snow and Oliver, 1995, 573), and this approach

commonly known as resource mobilization theory. This perspective views protest as “goal-oriented action constrained by resources, costs, network ties, and organizational capacities” (Snow and Oliver, 1995, 573). Resource mobilization theory focuses on factors which facilitate organization and mobilization like “extensive non-governmental organizations, socio-economic development and access to communication networks” (Dalton et al, 2009, 54-55).

One critical variable for this perspective is mobilizing structures such as informal and formal organizations (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 14) which play a crucial role in understanding the process of protest as they offer protesters sites for initial mobilization, help to further facilitate surges in protest as opportunities arise, and help to develop activists’ capacity to exploit resources (41). Although collective action is impossible without the individual choice of deciding whether or not to participate in the first place, it is individuals’ face-to-face interactions, social networks, personal relationships, and institutions from which the movement may be activated, to gain recruits and ultimately be sustained (Tarrow, 1994, 21). Under authoritarian regimes, the presence of groups, organizations, and social networks may be greatly restricted or even non-existent. However, as mentioned earlier, it is possible that personal connections (i.e. friends, co-workers, and family) serve a similar purpose (Opp and Gern, 1993).

The transmission of information is another crucial resource which may refer to either the information about protest itself or information about the effects of protest in terms of government responses, the reaction of the general public, and likelihood of success. Information, however, can serve to facilitate protest but also can emerge from protest. Protests reveal what is previously known (dissent or at least dissatisfaction with the regime) but hidden; protest brings this collective dissatisfaction to the surface and allows others to act on it and become more aware of it. Information regarding protests does not only reveal the level of opposition in the country, but

also leaves the regime's nature entirely exposed (Lohmann, 1994). Even in cases where the brutality and repression of the regime is previously known, government responses to protest make this fact evident and difficult to deny.

Syria does not clearly fall in line with either of these two approaches due to both a lack of resources, such as organizations and the relative absence of any discernible, 'traditional' opportunities within the country. However, in terms of political opportunities, the Syrian protest movement did have at least one important opportunity. This opportunity, however, differs from the way opportunity is conceptualized by McAdam (1996) because it was not internal, but rather emerged as protest spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Such a development created a window of opportunity both insofar as it demonstrated the possible success of protest as well as offering models from which Syrian protesters could both learn and modify techniques. The notion that opportunities are usually seen as developing within a country's borders limits the possibility of influential regional developments. As more countries obtain greater access to communication and technological developments – such as Internet and cell phones – foreign developments and events may be as influential as events within a country's borders. The story is not complete through an analysis of which favorable factors are present or absent but also how people perceive such opportunities and constraints, as well as how they overcome or attempt to overcome them.

## **2.2 PERIODS OF SUSTAINED PROTEST**

Tarrow (1993) defines sustained sequences of protest as “protest cycles...an increasing and then decreasing wave of interrelated collective actions and reactions to them whose aggregate

frequency, intensity, and forms increase and then decline in rough chronological proximity” (287). Although this definition is widely accepted, Koopmans’ slight modification is appropriate here: the use of the term “wave” instead of “cycle” due to the fact that “the notion of cycle suggests a periodically recurring sequence of phenomena” while the “wave” metaphor does not (Koopmans, 2004, 4). There is no reason to suspect that episodes necessarily repeat themselves within the various stages of protest (Koopmans, 2004). Episodes of protest action should be conceived as a series of actions that build on one another and continually evolve due to both internal and external dynamics. Oliver writes that it is precisely this sequence of action/reaction that defines collective action (Oliver, 1989, 3).

Protest waves are far from uniform (Tarrow, 1993). Tarrow (1993), however, does highlight certain trends that have been fairly consistent throughout the course of various protest waves. These features include: heightened conflict; broad sectoral and geographic extension; the appearance of new social movement organizations and the empowerment of old ones; the creation of new “master frames” of meaning; and the invention of new forms of collective action (284). Heightened conflict refers to episodes of intensified conflict that brings the movement to the attention of the elites, while setting in motion “a process of institutional adaptation or collapse” (Tarrow, 1993, 285). Protest only becomes significant insofar as the movement is able to attain a critical mass and represent a significant challenge to the status quo. This element is also often characterized by increased violence and intensity of the conflict. This intensified period of conflict ultimately may pose a threat to the longevity of the movement. Violence has a “polarizing effect on conflict and alliance systems” and the threat or actual presence of violence may serve to discourage bystanders from joining the movement (Tarrow, 1994, 104). Tarrow

also notes that as protest spreads there is a tendency for claims to broaden, “often radicalizing them into general challenges to authority” (Tarrow, 1994, 168).

“Geographic and sectoral diffusion” refers to the finding that protest tends to originate in the center and gradually move to the periphery (Tarrow, 1993, 285). Center, in this sense, refers to heavy industrial areas while the periphery refers to areas in which light industry and farming are prevalent (Tarrow, 1993, 285). It could be argued, however, that this feature of protest waves is not necessarily common to all occurrences of collective action, particularly more recent protest waves; in both the case of uprisings in Tunisia (2010 – 2011) and in the uprisings in Syria (2011 - ?), protests emerged in the periphery and spread to urban centers (Associated Press, 2011). Tarrow (1993) also predicts that dispersion is prevalent across various social sectors with activists being disproportionately comprised of members of certain groups – such as students and union members in the early stages – while later, protest gradually attracts less ‘traditional’ participants such as business elites, break-away political elites, and white-collar workers (Tarrow, 1993, 285).

Which mechanisms trigger such diffusion? Protest spreads geographically insofar as the movement is able to depict the struggle in favorable terms, as well as demonstrate the likelihood of success through a process of framing explained in further detail below. “Unlike conventional forms of participation, contentious collective action demonstrates the possibilities of collective action to others, offering even resource-poor groups opportunities that their positions in society would deny them” (Tarrow, 1994, 96). “This occurs when ‘early risers’ make claims on elites that can be used by those with less daring and fewer resources. Moreover, collective action exposes opponents’ points of weakness that may not be evident until they are challenged, and

can also reveal unsuspected or formerly passive allies, both within and outside the system” (Tarrow, 1994).

Theories of how protests spread are often divided among two different camps: one camp tends to focus on the role of organizations in explaining protest diffusion (Morris, 1981, 1984 as cited by Andrews and Biggs, 2006) and views organizations as essential in disseminating information and sharing tactics, and thus facilitating further collective action; while another camp views the spread of protest as largely a spontaneous phenomenon (Killian 1984; Oberschall 1989 as cited by Andrews and Biggs, 2006). However, the term “spontaneous” is somewhat misleading as there are often crucial mechanisms at play, such as the dispersion of information (Andrews and Biggs, 2006). For example, Susanne Lohmann (1994) utilizes a behavior cascades model in which individuals can select to participate in collective action or abstain, and “the net benefits derived from each alternative depend on the number of other individuals choosing that alternative” (Lohmann, 1994, 47). Lohmann highlights how mass protest activities expose information about the regime's lack of public support, thus increasing the desirability and benefits of protest, while also revealing the “malign” nature of the regime (Lohmann, 1994, 47).

This model interprets a sequence of mass protest activities as information cascades, which proceed as follows: 1) people take costly political action to express their dissatisfaction with the regime; 2) the public then takes informational cues from changes in the size of the protest movement over time; and 3) the regime loses public support and collapses if the protest activities reveal it to be malign (Lohmann, 1994, 47). Lohmann notes that the individual choice to participate in protest must be understood as being heterogeneous; each individual has their own specific threshold “denoting the number other individuals who must choose an alternative



before the individual finds it worthwhile to do so” (Lohmann, 1994, 47). For a given frequency distribution of thresholds, one individual’s choice of an alternative has the potential to push another individual over her threshold; the second individual’s action in turn may induce other individuals to follow; and so on (Lohmann, 1994, 47). Although the initial action requires that an individual or some individuals must be willing to go against the majority and take significant risks, the ultimate benefit depends on how many people choose to participate, which increases the likelihood of success and, particularly applicable in authoritarian contexts, lessens the risk of being targeted by the government’s coercive tactics (Lohmann, 1994).

The third characteristic in Tarrow’s model (1993) regards organizations and networks. New social movement organizations tend to emerge once the protest wave has gained momentum while the early stages are usually comprised of “older” social movements (Tarrow, 1993, 285). Older social movements have established networks and can overcome coordination obstacles that newer or less organized social movement organizations may face. In authoritarian regimes, where the existence of social movements or organizations may be weak or non-existent, it is possible that the movements do not generate the protest wave, but rather the wave ultimately creates the movements and organizations. In this case, the impetus of these movements is the protest wave. Another way in which to explain situations in which organizations are lacking is analyzing more closely the role played by personal networks, which may be the only form that exists in repressive, authoritarian countries. Personal networks of co-workers, families, and friends may fill this gap, although the degree to which personal networks play a role in facilitating and fostering mobilization in authoritarian settings is largely unknown (Opp and Gern, 1993, 662).

The fourth feature in Tarrow's (1993) description of protest waves is "new frames of meaning." The concept of frames is based on sociological and psychological approaches to understanding social movements through collective identity. This approach emerged among critics who believed that other approaches, namely the POS approach, gave far too much weight to external factors while ignoring the role of agency in explaining the process of social movements and protest (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003). Due to such criticisms, another approach emerged that focuses on how identity – namely collective identity – both serves to drive protest while it also is created and modified within the movement (Polletta, 1998; Klandermans, 2000).

Collective identity, defined as an individual's "cognitive, moral, and emotional connections with a broader community, category, practice, or institution" (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, 285 and 298), is constantly impacted by its relation to the external environment and external actors which consequently provide both opportunities and constraints that "are in turn recognized and defined as such by the actor" (Melucci 1995, 47). The process of cooperating to achieve a common goal ultimately transforms identity, as identity both constructs and becomes constructed through social interactions and relations among groups (Zack, 2002, 60). Collective identity becomes politicized in light of a sequence of events which "gradually transform the group's relationship to its social environment," and frequently begins with "the awareness of shared grievances," followed by a process through which an "external enemy" is blamed for the group's present condition and demands are presented to the responsible party (Klandermans, 2005, 159).

Perhaps the most well-known variant of this theory is framing, or as it is also known, "collective action frames" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001, 14). This is the fourth element of Tarrow's (1993) protest cycle. Frames are the "interpretive packages" that activists develop to

mobilize potential adherents and participants, making a strong case of the existence of injustice, thus increasing the “effectiveness of collective ‘agency’ in changing the condition” (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, 291). These frames can be used to “justify and dignify collective action” and serve as a mobilization tool (Tarrow, 1993, 286).

David Snow and his colleagues have defined this tool of collective action as a process of “rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective” (Snow et al., 1986, 464-465). Some examples of this process are seen in the linkage of indigenous rights groups and environmental organizations. These two groups have, in some cases, partnered to link the idea of defending indigenous peoples’ livelihoods and environmental conservation, or in the re-naming of female circumcision or clitoridectomy to female genital mutilation (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, 224-225), a name which evokes a more powerful response.

For a frame to be effective it is critical that it conveys that “a given state of affairs is neither neutral nor accidental,” while also offering a credible solution (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, 225). A sense of injustice is critical to propel participation in collective action. Framing must also clearly convey the efficacy of the movement. In order to convince people to act collectively, activists must frame the action in such a way as to demonstrate change is only possible through collective action (Oliver, 1989, 10). Participants challenging authority must “strategically ‘frame’ identities” in such a way that they attract participation, nurture commitment, and foster solidarity (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, 291) in order to overcome a variety of obstacles such as free-riders, fear, and high costs.

This framing of identity serves another purpose as well. The process helps to distinguish between the opposition, the opponents, and bystanders and helps to sustain participants’

commitment while managing both real and potential internal divisions (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, 291). Framing aims to increase identification from the broader populace with the movement. As others have noted, “the more someone identifies with a group, the higher the chances are that he [sic] will take part in collective action on behalf of that group” (Klandermans, 2005, 160). Participation, in turn, ultimately serves to reinforce this collective identity (Klandermans, 2005, 170). “Movement activists come to value the image of themselves as activists as an end in itself so that it becomes an intrinsic motivation to ‘do the right thing’” (Oliver, 1989, 12).

Tarrow (1993) considers the final common feature across protest waves to be “expanding repertoires of contention” which refers to the development within the protest wave of new strategies and tools of protest and dissent (286). Movement leaders invent, adapt, and combine various forms of collective action to stimulate support from people who might otherwise stay at home in order to overcome their relative disadvantage of facing a state with considerably greater access to resources and capacity to confront the protest movement (Tarrow, 1994, 19; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 15). For example, strikes may be seen as less costly than demonstrations, especially if the regime has traditionally responded to demonstrations with violence and repression. McAdam (1983) points out how there is a strong link between the emergence of new protest techniques and peaks in protest. This “tactical innovation” and the corresponding government response is part of the “ongoing process of tactical interaction in which insurgents and opponents seek, in chess-like fashion, to offset the moves of the other” (McAdams, 1983, 736). While the evolution of protest tactics does present an advantage, a movement “must be able to sustain the leverage it has achieved through the use of such tactics” because even “the most successful tactic is likely to be effectively countered by movement opponents if relied upon too long” (McAdam, 1983, 736). This is typically done in one of two

ways: 1) movements may use the leverage that new tactics have given them in order to obtain positions of “institutionalized power” or 2) continue “to experiment with noninstitutionalized forms of protest” (McAdams, 1983, 736).

### **3.0 THE DYNAMICS OF PROTEST, GOVERNMENT RESPONSES, AND LIKELIHOOD OF SUCCESS**

As mentioned previously, repression may have two possible effects on protest. First repression may work to deter dissent by creating greater fear among potential dissidents as the costs increase and may also signal the strength of the regime and consequently the fact that protest is unlikely to be successful. On the other hand, severe coercive measures may lead to greater opposition and anger towards the regime (Zwerman and Steinoff, 2005; Linden and Klandermans, 2006), while also serving to delegitimize the regime. Secondly, repression may also contribute to a greater sense of solidarity among citizens, leading more people to sympathize with the killed or arrested protesters, and thus, consequently, perceive the opposition in a more favorable light. Furthermore, such acts of severe repression could also be perceived as a sign of the vulnerability of the regime due to the fact that it may appear to some that the regime sees the dissent as a very real threat. In the case of Syria, protest spread rather rapidly after the initial outbreak in Daraa, in spite of the government's repressive clampdown, and it appears that in Syria repression had a positive impact on protest (i.e. appeared to be linked with the increase in the number of protests). In Syria, after instances in which the government used a great deal of force (i.e. in early responses to the situation in Daraa, the torture and death of a 13 year old boy, and high death tolls in Homs during Ramadan), high numbers of protests were reported in the following days (my data). While the protest spread could have been triggered by other factors,

the frequent references to the martyrs of Daraa and other regions (Euronews, April 1, 2011; Blomfield, June 3, 2011) appear to indicate that repression was seen as largely excessive and illegitimate. I posit that repression, measured by the number of deaths and arrests in the previous week<sup>1</sup>, has been one of the principal forces driving increased protests in the current week. I expect that coercive government policies lead to great protest with the primary mechanisms being outrage and a delegitimizing effect on the regime.

**H1: Government repression, measured by the number of deaths and arrests in a given week, increases the number of protests in the following week.**

Based on previous findings that concessions are also influential (Rasler 1996; Lichbach, 1987) and the idea that governments are constantly making a choice between coercive and accommodating policies, concessions will also be considered. I hypothesize that concessions will likely increase protest because they are not perceived as meaningful, due to the Syrian regime's history of limited concessions and short-lived reforms (Ismail, 2010), as well as regional patterns which seem to indicate that insignificant, vague, and unrelated concessions on the part of leaders, demonstrated in the case of Egypt and Tunisia had little impact on deterring protest. This notion is further supported in the literature, which maintains that for concessions to be perceived as meaningful, thus possibly reducing protest, they must be "substantial and address the dissident needs, otherwise they tend to generate more protest activity" (Goldstone and Tilly, 2001). Moreover, concessions can serve as a signal to the protesters that their efforts are effective at challenging the regime.

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<sup>1</sup> By "week", in order to capture the effect of the Friday "Day of Rage" after prayers, I aggregated daily data on a seven-day period beginning with Friday morning and concluding with Thursday night though this is obviously not a week in either the Gregorian or Hijri calendar. This was done due to the fact that the largest number of protests, and consequently killings and arrests were carried out on this day. Furthermore, due to the fact that since some bodies have been discovered later, it is not always clear on precisely which day certain deaths occurred and this time period captures deaths that were discovered in the days following Friday's protests.

**H2: Government concessions will increase protest in the same period in which the concessions are offered.**

Finally, due to both the length of the protest wave, as well as fairly consistent surges, some consideration must be given to the likelihood of success. Engaging in collective action is associated with considerable costs (i.e. time, possible loss of employment, the chance of arrest) but in a repressive, authoritarian regime, these costs greatly increase. Any individual participating in protest in Syria, particularly after the first weeks in which the government responded severely to the mobilization in Daraa, likely had some idea of the risks involved. Given these high costs, outrage and solidarity may not be the only factors driving the protest movement and the presence of opportunities is critical. For this reason, likelihood of success is crucial and is measured by two separate factors: statements of support from foreign leaders and international organizations and protest movements' victories in neighboring countries. Foreign support is defined as any action or statements that at least give lip service, if not substantial backing, to the opposition's cause and actions, such as sanctions and threats of expulsion from the Arab League, and are likely to generate even greater number of protests. As foreign support increases, particularly from important international players, the regime grows increasingly isolated and the protest movement's claims are recognized and legitimized.

The second element of likelihood of success is the victory of regional opposition movements. During Syria's protest wave, important developments were occurring in other countries in the region, such as President Saleh's departure from Yemen, and the rebels surge in Libya. Such events likely reinforced the efficacy and desirability of collective action and as Francisco (2004) notes, "protest is event driven" (121). Although some of these "victories" did little to actually achieve the opposition's aims, what is critical is the perception of such events as



they occurred, which was assessed by looking at the coverage of events from periodicals of the region. I expect regional events to impact protest positively as they may serve to maintain the momentum of protest and convince Syrian dissidents that if success has been achieved in other countries, their uprising also may be successful in the long-run in achieving their aims. The inclusion of both of these variables is important because some sort of signal for mobilization and coordination that is “potent” enough to ensure “that everyone else reads the same signal with enough confidence to act on it, thus providing one another with the immunity that goes with action in large numbers” (Schelling, 1963, 54) is critical in explaining surges.

**H3: The occurrence of statements of foreign support and the success of other opposition movements in the region will increase protests in the current week.**

## **4.0 CASE STUDY: SYRIA**

### **4.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PROTEST AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO OPPOSITION IN SYRIA**

Syria has been under authoritarian rule for decades and has experienced only limited periods of contested power and protest. Decision-making is believed to be heavily concentrated in the hands of the President, Bashar al-Assad, and his close inner circle (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, 2007). Although al-Assad, upon taking office after the death of his father in 2000, initially expressed support for political liberalization and pluralism, such support was short-lived, though it resulted in a brief mobilization and period of debate among opposition figures known as the “Damascus Spring”. However, this period of relative openness and opportunity was quickly crushed through a policy of repression, including arrests and censorship (Wieland, 2006). The possibility of political reform did not emerge again for nearly five years. In June 2005, during the 10th Ba’ath Party Congress, certain decisions on political reforms, such as the licensing of independent political parties, were accepted, but lacked any specific timetable for implementation and ultimately failed to materialize (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, 2007).

Prior to the uprisings in Syria, all parties other than the ruling Ba'ath party were banned under both Bashar al-Assad as well as his father, Hafez (Spyer, October 27, 2011), and

membership to the Muslim Brotherhood was an offense punishable by death under Article 49 of the Syrian penal code enacted in 1980 (Pace and Landis, 2009). Moreover, the country also lacked established organizations and civil society has been described as a “wasteland” (Wieland, 2006). In the absence of effective political opposition groups, some human rights organizations (estimated to number around 12 at their peak) were marginally active in Syrian society and, although fragmented and small, have usually been considered “arguably the most effective” opposition on the ground to the regime (Pace and Landis, 2009). However, there also were a few opposition groups operating mostly from abroad (Spyer, October 27, 2011), and were extremely fragmented (Al-Jazeera, February 9, 2011).

For such reasons, upon the advent of the so-called “Arab Spring”<sup>2</sup>, few analysts predicted a Syrian uprising (Al-Jazeera, February 9, 2011). Other factors expected to deter opposition include the presence of a repressive state apparatus, a relatively popular president, and the military’s close ties to the regime (Al-Jazeera, February 9, 2011). Other reports note that while dissent may have existed in Syrian society, most Syrians tended to prefer the status quo to the unrest that regime change had sparked in neighboring Iraq (United States Institute of Peace, March 2006). The Emergency Law, moreover, which has been in place since 1963, severely restricts citizens in terms of free speech, association, assembly, and press (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, 2007). Furthermore, would-be Syrian activists bear the reminder of what can occur to those who dare to challenge the regime in the example of the Muslim Brotherhood uprisings in 1982, which were crushed violently in Hama and believed to have resulted in 20,000 or more deaths (Al-Jazeera, February 9, 2011). Additionally, political

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<sup>2</sup> Although the media typically refers to the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria as the ‘Arab Spring’, some analysts object to such terms (see Rothkopf 2011) and the term seems to be rarely, if ever, used by Arab activists.

activists are commonly detained and there were estimated to be around 4,500 “prisoners of opinion” in Syrian jails prior to the uprisings (Al-Jazeera, February 9, 2011).

Doubts that Syrians would join in the revolutions spreading through the Arab world were reinforced when a call to protest on Facebook in February 2011 failed to materialize (Al-Jazeera, February 9, 2011). However, in mid-March, protests erupted in the city of Daraa and while the initial demands were centered on freeing youths who had recently been arrested for spraying anti-government graffiti on a wall, the demands evolved to call for greater political freedoms and quickly grew in scale. The Syrian government chose to respond to the protesters with a combination of repressive and conciliatory gestures. Security forces fired live ammunition at the crowds, resulting in several deaths and scores of injuries within the first few days of the protest (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). Meanwhile President Assad offered several conciliatory gestures, such as increased pay and benefits for state workers, the removal of Daraa’s governor, Faisal Kalthoum, the release of 200 political, the dismantling of the cabinet, and a decree granting nationality to thousands of Kurds (Al-Jazeera, "Syria Uprising: Key Events; New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). The protests, however, continued to grow and gradually dispersed throughout the country, with crowds sometimes reaching tens of thousands of participants in Damascus, Baniyas, Latakia, and Daraa (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology; Al-Jazeera, "Syria: The People Awake"). By March 30, President Bashar al-Assad made his first public address to the nation, and blamed the unrest largely on a foreign conspiracy (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology).

As the protests continued, the government continued to rely on concessions but also increased repression and by early May the death toll was estimated to have reached 600 casualties (NPR, May 6, 2011). Estimates of the number of arrests were much higher, rumored

to be around 10,000 by June 2011 (The Economist, June 18, 2011). Even in the face of ever-increasing obstacles and constraints including extensive crack-downs in Daraa and Homs, Syrians continued to mobilize (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). Deaths and arrests were not the only costs of protests; on June 12th, armed forces took control of Jisr al-Shughour in the province of Idlib, resulting in an estimated 12,000 Syrians crossing the border to Turkey (Al-Jazeera, "Syria Uprising: Key Events).

Protests, in the first few months, tended to be sequential, moving from place to place, rather than occurring simultaneously (The Economist, July 2, 2011). Several months into the protest, analysts and journalists began to emphasize the emerging divisions, particularly sectarian, in the country (Arango, February 28, 2012). As the protest movement continued, it appeared that Alawites, Christians, and some middle-class Sunnis were reluctant to support the protesters both due to their own vested interests with the regime or simply due to fear of what a post-Assad Syria would be like. The regime played into these emerging divisions. The Syrian government was rumored to be supplying Alawite villages, near Sunni areas, with arms (The Economist, June 4, 2011).

However, the depiction of the divisions in Syria as sectarian does not fully explain the dynamics at play, which were actually more complex and often fell not only along sectarian, but also regional and socio-economic divisions. Despite the predominance of Sunnis in the country, some scholars highlight the fact that Sunnis hardly comprise a uniform group. For this reason, Syria has often been characterized as having an "empty center" due to a lack of unity among Sunnis and internal divisions (Abd-Allah, 1983, 35). These divisions are primarily class-based, and at various stages of the protest trajectory this has been clearly established; despite the fact that Sunnis predominate in the opposition movement, the participation has been primarily from

working-class Sunnis, while Sunnis who occupy higher socio-economic strata in society have tended to avoid coming out in support of the opposition. Many educated, middle-class individuals, including Sunnis, dismissed the protesters as “rural illiterates” or “religious fanatics” (The Economist, June 4, 2011). At the same time, protest attracted minorities. Some Alawites and Christians came out on the side of the protesters (The Economist, June 4, 2011; BBC, April 6, 2012). Also, the movement received backing from important Kurdish figures, including Mishaal Tamo, the leader of the Kurdish Future Movement (Al-Jazeera, “Syria: The People Awake”).

The divisions were also linked to the role networks play in facilitating protest, though in this case the category of networks were largely those based on personal ties. In the absence of more established networks, protesters relied on the support of family members (which may have also been a basis for recruitment). This factor may also help to explain the absence of significant numbers of minorities, such as Christians and Alawites in the protest movement. Meanwhile, supporters of the President rallied in Damascus and other cities, indicating that despite widespread dissent, the President still enjoyed some public support (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology), or at the very least had the coercive capabilities to pressure Syrians to mobilize in his behalf.

On June 27, dozens of opposition figures met publically for the first time in Damascus, although the meeting was sanctioned by the government, thus resulting in its condemnation by many activists (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). Earlier in the month, over 300 exiles, along with a few Syrian activists who had managed to cross the border, met in Antalya, Turkey (The Economist, June 4, 2011) as the opposition continued to organize. On the eve of Ramadan, July 31, 2011, activists claimed that security forces had killed nearly 140

people, 100 in Hama alone (Al-Jazeera, "Syria Uprising: Key Events"). Despite the high death tolls leading up to Ramadan, tens of thousands of protestors gathered in Hama, which President al-Assad continued to dismiss, this time as religiously inspired unrest with foreign backing (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology).

Amid continued defections, the formation of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), led by Colonel Riad al-Asaad, was announced and estimated to have between 3,000 and 15,000 members (Al-Jazeera, "Syria: The People Awake"). Although after its formation, the FSA aimed to protect protesters and facilitate demonstrations and protest, the organization later began to attack government forces and strategic targets (Al-Jazeera, "Syria: The People Awake"). The government's assault on Hama continued throughout August, as security forces bombed the city after dawn prayers and the entire province suffered high casualties, estimated to be in the hundreds (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). In August 2011, Daraa and Deir al Zour continued to be "under siege" by security forces (The Economist, August 6, 2011).

That same month, a group of "revolutionary blocs" announced they were forming a new coalition, called the Syrian Revolution Commission (Al-Jazeera, "Syria Uprising: Key Events") while the death toll had reached 2,000 by the beginning of August 2011 – this also included an estimated 300 members of the Syrian security forces (The Economist, August 6, 2011) – likely due to the incorporation of defecting soldiers in the movement and greater defensive capabilities on the part of the opposition. On August 23rd, opponents of the Assad regime met in Istanbul to launch a "national council" which would come to be known as the Syrian National Council or the Syrian National Transitional Council (Al-Jazeera, Syria uprising: Key events).

International pressure on the Assad regime intensified. The Arab League announced that Nabil al-Arabi, the Secretary-General, would visit Syria, shortly after reports had surfaced that

Damascus had called off a previously planned visit (BBC, September 7, 2011). The Syrian government continued its heavy offensive in the province of Homs, focusing particularly on the town of Rastan (BBC, September 30, 2011). The possibility of the opposition movement receiving substantial foreign help seemed unlikely by October 2011 when Russia and China vetoed a European-drafted resolution in the Security Council, condemning the crackdown (BBC, October 5, 2011). Despite the mounting death toll and the uncertainty of foreign assistance, the protest movement continued to surge and was continually met with repression. By the end of October 2011 the death toll had exceeded 3,000 casualties (Kennedy, October 21, 2011).

#### **4.2 POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES**

In terms of the political opportunity model, Syria would appear to be a case where the opportunities for collective action were few: networks of oppositional activists were nearly non-existent; the regime's potential for repression was both quite high and certain; and, unlike Assad's first year in office in which he appeared to be sympathetic to political reforms, there was no elites on the regime overtly sympathetic to a pro-reform agenda (Wieland, 2006; Al-Jazeera, February 9, 2011). It would seem that Syria was a case where constraints would ultimately have greater influence on Syrians' decisions to participate in collective action, ultimately deterring any significant mobilization of opposition. As mentioned earlier, however, the Arab world was simultaneously undergoing significant upheavals, from reforms in Morocco to the overthrowing of two long-standing dictators in North Africa. In Syria, the protests emerged at a time when the potential pay-offs of protest had increased with the regional events that clearly demonstrating that protest under authoritarian regimes was not only possible, but could be successful.



Yet external events of protest do not fully explain the events in Syria and it took domestic occurrences of protest to fuel the dispersion of collective action in Syria. This does not imply that the events in the region were not opportunities, but rather they failed to be perceived. The outbreak of protest in Daraa conveyed extremely crucial information that was, in turn, perceived as an opportunity to mobilize. First, the collective action in Daraa demonstrated that discontent with the regime was present within Syria, while the government's repressive response helped to expose the malign nature of the regime. Along with Lohmann's typology of protesters, the turnout of "anti-status quo extremists" (i.e. individuals that require relatively low turn-out to decide to participate in collective action) in Daraa provided the window of opportunity and the information necessary for other extremists to mobilize in other areas, including Homs and Damascus.

This initial dispersion of protest was also linked to the emergence of structural opportunities in the form of the government's decision to offer some concessions directly to the protesters, offering hope that the movement could be successful. Political opportunities also emerged in the presence of sympathetic political elites, though to a very minor degree. After the government's initial repressive response in Daraa, members of the Ba'ath party resigned over the crackdown (Reuters, April 27, 2011). The support of cleavages within the ruling elites has been identified by Tarrow (1994) as a critical element of the political opportunity structure that helps to facilitate protest and improve the likelihood of success of the movement. The support of Syrian elites, however, remained relatively minor, with no significant events of political elite support for the movement emerging again until nearly six months into the protest wave. In September, in addition to further military defections, some government officials chose to break from the regime, including the attorney general of Hama, Adnan Bakkour, who resigned over the

crackdown, and Hassan Abdul-Azim, a Syrian politician who demanded an end to the government's repressive response and agreed to meet with U.S. ambassador Robert Ford (Al-Jazeera, Syria uprising: Key events).

In the relative absence of sympathetic elites within the Syrian regime, international support was critical to ensure a chance of success and legitimize the movement. While many statements and action of support were relatively minor in the period covered for this analysis, some gestures of support, such as the United States' decision to implement sanctions, the Security Council's condemnation of the violence, and further statements of disapproval from important regional powers, such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, fuelled optimism that the movement could be successful, or at the very least, the events were being monitored by the global community, unlike the absence of international condemnation after the massacre of Hama in 1982. The importance of foreign allies can be understood in several ways. For example, international support may reinforce and further legitimize the claims and tactics of the local opposition. Also, such support may help to frame and re-frame the opposition's demands, particularly in the face of how the Syrian government has tried to depict the opposition – as terrorists, religious fanatics, and foreign agents (The Economist, August 13, 2011). Foreign support offers an important challenge to this view.

In Syria, repressive government policies increased at the same rate as the growth of the protest movement. As seen above, the relationship between protest and repression is not clear. But what is clear in the Syrian case is that repression certainly did not lessen protest. In fact, it may have increased it. While governments typically elect to use protest to increase the costs of protest, activists may perceive the policy of repression differently.

While repression is often conceptualized as a constraint (McAdam, 1996), the information it conveys about the regime may transform it into an opportunity. The Syrian government's repressive way of handling the actions of the teenagers in Daraa made it clear to those who privately opposed the regime two important factors: 1) that the government's repressive measures to deal with the teenagers was arbitrary and quite severe, which prompted potential dissidents to sympathize with the youths, and 2) that even such a minor offense was evidently seen as quite threatening by the regime, which in turn offered some support for the idea that protest could also be effective in Syria. Both the arrest of the teenagers, as well as the government's repressive response to the subsequent protests in Daraa, can both be seen as instances of "cognitive liberation" (McAdam, 1982) which fuel a sense of collective injustice which is often critical to propel people into action.

Repression, as well as concessions, must be understood in terms of its dynamic interaction and the sometimes complementary, sometimes competing messages that it sends to challengers. While governments may assume that such tactics deter further dissent in the way which repression increases the cost of dissent and concessions may co-opt some dissidents, particularly moderate ones, protesters do not necessarily perceive such responses in the same way. Rather protesters may perceive concessions as signaling the improved chances of success, while repression may propel some individuals to join in collective action, not necessarily only out of opposition with the regime, but also due to sympathy with the fallen protesters.

### 4.3 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION THEORY

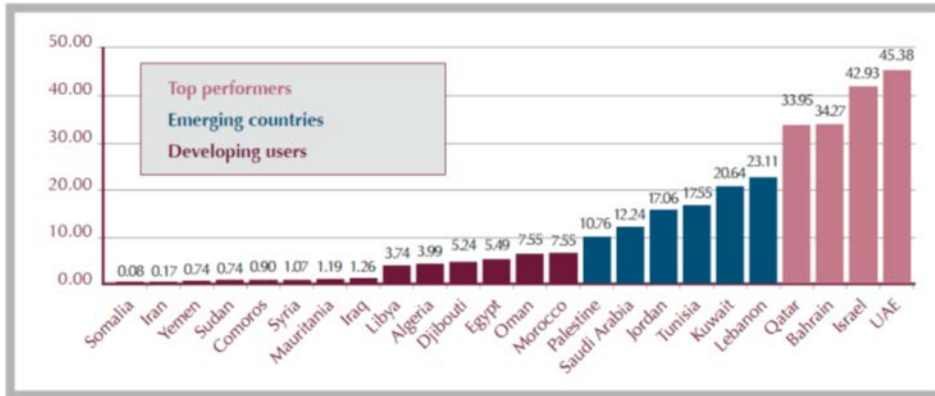
Like political opportunities, resources and mobilizing structures appeared to have been absent, especially in the early stages of the protest. In Syria, activists utilized a similar point of coordination and mobilization that had also been utilized during the protests East German (Opp and Gern, 1993): sites of worship, one of the rare locations in which large numbers of people could gather without gaining much attention (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). Networks that gradually emerged though in the early stages tended to be lacking a central command. One of the earliest mentions of the emergence of networks was the National Initiative for Change, which called for a democratic transition in April 2011. It was said to have 150 members and represented “a broad spectrum of groups opposing” Assad including most of Syria’s ethnic and religious communities as well as Syrians both within the country and abroad (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology; Al-Jazeera, April 27, 2011). Aside from this organization, protesters were reportedly mainly organized within small groups. It was believed that activists were organizing themselves in cells of roughly 20 individuals connected by only one leader (The Economist, July 2, 2011).

In August, the level of organization and coordination among opposition networks increased. A group of "revolutionary blocs" announced they were forming a new coalition called the Syrian Revolution Commission (Al-Jazeera,"Syria Uprising: Key Events). On August 23rd, opponents of the Assad regime met in Istanbul to launch a "national council" (Al-Jazeera, Syria uprising: Key events). The emergence of organizations representing the opposition movement gradually began to attract the support of other parties (the majority of which operated outside of the country). More organized networks, however, did not necessarily do a better job of coordinating protest and presenting a unified front. While disunity and fractionalization

continued among the two largest opposition coalitions – the Syrian National Council and the National Coordination Committee – local networks of activists were reportedly more effective in presenting a unified front and coordinating through Facebook, mobile phones, and channels established through personal and work connections (Al-Jazeera, "Syria: The People Awake"). Such occurrences conveyed the message that regardless of how the revolution was “professionalized”, the Syrian revolution seemed destined to remain an organic revolution that emerged on the streets with no central command and continued to flourish in much the same way.

Communication, such as social media and Internet, were frequently shut down by the government throughout much of the protest wave (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). While the role of the internet and social media has been emphasized as critical in understanding the spread of the protests (Blandford, April 8, 2011), internet and social media play a limited role in the lives of most Syrians, with only 1 in 5 Syrians online (The Economist, July 2, 2011; Internet World Stats, 2010; CIA World Fact Book, 2011), while only around 1 percent using Facebook as of December 2010, one of the lowest rates among Arab countries (see Figure 1)(Arab Social Media Report, January 2011). Therefore, it seems unlikely that the majority of Syrians regular utilize such resources, particularly older Syrians or those in early protest hubs such as Daraa. Furthermore, due to both decades of repression and the government's pervasive control over media, Internet, and phone lines, the Syrian activists initially struggled to collaborate both online and in person (Khamis, Gold and Vaughn, 2011, 9). For this reason, communications seems to have been facilitated primarily through “traditional bonds” such as tribal, professional, and social relationships, given the government’s constant interference with phone lines and internet (The Economist, July 2, 2011).

**Figure 1: Access to Facebook**



(Source: Arab Social Media Report, January 2011)

However, technology still played a role, particularly several months into the protest wave when activists received training from the diaspora and improved their skills. Communication improved as some Syrian activists in the diaspora managed to smuggle cell phones, cameras, and laptops into Syria so the protesters could document the events that helped the Syrian opposition movement relay events to the global public as well as Syrian society (Khamis, Gold and Vaughn, 2011, 9; BBC, September 14, 2011). The diaspora also aided in helping to train activists to use Skype and other online tools to further facilitate communication (Khamis, Gold and Vaughn, 2011, 10). Also, social media was an important asset to help the protestors organize and recruit others. The Facebook page, The Syrian Revolution 2011, boasted 120,000 followers (though many were in the diaspora) and was used to coordinate and publicize protests (YaLibnan, April 19, 2011).

Activists also relied on more traditional methods such as posting flyers and using graffiti calling for protest to spread information, while other activists relied more heavily on word-of-mouth networks of carefully vetted activists (Macleod and Flamand, 2011). In order to better communicate their message beyond the borders of Syria, activists were innovative while trying to ensure participants' safety. After realizing the perils of filming protests (as the regime began to watch the videos to identify the participants), activists began to film protestors either from

above or behind (Macleod and Flamand, 2011; Al-Jazeera, "Syria: The People Awake"). Protesters, however, began to carry banners and signs backwards so their demands could still be filmed (Macleod and Flamand, 2011; Al-Jazeera, "Syria: The People Awake").

## **4.4 PROTEST WAVES**

The protest wave in Syria was characterized by evolving demands, as well as significant spikes in the number of protests. For example, the movement experienced significant declines in May, though later in the month, the protest movement regained its momentum (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). By the beginning of July, protest gatherings attracted hundreds of thousands of Syrians (The Economist, July 2, 2011). As the government continued its repressive response to protests and reforms fell short of the protesters' demands, the opposition movement, skeptical of any genuine reform process under Assad, shifted to demand the removal of the President (Council on Foreign Relations, June 14, 2011).

### **4.4.1 HEIGHTENED CONFLICT**

Like Tarrow's (1993) model predicts, the wave of collective action in Syria was characterized by "heightened conflict" both in terms of the level of violence and the degree of public dissent. By early April 2011, more than 10,000 protestors took to the streets in several cities, including Damascus, Baniyas, Bayda, Homs, and Aleppo (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). Protest increased, both in terms of the number of participants and the spread of protests throughout the week and country. Most waves reach heights in which the movement

attains mass and challenges the elites. This process, according to Tarrow (1993), triggers a process of “institutional adaptation or collapse”. The Syrian regime chose adaptation, and its preferred method was coercion and violence as security forces continued their repressive response, accompanied by limited concessions (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology).

The increase in violence, however, was not simply one sided. After the Interior Ministry’s warning that protest “under any banner whatsoever” would not be tolerated, 75 protesters were killed in a single day on April 23, 2011 (Al-Jazeera, "Syria Uprising: Key Events"; Al-Jazeera, "Syria: The People Awake"; New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). On the side of the opposition, some members of the protest movement decided to take up arms, ultimately leading to Syrian security forces’ deaths as both sides began to clash in an increasingly violent manner (Rosen, February 13, 2012). Although it is not entirely clear at which stage in the uprisings, some protesters began to substitute a strictly non-violent approach to the incorporation of some defensive tactics (Rosen, February 13, 2012). Also, the increasing defections of soldiers marked a critical turning point in which the largely peaceful uprising had the potential to take a violent turn. The first acts of armed self-defense among the opposition were believed to have taken place in late April, as demonstrations were increasingly met by live fire and individuals in Bab Amr and Bab Sbaa in Homs, as well as some groups in Idlib, Daraa, and Damascus that utilized defensive measures (Rosen, February 13, 2012). In Homs, gun prices rose sharply in June 2011, and in Tel Kalakh, near the border with Lebanon, protesters were believed to be using rocket-propelled grenades and guns (The Economist, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011). However, the desire to keep both foreign and local opinion on their side made many members of the opposition reluctant to employ violent tactics lest they feed into the regime’s continual



depiction of them as “armed gangs” (The Economist, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011). Consequently, the government decided to employ more severe methods through the period of intensified conflict, including the use of warships to try to quell the uprising in coastal districts and the placement of tanks in Deir al Zour (The Economist, August 20, 2011). The stronger offensive measures resulted in a spike of the death toll, with 350 casualties reported between August 1<sup>st</sup> and August 20<sup>th</sup> (The Economist, August 20, 2011).

#### **4.4.2 GEOGRAPHIC AND SECTORAL DISPERSION**

The movement in Syria has differed slightly from the pattern predicted by Tarrow (1993) in terms of sectorial and geographic dispersion. While Tarrow (1993) predicts that protest typically originates in urban areas, then gradually spreads to the periphery (i.e. agricultural, and less industrialized areas), the protest movement in Syria originated in the periphery and spread to more central, urban areas. While protest did break out in the city of Daraa, the surrounding region depends heavily on agriculture and is far less industrialized or heavily populated as major cities in the country, most notably Homs, Damascus, and Aleppo. Protest reached the third largest city in the country, Homs, relatively quickly. However, protest did not reach a critical level in Damascus or Aleppo until towards the end of the period analyzed in this paper.

Dispersion among different sectors of society was fairly prevalent in this period, though a lack of information about the demographics of the protesters makes it difficult to ascertain. Despite the fact that the original protests had primarily emerged in rural, predominantly-Sunni areas and continued to attract a large proportion of the rural and working class Syrians, the movement attracted the support of a significant proportion of the Sunni Muslim establishment (The Economist, July 2, 2011), as well as some Christians and Alawites (The Economist, June 4,

2011; BBC, April 6, 2012). In the absence of details regarding the degree to which Syrians are religious, it is difficult to be sure of this fact, but it does appear that protest has spread from the “more” religious areas to the “less” or at least “less” overtly religious areas in Syria. Regions like Daraa, Homs, Hama, and even smaller locations like Douma in Damascus, are known for being religious (The Economist, June 4, 2011; Dumper and Stanley, 2007; The Christian Science Monitor, February 7, 2012; BBC, February 12, 2012). This is not to imply that more devout individuals were more likely to protest in Syria or that the protest movement was a strictly Sunni phenomenon but rather that, in the absence of networks or “safe” mobilizing structures, it may make sense that the most religious areas experienced protest early in the wave because they had fewer coordination problems to overcome as they were already together after Friday prayers. As Tarrow (1989) notes, movement activity tends to be stronger in some areas than others (as quoted by Snow and Oliver, 1995, 575).

By July, almost all poorer, working class suburbs or agricultural villages had been affected, while the more prosperous areas had failed to mobilize against the regime (The Economist, July 30, 2011). This is likely the case due to three primary factors. First, agricultural, rural areas had not benefited from the government’s economic liberalization policies (The Economist, June 11, 2011). While in the early years of Baath rule, rural areas tended to receive preferential treatment to some degree because many officials utilized their new position of power to bestow preferential treatment to the poor villages from which many originated (The Economist, June 11, 2011). However, under Bashar al-Assad, such policies were largely neglected, and instead, the regime shifted preferential treatment to other targets, namely urbanites, merchants, and religious leaders (The Economist, June 11, 2011). Syrians from poor,

mainly rural villages have suffered from “drought, rampant unemployment, and the corruption and bullying of state officials” (The Economist, June 11, 2011).

Another factor that has not been deeply analyzed, but seems plausible, is that agriculture and working-class areas may also have featured stronger inter-personal relationships. The presence of such bonds, which tend to be less pronounced in larger, urbanized settings, may have helped to overcome the lack of organizations and networks. Protest has been closely linked to the presence of such bonds, which may serve to aid in coordination and recruitment (Opp and Gern, 1993). Furthermore, ties of families and friends were not the only factors in agriculture-based and working-class based communities, but also ties that form between co-workers and those engaged in similar livelihoods.

Finally, some analysts have pointed out that both Damascus and Aleppo, areas that have recently received more benefits from the regime (Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011), also tend to be under greater security surveillance (Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011). While the sheer size of both cities and their role in the country’s economics may have motivated such policies, the government failed to assess the degree to which discontent may have been present in other areas. The government employed a rather lopsided policy, both before and during the protests, as both co-optive and preventative measures (strong presence of security forces) were employed in other areas where the government may have already enjoyed considerable support, as seen in the large and frequent pro-Assad rallies (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology; The Washington Post, May 3, 2011; Doucet, October 6, 2011; Alarabiya, October 12, 2011). However, there is a considerable problem of causality here. It is difficult to determine, without further investigation if the government enjoyed support and misinterpreted what areas were most

at risk of rebellion or if the support and relative lack of opposition in these areas was actually a function of the government's policies.

Furthermore, given both the duration of protest in Syria and the relatively rapid spread, protest spread may be largely self-sustaining. As more people are both involved in the protest movement and become victims to the government's coercive policies, it becomes more difficult to maintain a distance between "us" (the opposition) and "them" (the regime and its supporters). In the early weeks of protest, a middle-class, secular individual in Damascus may have felt like he/she had little in common with the working-class and agricultural-class protesters in Daraa, but as the protest spread and more people became involved, diverse segments of society began to recognize that the protesters were not merely from one region or one socio-economic segment of society. In this way, organizations and networks may have played a role, but the networks and organizations were largely informal; those based on work, family, and acquaintances. In this sense, protest diffusion is not merely a question of whether or not the activists' claims resonate with the general public, but it also depends on who is making the claims. Protest becomes a more valid possibility if observers and bystanders come to realize that they have something in common with the claimants and they were not simply the "rural illiterates" or "religious fanatics" (The Economist, June 4, 2011). Protest is interactive. Regions build on their own experiences and influence one another. Protest waves are not simply the waves of a country but rather a major wave comprised of smaller waves that reinforce one another.

The diffusion of protest across sectors of society, however, was not as pervasive as predicted by Tarrow's model (1993) as the least "traditional" participants did not play in active role in the movement, at least not during this period of analysis. There were very few political elite defections. Secondly, the movement continued to struggle to attract support among the

Syrian business class. Unlike Egypt, where the educated middle class and business class used their knowledge of social media to contribute to the overthrow of Mubarak, in Syria, the protests have primarily been led by those in the agricultural sector, as well as working class Syrians (Time, May 27, 2011). Syria's business class remained largely undecided on anti-Assad demonstrations and some argued that the business community's ties to Assad "cronies" in government contributed to this indecisiveness as the community attempted to assess the impact of a post-Assad Syria (Time, May 27, 2011). Other segments of Syrian society, whose decision to side with the opposition would have further undermined President Assad, were the security forces, though most analysts predicted that, unlike Tunisia and Egypt, they would remain loyal to the President (Council on Foreign Relations, June 14, 2011).

#### **4.4.3 EMERGING ORGANIZATIONS**

In terms of Tarrow's (1993) third feature of protest cycles – the emergence of new organizations in later periods, with "older" organizations dominating early stages – Syria differs. As mentioned earlier, there were no established organizations on the ground in the early stages of the protest cycle. However, as Tarrow's model (1993) predicts, new organizations did emerge, such as the FSA, the variety of "revolutionary blocs", the SNC, etc. In the case of Syria, it seems as if networks did not create the movement, but that the movement ultimately created the networks. As the protest wave progressed, networks of activists were formed in order to coordinate protest, but this seems to have been almost a necessity to ensure the survival of the movement rather than a development that helped to spark and coordinate the protest in the early stages. Although the initial steps to form a national council abroad included the involvement of many former opposition figures, including members of the Muslim Brotherhood, none of these organizations

were directly responsible for sparking the protest movement. While they may have provided logistic support and articulated the platform of the opposition (RT, March 20, 2012), their positions did not always line up with positions that emerged on the street (Seelye, Kate, September 1, 2011). The Syrian revolution seems to be a genuinely organic revolution, initiated and sustained by the people, as opposed to any one particularly organization or group.

This is not to say that networks and linkages did not play a role, but as analysis of other authoritarian regimes have found (Opp and Gern, 1993), in the absence of established networks and organizations, personal ties may function in a similar way. This is specifically relevant in the case of the first region to experience sustained, large-scale protest, Daraa, where strong bonds and connections among families led to demonstrations and protest on behalf of arrested youths. However, even if personal ties played a role it is important to note that “mobilization does not just depend on social ties; it also creates them” (Gould, 1991, 719 as quoted on Snow and Oliver, 1995, 576). The protest movement in Daraa was initially dismissed by some other segments of Syrian society (The Economist, June 4, 2011). But as the claims and demands of the initial protests were embraced by Syrians from other religious, regional, and socio-economic backgrounds bonds were created and fostered throughout the wave. In this way, Syrians with very different backgrounds were able to unify under the umbrella of greater freedom and the goal of achieving the removal of President Assad.

#### **4.4.4 COLLECTIVE ACTION FRAMES**

The fourth feature of Tarrow’s (1993) model is the emergence of collective frames of action. Activists primarily framed their struggle through their use of familiar symbols of Syrian identity; some were reinforced while others were undermined. As mentioned previously, frames serve to

“dignify claims, connect them to others, and help produce a collective identity among claimants” (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001). Protesters challenged the Assad legacy and role in Syria’s history. Activists renamed streets, bridges, and boulevards that carried the Assad family name through the Google crowdsourcing program, Map Maker. Some street names were also physically changed through graffiti and paint throughout Syria (Khamis, Gold and Vaughn, 2011, 12). Demonstrators in Daraa set fire to the ruling Baath Party’s headquarters (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology).

The Ba’ath Party, as well as the regime’s pan-Arab, anti-imperial, pro-Palestinian ideology, was not the stabilizing force that President Assad had predicted them to be. The president asserted in an interview that such factors made Syria immune to the kind of revolt that occurred in Tunisia and Egypt (Wall Street Journal, January 31, 2011). Instead, the Ba’ath Party, through the eyes of the protestors, had been de-legitimized. Rather than serving as a unifying force in the country, the Party now symbolized unwelcome authority. As Polletta and Jasper (2001) note, “Even identities that are familiar, longstanding, and enforced by law and custom frequently need to be re-imagined by movement activists. At the very least, they must be integrated with a *movement* identity . . .” (289).

Framing is utilized both by the opponents of the regime as well as the regime itself. The Assad government and the opposition movement were engaged in a continual tug-of-war to determine what it was to be “Syrian” and who had a legitimate claim to the symbols that defined the country’s history. For example, Assad accused the protesters of being driven by foreign forces that wanted to restore colonialism; the protest movement called such claims into question and carried banners and placards that denounced President Assad’s own foreign allies, particularly Iran and Hizbullah whose leader, Hassan Nasrallah, had spoken out in support of

Assad (The Economist, June 4, 2011). On April 17th, the day marking the end of French colonial rule large, crowds turned out to protest (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). This challenged the regime's former self-identification as "anti-imperial" or "anti-Western" and the mobilization served to demonstrate that, at least in the eyes of some Syrians, Ba'ath Party and Assad family rule had become synonymous with a largely illegitimate imposition of power.

The regime continued to rely heavily on their narrative regarding the "true" identities of the protesters, later referring to them as "armed gangs" and "terrorists," thus attempting to distance the movement from mainstream Syrian society. The movement attempted to challenge such accusations by referring to itself as "the people" or "Syrians" ('Knight of Hama', 2011). This is a fairly common example of framing in protest trajectories as the usage of broad, inclusive labels such as 'the people' help to both inspire greater participation while also preventing the regime from attacking participants as "outsiders" (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, 294).

The protesters also tried to frame their struggle in such a way as to break with any accusations of being violent. During protests aimed to break the siege on Homs, protesters carried olive branches as a symbol of peace (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). The activists also found creative ways to depict the repression they faced in Kafr Nabel, in Idlib, by wearing gags over their mouths (Khamis, Gold and Vaughn, 2011, 11).

The regime would continue to frame the conflict and attempted to link the movement to religious radicals and extremists certain repressive measures made it evident that not only religious fanatics and foreign agents were involved in the flourishing opposition movement. In May, the discovery of a video of the mutilated body of a 13-year-old boy, Hamza Al-Khatib, was discovered. Al-Khatib had been taken, tortured, and killed by government forces (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology) further fueling outrage and disillusionment with the



regime. Even for those who believed the protest movement was truly the work of “armed gangs”, high death tolls and the killing of children (estimated to be around 187 by the October 2011) (BBC, October, 14, 2011) undermined the regime’s attempt to portray itself in a favorable light. While the impact of the government’s repression impacted nearly every region of Syria – with targets included women and children, which undermined the narrative that the regime was engaged in a war with “armed thugs” outside of mainstream Syrian society – the fact that repression did not impact minorities to the same degree as Sunnis meant that sympathy for the movement may have been greater across regions, but not necessarily among minorities.

Religion played another important role, both in terms of collective identity and the government and protest movement’s attempt to frame the events in a way that favored its own positions. President Assad chose to dismiss surges in the protest moving during the holy month of Ramadan as “religiously inspired unrest with foreign backing” (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). Such a position was fairly common, as the Syrian regime had consistently used the threat of radical Islam to justify repression, including the severe response to a Muslim Brotherhood uprising that had occurred in 1982 (Wieland, 2006). The government’s seizure of a landmark mosque in Daraa contributed to the perception that the government was not only aiming to crush the protest movement, but may have also led some to believe that the regime was directly attacking religious institutions, and more specifically Sunni Islam.

Although the role of religion has been continuously debated in understanding both the origins and trajectory of the protest movement, the increased level of protest during Ramadan seems to indicate the activists were using religion to support and further invigorate the movement. Furthermore, the use of mosques as a point of mobilization and the invocation of religious terminology, such as the use of the word “martyr” (Euronews, April 1, 2011;

Blomfield, June 3, 2011) contributed to at least some degree of religious undertones. Later, FSA brigades took names with strong connotations with Sunni Islam (Rosen, February 13, 2012).

The protest movement, for their part, has largely attempted to convey that the protest was not an exclusively Sunni or even Muslim phenomenon. Through the Facebook page, The Syrian Revolution 2011, activists posted a message that "Jesus Christ rejected injustice, hatred and sin and brought a new revolution of human and spiritual values and human dignity" calling for Christians and other minorities to join the movement (YaLibnan, April 19, 2011). They also posted that "We are Christians, Sunni Muslims, Alawites, Druze, Shiites, Arabs and Kurds, it is our duty to revolt in the face of Baathist vampires" (YaLibnan, April 19, 2011). By August 2011, a common refrain during protests was "We have no problem between us" (The Economist, August 27, 2011).

This follows what theorists of social movements predict: when representing themselves to the public, protest groups "may cast themselves as more unified or homogeneous than they would in a setting of fellow activists" (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, 294). This strategy is critical to attract support and further participation in the cause and not to exclude potential dissidents.

However, though presenting themselves as more unified and homogeneous is a strategy, it was not without a degree of truth. The first attempt at creating a platform for the opposition, on April 22, 2011, was the creation of "Local Coordination Committees" (LCCs) comprised of activists of key cities, which offered a statement of demands including Syria's transition from dictatorship to democracy, with a "multi-national, multi-ethnic, and religiously tolerant society" (Weiss, July 5, 2011).

#### 4.4.5 REPERTOIRES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

The final feature, the expansion of “repertoires of collective action” (Tarrow, 1993) is present throughout the entire protest wave in Syria. Continually evolving tactics is crucial in protest cycles because patterns of protest are marked by the ongoing dynamic interaction between protesters and the regime: its tactics and counter-tactics. The emergence of new tactics among the opposition allowed the protesters to more effectively challenge the government, draw greater attention to their cause, and attract new recruits. An example includes protests organized at night, which aimed to both evade security forces and protect the identification of protesters (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology; Macleod and Flamand, 2011).

Other examples of evolving tactics also includes strategies that were less costly, including a boycott of brands and companies distributed or owned by people with ties to the regime (Malas, July 8, 2011). Small, brief protests was another tactic that emerged; smaller protesters were harder for security forces to target as they tended to conclude as quickly as they had appeared and were particularly common in areas under heavy surveillance (‘The Ajnabi’, August 30, 2011). Other tactics included using fake IDs to bypass security forces in order to participate in protest or document human rights abuses carried about by security forces (Macleod and Flamand, 2011). The opposition also utilized high attendance at dawn prayers during Ramadan, as well as other traditional religious celebrations, to demonstrate in order to mask the purpose of gatherings (Macleod and Flamand, 2011).

Activists also were innovative in terms of non-violent tactics throughout the protest wave. For example, protesters dyed the water in seven of Damascus's largest fountains red to symbolize the blood of fallen protesters, aimed laser lights at the presidential residence, used stickers with the names of killed protesters on street signs, sent “freedom balloons” loose over

cities, and created training videos of non-violent tactics (Khamis, Gold and Vaughn, 2011, 10). Music also played an important role in the uprising, as anti-Assad songs were sung during protests and activists put cassette players with speakers in trash cans which would play famous anti-Assad songs (Khamis, Gold and Vaughn, 2011, 10). The Syrian opposition also borrowed other tactics from abroad, such as several stagings of “Egyptian-style sit-ins” in Homs (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology).

The further evolution of tactics seen in this period confirms Tarrow’s (1993) idea that protest waves are marked by “expanding repertoires of contention” (286). “Each society has a stock of familiar forms of action that are known by both potential challengers and their opponents which become habitual aspects of their interaction” (Tarrow , 1994, 19). Movement leaders invent, adapt, and combine various forms of collective action to stimulate support from people who might otherwise stay at home (Tarrow, 1994, 19; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 15). The evolution of tactics, particularly insofar as they improve the success of the movement and reduce the costs, is extremely important in explaining the corresponding surges in protest seen in this period and the ability to attract more risk-adverse individuals. However, the ability of such tactics to attract new participants is typically short-lived, as the regime, also innovating and transforming their tactics, finds ways in which to circumvent these new tactics (Tarrow, 1993). As more protesters are arrested, killed, or injured, the movement is expected to temporarily decline until, either due to some internal or external factor that makes protest either more appealing or less costly, the movement overcomes the obstacles created by the regime (Tarrow, 1993).

## 5.0 CASE STUDIES OF REGIONS

In order to improve the internal validity of the model, I selected five regions to analyze: Daraa, Homs, Aleppo, Damascus, and Hama. Each was selected for several reasons. Given prior findings that protest tends to vary at different points of the wave and cycle, I selected regions that were both involved in the protest movement from the early stages (Daraa and Homs), as well as regions in which large-scale protest emerged later (Damascus and Hama). Also, so as not to select on the dependent variable (King et al, 1994), I chose one region that had very few protests throughout most of the wave, with increased protest activity only at the tail end of the protest period examined in this study: Aleppo. While it would have been ideal to have selected a region that had seen no protest activity at any point, this was not possible due to the fact that every region in Syria saw at least several protests (my data), including the sparsely populated region of Quneitra whose capital only has 150 residents (Population and Housing Census, 2004).

Also, the regions represent the diversity of Syria. Aleppo has significant population of Christians, Hama is known for its devoutly religious Sunni population, Homs has a sizable Alawite population, and Aleppo has a sizable Kurdish population. The final reason for this specific selection of cases is the variation in one of the explanatory variables: repression. Protests in Homs, Hama, and Daraa were consistently met with relatively high numbers of both deaths and arrests (my data, Al-Jazeera interactive map), while Damascus and Aleppo's protests led to far fewer deaths; the number of arrests, however, were quite high (my own data).

**Figure 2:Map of Syria**



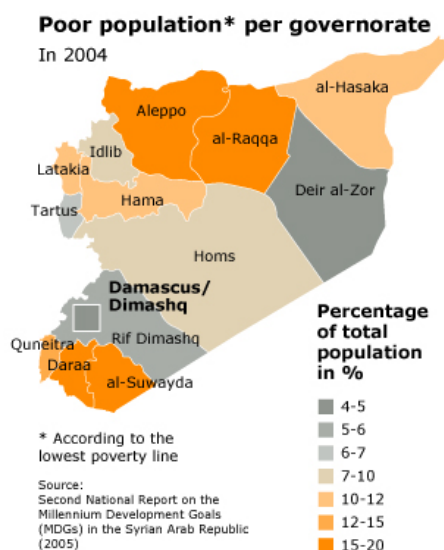
## **5.1 DARAA**

The governorate of Daraa is in the southwest of Syria, bordered by Jordan to the South and Damascus to the north. The capital, also called Daraa, is roughly 60 miles from Damascus and the population of the region is estimated to be roughly one million people. Daraa was formerly considered an area of stalwart Ba’ath Party support (Sterling, March 1, 2012; Van Dam, 1996), which resulted in substantial “government favoritism” (Van Dam, 1996). Daraa experienced “disproportionate growth” from the 1960s to the 1990s (Van Dam, 1996). The population is predominantly Sunni Muslim, though a few areas, such as Ezraa, are predominantly Christian (Anderson, March 14, 2012).

This loyalty, however, has not helped the region recently. Daraa, the heavily populated capital, is one of Syria’s poorest cities, and has been hit particularly hard by the water shortage, which affects the entire country (UPI, April 1, 2011; Olmert, March 21, 2011). Daraa had also recently experienced drops in subsidies and declining wages (Sterling, March 1, 2012). As the

region primarily relies on agricultural production, the event of what has been called “the worst long-term drought and most severe set of crop failures since agricultural civilizations began in the Fertile Crescent” (Femia and Werrell, February 29, 2012), has devastated the region. The deteriorating situation of farmlands in Syria has been compounded by the Assad government’s “mismanagement and neglect” (Femia and Werrell, February 29, 2012). The government has relied on a policy of subsidies for water-intensive wheat and cotton farming and “encouraged inefficient irrigation techniques” (Femia and Werrell, February 29, 2012). In the south of the country, nearly 75% of the farming population experienced “total crop failure” (Femia and Werrell, February 29, 2012). In 2009, the UN announced that over 800,000 Syrians had their entire livelihoods demolished as a result of the droughts and over one million Syrians became food insecure, while the UN estimates that between two and three million people now live in extreme poverty (Femia and Werrell, February 29, 2012). Poverty, however, has been a pressing problem for this region for some time (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Percentage of total population at or below the poverty line**



### **5.1.1 PROTEST AND OPPOSITION HISTORY**

There is little knowledge of the involvement of the people of Daraa in past uprisings or protest, though one scholar writes that along with Hama, Daraa also suffered considerable repression in the early 1980s due to opposition with the regime (Abd-Allah, 1983).

### **5.1.2 CURRENT EVENTS**

The first large-scale, significant showing of opposition occurred in Daraa in mid-March, at least partially in response to the recent arrest and torture of 15 youths who had written anti-government graffiti on walls (Al-Jazeera, "Syria Uprising: Key Events; Al-Jazeera, "Syria: The People Awake "). The Syrian government swiftly and severely cracked down on this showing of dissent (Al-Jazeera, "Syria Uprising: Key Events; Al-Jazeera, "Syria: The People Awake "). The crackdown in Daraa resulted in nearly 30 deaths within only a few days (Human Rights Watch, 2011), and consequently sparked outrage both within Daraa and throughout the country (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). The day after protests erupted in Daraa, women led a sit-in Damascus, demanding the release of prisoners "unfairly jailed" (Sterling, March 1, 2012). On April 25th, the Syrian government launched an 11-day siege on Daraa while also cutting off food, water, and other crucial supplies to some of the towns and neighborhoods with the largest protests (Al-Jazeera, "Syria Uprising: Key Events; Al-Jazeera, "Syria: The People Awake"; New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). The Syrian military, using tanks, helicopters, and snipers, seized a landmark mosque that had become a center of protest in Daraa on April 30th (New York Times, "Events in Syria: A Chronology").



By May 2011, Daraa, especially the neighborhood of al-Balad, had been on “lockdown” for a month, surrounded by the Syrian army (Clanet, June 10, 2011). The Al-Balad neighborhood saw the most unrest on the first days of the region’s protest movement (Clanet, June 10, 2011). In May, troops pulled out of Daraa but the protests and subsequent government crackdown continued, resulting in the arrest, torture, and death of 13 year old, Hamza Al-Khatib (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology; Sydney Morning Herald, May 5, 2011). Throughout the course of the protest, Daraa remained active in the opposition movement (my own data) gradually spreading from the capital to Al-Harraq, Dael, Tafas, Bosra, Nawa, Busr al-Harir, Othman, Kafr Shams, and Jassem (my own data; Anderson, March 14, 2012).

### **5.1.3 POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES**

While many scholars consider political opportunity as domestic features (McAdams, 1996), there seems to be no reason why this could not also pertain to external developments in the region as well. The uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia not only showed that segments of other Arab countries’ populations were dissatisfied with the status quo and the relative lack of freedom, but also demonstrated that protest was not only possible, but also had the potential to be successful in removing authoritarian leaders. Even in countries, such as Jordan, where protest did not reach a significant scale or overthrow the King, protest and unrest did result in considerable government concessions (The Guardian, February 23, 2011). Such events may also have partially contributed to an idea, however mistaken, that President al-Assad would offer concessions and avoid utilizing severe repressive measures, as had occurred in Tunisia. The presence of Al-Jazeera and other alternatives to state-controlled media in Syria relayed such information (Freedom House, 2011), allowing the people of Daraa, and Syrians throughout the country, to remain abreast with

such events and developments. This likely influenced, at least to some degree, the perception that protest was possible and could be successful. The protest movement in Daraa, however, also obtained some important support within Syria. In late April, 200 members of the Ba'ath party, mainly from the province of Daraa and the surrounding regions, resigned in order to protest the attack by government forces (Reuters, April 27, 2011).

Another side of political opportunity is constraints. Although the severe repression inflicted on Daraa would seem to serve as a significant obstacle to protest, another possibility should be considered – that the brutal response clearly illustrated that the regime felt threatened by the strong showing of collective dissent. It is also crucial to note that repression actually created the first opportunity for collective action against the regime in Daraa after the arrest of the youths who had written anti-regime graffiti. Furthermore, repression did not occur in isolation, and the regime offered several concessions (pay raises for state employees, the release of some activists, etc.), as well as a statement from the government's spokeswoman that the people of Daraa had “legitimate” complaints (Landis, March 25, 2011). This offered conflicting messages, and also may have conveyed to protesters that they could be successful in extracting concessions from the regime.

#### **5.1.4 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION THEORY**

Another element that has been found to be influential for both the on-set, as well as further surges of protest, is the role played by mobilizing structures and networks, components of resource mobilization theory (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). Scholars who subscribe to this view argue that protest activity, particularly prolonged collective action, requires a significant base of resources (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Dalton et al, 2009). Daraa like the rest of

Syria, however, lacked significant organizations both in terms of established networks and organizations, while the repressive state apparatus made communicating dissent difficult. The few existing organizations on the ground of opposition are primarily small, human rights organizations. Daraa, however, prior to the protest, had no known opposition groups or organizations.

However, as was argued for the larger developments in Syria, the protest movement in Daraa, while lacking established opposition groups or organizations, likely relied on the presence of personal networks and mobilizing structures. For example, since most of the major towns and cities in Daraa are relatively small, some have drawn attention to the fact that residents of the region are relatively inter-connected (Sterling, March 1, 2012). Thus, it is possible that personal networks have, to some degree, facilitated mobilization, as well as helped to increase the size and scale of the protests. The idea of personal networks being influential in sparking protest is also linked to the fact the arrested teenagers were from “almost every large family in Daraa (Al-Jazeera, April 19, 2011). It has been noted that the “largely tribal society of Syria’s south, family loyalty and honor (sic) run deep” (Al-Jazeera, April 19, 2011). Such personal networks offered several important resources for the people of Daraa – modes of communication, trusted links, and bases for further recruitment. The idea that personal ties may facilitate mobilization follows the notion that recruitment tends to take place “primarily through preexisting solidarities through norms of obligation and reciprocity” (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, 290).

Also, in the absence of such networks, other sources were utilized for coordination, such as mosques. Like the rest of Syria, in Daraa protest initially occurred after Friday prayers (Al-Jazeera, April 9, 2011; Al-Jazeera, April 19, 2011). In the absence of “safe” areas for gathering, the mosque provided a good guise for the protesters’ gathering, as well as sites to share

information and recruit additional protesters. The Omari mosque, which was later seized by Syrian government forces, was transformed into the center of the protest movement and a site to re-group (New York Times, March 20, 2011; Newcomb, April 30, 2011). Religious sites gained further legitimization as a site from which to launch collective arrest due to the fact that shortly after the arrest of the youths, local religious leaders marched alongside the parents and families, confronting the governor, Faisal Kalthoum, after Friday prayers (Al-Jazeera, April 19, 2011). Such acts added legitimacy for the protesters' demands and provided important, influential support.

Another important resource, the transmission of information, presented a considerable obstacle in Daraa, like most of Syria. Although some analysis of the situation tends to focus on the central role of media – like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter – in both sparking and sustaining the revolution (Kennedy, February 11, 2011; Titlow, November 18, 2011; Kocaoglu and Russel, June 28, 2011) this fails to capture the entire picture, as well as the mechanisms by which these tools can be influential. While such sources may facilitate communication, this ignores several important caveats. First, access is very limited (Internet World Stats, 2010; CIA World Fact Book, 2011). Furthermore, even among those who regularly utilize Internet and social media, the government intermittently blocked these resources and protesters experienced power outages and interference with mobile phone networks (BBC, October 24, 2011; Reporters without Borders, March 2011; Derhally, April 13, 2011), so they are not necessarily reliable methods of coordination or communication. Secondly, while social media may serve to aid coordination and communication, the messages transmitted only have value insofar as they are capable of igniting dissent and reaching a receptive audience. For example, previous calls for protest on Facebook failed to materialize (USA Today, February 1, 2011).

## **5.1.5 PROTEST WAVES**

### **5.1.5.1 HEIGHTENED CONFLICT**

In terms of Tarrow's (1993) description of protest cycles, the protest wave in Daraa has exhibited similarities and significant differences. With regards to the first feature, heightened conflict, Daraa experienced high levels of conflict early in the protest trajectory with the government's immediate repressive response and the opposition's subsequent resistance. Government forces quickly responded to the mobilization in Daraa, using tear gas to break up public gatherings and "excessive force" against protesters (Razzouk, March 21, 2011). In April 2011, the government imposed a blockade on the town, cutting off electricity and water, which amounted to what many human rights organizations called "a major humanitarian crisis" (NPR, April 30, 2011).

### **5.1.5.2 GEOGRAPHIC AND SECTORAL DISPERSION**

The second element, broad sectorial and geographic extension fits the case of Daraa, although a lack of clarity regarding the demographics of the protesters makes it difficult to verify. In terms of geographical extension of the protests, the capital of Daraa, with a population of 177,200 residents (Syrian Government Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004) was one of the first areas in which protestors emerged, but was later followed by nearby towns, such as Al-Sanamayn and Nawa (my own data). Like Tarrow (1993) predicts, protest diffuses from larger to more rural areas. Although all of Daraa relies on agriculture, the fact that the protest waves spread from the more industrialized areas, such as the capital, and gradually spread to smaller areas (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zUgl1eIV8U>, my data), confirms this theory. Unfortunately, due to lack of information on individual protesters, it is not certain that in Daraa the first people to participate in protest were those who have a greater tendency, at least

historically speaking, to engage in protest, like activists and students. Given the fact that the arrests of the youths affected most of the major families of Daraa, it appears that significant segments of the population in Daraa were already involved in the movement, though throughout other stages of the wave, it is less clear.

### **5.1.5.3 EMERGING ORGANIZATIONS**

Like the protest movement throughout Syria, the uprisings in Daraa fail to demonstrate Tarrow's third element: the emergence of new social movement organizations and the empowerment of older ones. Across Syria, especially in the first several months, most analysts described the Syrian protests as "leaderless" (Sly, July 28, 2011). It seems as if the uprisings in Daraa were primarily spontaneous in the sense that they were not planned by any known organization or network. In Daraa networks may have played a role, but personal networks are more likely to explain coordination and the dispersion of information. As one analyst points out, in Daraa most people know one another and relationships are close both in the city of Daraa and nearby villages and towns (Sterling, March 1, 2012). However, the second element of the prediction, that new social movements emerge, is applicable. Although the degree to which protesters were organized seems to have been limited, especially in the early stages, protesters were believed to be organized into small cells of roughly 20 people to facilitate coordination and planning (Economist article).

### **5.1.5.4 COLLECTIVE ACTION FRAMES**

Tarrow's fourth element, new "master frames" of meaning, can be seen in the case of Daraa. Collective identity often utilizes familiar symbols and ideology, such as religion and tribal identity. In Daraa, the use of the term "martyr" was used early on ("The blood of martyrs is not

spilt in waste!") and terms invoking religion ("Allah Akbar") (Al-Jazeera, March 24, 2011). While some, including the regime, have attempted to use the prevalence of religious symbolism and language to dismiss the protesters as "religious fanatics" (The Economist, June 4, 2011), the use of religious symbols and words serve an important purpose. Religion, in its familiarity and links to Syrian identity, can offer a source of comfort and support to resource-poor groups. Moreover, terminology such as "martyr" help to frame the protest movement as a quasi-religious struggle against "good" and "evil", expanding the struggle beyond pure political ideology. Protest was further framed through the use of funerals to express collective dissent (Al-Jazeera, March 24, 2011), reinforcing the notion that the deceased had died for a particular cause and were "martyrs" to the struggle. To use funerals to voice opposition to the regime, the protesters in Daraa signified the political nature of the deaths. The framing of such events and terms were reinforced beyond Daraa. A Syrian Facebook groups called for a "Week of the Martyrs" protests in honor of those killed in Daraa (Middle East Online, April 4, 2011).

Only a week into the protests, activists utilized framing to legitimize their claims, calling Friday demonstrations a "Day of Dignity" (Karam, March 25, 2011). The protestors gathered in the city's central square, Assad Square, which, named after Hafez al-Assad, was a symbolic gesture in and of itself (Karam, March 25, 2011). The protesters capitalized on clear symbols of the regime to express their dissent. Protesters burned party headquarters, as well as a branch of SyriaTel phone company, which is owned by the president's cousin, Rami Makhlouf (The New York Times, March 20, 2011). On several occasions the protesters chanted "freedom" while carrying olive branches and Syrian flags (Karam, March 25, 2011), both highlighting their peaceful tactics, while dispelling the notion that they were somehow less loyal to Syria than other residents or that they were agents of foreign influence. Like many of the regions analyzed

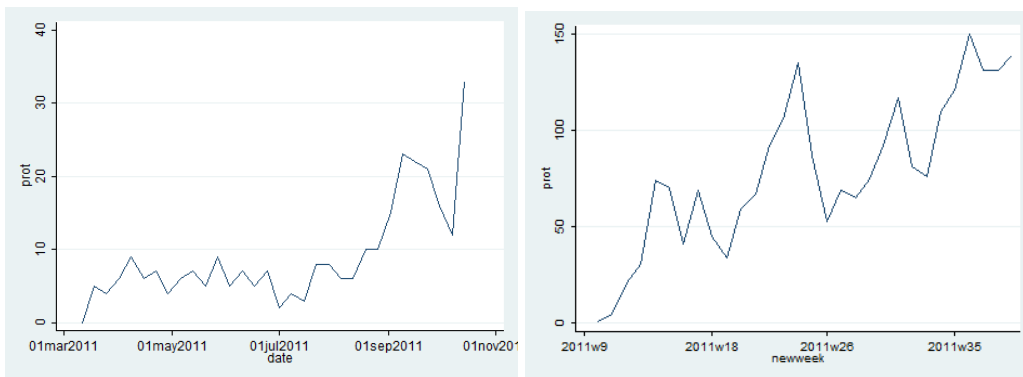
more in detail, Daraa’s demonstrations and protests have capitalized on the people’s collective identity, primarily in terms of tribal affiliation, as well as an emphasis on the region’s central role in the protest wave (‘Knight of Hama’, 2011).

### 5.1.5.5 REPERTOIRES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Finally, the invention of new forms of collective action is the final feature Tarrow (1993) highlights. While protesters in Daraa initially relied on fairly traditional forms of collective action, there were some important innovations as the protest waved progressed. By October 2011, protesters in Daraa utilized night protests and other tactical innovations that had been gaining popularity throughout the country (YouTube video, 3/05/2012 and October 13. 2011). In Daraa, strikes were utilized periodically, including an extremely widespread strike in October 2011 (Oweis and al-Khalidi, October 26, 2011).

### 5.1.6 HOW DO PATTERNS IN DARAA COMPARE TO SYRIA?

Figure 4: Protest Pattern in Daraa and Syria



While Syria’s revolution has been described as increasingly sectarian in nature (Arango, February 28, 2012), Daraa, particularly in the early days of the protests, served as one clear



instance in which inter-communal cooperation was present. When the security forces entered Daraa, the town's Christian residents opened their homes to wounded protesters after the Friday prayer demonstrations (Anderson, March 14, 2012). A critical difference between the people of Daraa and the rest of Syria is the presence of individuals with a relatively low-threshold to engage in collective action (Lohmann, 1994); any society is comprised of a full spectrum individual responses to protest. Comparatively speaking, in Daraa, it took very little to set off the first protest – the arrest and torture of several young boys – while similar events, historically, were not met with the same response. The events in the region helped to foster the notion that dissent and opposition should be given an outlet through protest and collective action, while prior to the uprising, such sentiments may have been concealed.

In the same way that the uprising in the Arab world served to confirm the possible efficacy of protest, the events in Daraa, as well as the government's brutal response, helped to fuel a broader protest movement. First, the events demonstrated there were at least some individuals who found fault with the regime while also finding protest to be a worthwhile avenue through which to express their dissent. The key here is that the events in Daraa were within Syria, which helped to draw attention to the fact that there was viable opposition to the regime within Syria, as opposed to the idea that the waves of uprisings were merely, for example, an Egyptian or North African phenomenon. Secondly, the government's harsh repression in response to the protests in Daraa, fueled sympathy with the protesters (likely, even among those that did not necessarily agree with either their opposition or their way of expressing it).

Early on, however, questions emerged regarding both how representative the protesters in Daraa were, as well as what were the chances that the small mobilization could actually spark further showings of dissatisfaction. As one analyst put it, "The centrality of Daraa in the uprising

may have limited appeal to the urban elites. The dusty border city marked by tribal loyalties, poverty, and Islamic conservatism may inspire Syria's rural masses who suffer from poverty, a prolonged drought and joblessness, but mass demonstrations there have frightened Syria's urban elites. Even those who share anger at repression and hope for liberation with their rural counterparts still fear the poor and the threat of disorder" (Landis, March 25, 2011).

## **5.2 HOMS**

The province of Homs is the largest, geographically, in Syria and borders Lebanon in the west and Iraq in the east. Nearly 75% of residents are Sunnis, while Christians make up about 5%, and Alawites, many having migrated to the capital in recent decades, comprise roughly 20% of the population (Bassel, December 15-21, 2011). For this reason, Homs has been called a “microcosm” of Syria, because, like the country, it is home to a Sunni Muslim majority and significant minorities of Christians and Alawites (Shadid, October 1, 2011). The city of Homs is the third largest city and major industrial center of the country. Also, the city is part of an important hub of a road and rail network, serving as a key link between interior cities and the coast (Homsonline.com).

### **5.2.1 PROTEST AND OPPOSITION HISTORY**

The history of Homs is marked by significant periods of uprisings and dissent, first against French colonial role and later as a center of resistance to the Ba’ath monopoly on power (Van Dam, 1996). In 1925, Homs joined Damascus and southern Druze tribes in a revolt against

French rule (Cleveland, 2000). Opposition to the Ba'ath party in Homs can be traced back to the 1960s, shortly after the Baathists seized power in a military coup (Lipin, November 15, 2011). After the coup, business owners, along with religious conservatives, organized protests in 1964, primarily in response to the socialist and secular agenda of the Ba'ath party. However, the uprisings were quickly crushed by security forces, which ultimately were effective in keeping the city and surrounding areas quiet for the following decades (Lipin, November 15, 2011).

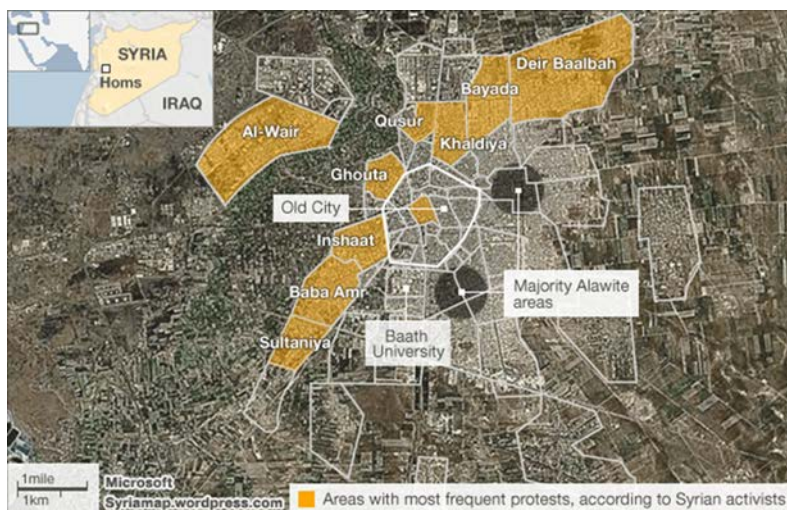
### **5.2.2 CURRENT EVENTS**

It seems fitting that Homs and Hama have played important roles in the 2011 – present uprising as they are commonly called “the two sisters” (Abd-Allah, 1983). Homs has come to be known as the “capital” of the Syrian revolution since it was one of the first cities to join the uprisings. Other factors that contributed to this moniker include certain areas, namely Al-Rastan, Talbisa, Talclakh, and Al-Hawla, which have become havens for revolutionaries fleeing regime forces (Bassel, December 15-21, 2011). Bab Amr has served as a primary base for the Free Syrian Army (Al-Jazeera, "Interactive: Timeline of Syria Unrest", March 23, 2012). The city of Homs has presented some advantages to the protesters. The presence of a large number of defecting soldiers, as well as the complicated, circuitous geography of the city and surrounding areas (BBC, March 12, 2012), both offered a marginal advantage to the opposition movement in Homs. Homs' large population was thought to present an additional advantage: the province shares a border with Iraq and Lebanon, “making any attempt to impose military control over it a difficult and expensive venture” (Bassel, December 15-21, 2011)

Being the “capital” of the revolution, however, comes with a high price. Homs suffered severe repression early on, with a high causality toll of 50 deaths in a single day in April 2011.

Certain neighborhoods were hit particularly hard, such as the Bab Amr district of the city, as well as the nearby town, Rastan (BBC, March 12, 2012; BBC, September 23, 2011). The province has suffered roughly 44% of the casualties that have occurred since the uprising began (Al-Jazeera, "Interactive: Timeline of Syria Unrest", March 23, 2012). Additionally, most of the “scores” of Syrians who had been reported missing by April 2011 were from Homs (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology).

**Figure 5: Map of Homs (areas in yellow are those with most frequent protests)**



(source Al-Jazeera, April 9, 2012)

### 5.2.3 POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

The events in Homs should be viewed through the lens of developments in the region, as well as the early collective action of opposition in Daraa. While not the “political elites” to which McAdams (1996) refers, the high number of defections from the security forces, and their consequent decision to make Homs one of their main bases of operation, should also be viewed as a political opportunity for the opposition movement. The presence of the soldiers helped to sustain and increase the movement in two important ways: 1) through the validation of the civilians’ efforts to mobilize and 2) through the soldiers’ role in protecting the protesters from

the Syrian security forces (Al-Jazeera, "Syria: The People Awake"). On the other hand, the presence of the FSA could also be understood as a constraint as it could invite the presence of the Syrian security forces and warrant a more repressive government response. Moreover, the incorporation of soldiers in the movement could also have turned off more moderate protesters, given the fact that the likelihood for violence was likely to increase. "One of the chief causes of movement decline is that collective identity stops lining up with the movement" and participants may cease to believe that the movement represents them (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, 292). However, even with the presence of the soldiers in Homs, it seems as if the protest movement managed to remain largely non-violent well into the protest wave (Dixon, February 19, 2012).

Another factor which may have served as an opportunity is the fact that the protest wave in Homs followed the events in Daraa. While it could be argued that the people of Daraa did not anticipate the scale of the government's coercive policies, those who elected to participate in collective action in Homs likely were at least somewhat aware of the potential consequences. Knowing more or less what to expect provided the protesters some advantage in terms of coordination and the ability to strategize in the face of potential government policies of repression. Furthermore, they could learn and adapt tactics and strategies used in Daraa, such as the use of mosques as a point of mobilization.

In terms of the political constraints, as we have seen the policies of repression in Homs have been quite high, particularly in terms of casualties. Beginning in June, the demonstrators in Homs faced security forces, often with live ammunition on a daily basis (Bassel, December 15-21, 2011). Costs, however, particularly with regards to the areas which have been under siege by government security forces for prolonged periods, must be understood as more than just repression in its more measurable, easily quantifiable terms (arrests, disappearances, deaths). In

Homs, other “repressive” responses that limited the protesters ability to participate in collective action included shortages of basic necessities such as food and water, as well as frequent power outages (Ferguson, February 8, 2012; The Economist, June 30, 2011). As mentioned previously, repression, however, should not only be considered as a constraint, but also a factor that may serve to actually legitimize the struggle of the opposition in some ways. The invocation of terms such as “martyr” conveys this; the demonstrators in Homs often shouted “To heave we are going, martyrs of millions” (Mcevers, August 30, 2011). Even facing mounting repression, activists often insisted that they would “protest under any circumstances” (Mcevers, August 30, 2011).

#### **5.2.4 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION THEORY**

While, as we will continue to see, Syria as a whole, as well as individual regions, lacked resources – both in terms of networks and methods in which to coordinate and transmit information – the regions that began to protest after Daraa did have one useful resource at their disposal: knowledge regarding what the expected response from the regime would be.

**MOBILIZING STRUCTURES:** In the absence of formal networks, the residents of Homs likely utilized other less formal ties to coordinate and recruit. Strong tribal bonds exist between Sunnis in rural areas of the city, especially in the districts of Baba Amr, Al-Khaleidiya, Bab Al-Sebaa, Al-Bayada, Deir Baalba, Bab Hud and Bab Al-Dreeb (Bassel, December 15-21, 2011).

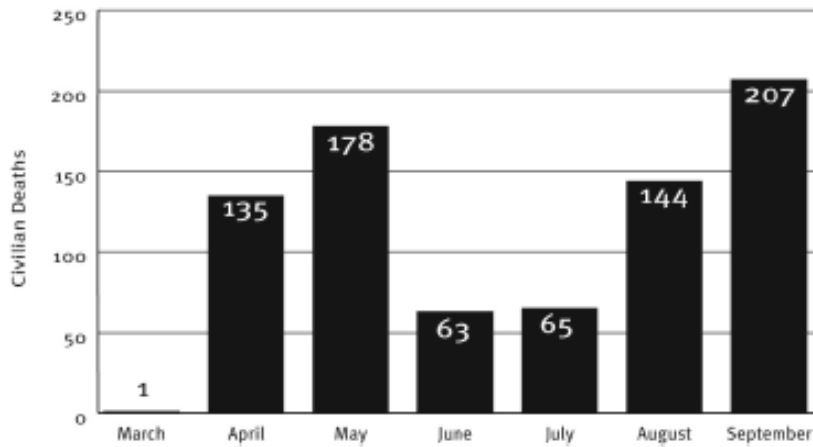
## **5.2.5 PROTEST WAVES**

### **5.2.5.1 HEIGHTENED CONFLICT**

Applying Tarrow's (1993) description of protest waves to Homs, we see that, like in Daraa, the capital of Homs (as well as most of the region) exhibited the feature of "heightened conflict" as the protests grew and the Syrian regime, increasing their coercive response, entered into a highly confrontational exchange with the opposition movement. The Syrian government attempted to quell the uprising through repression, as well as cutting off electricity and food supplies (BBC, March 12, 2012). Homs is the third largest city and an important link to modes of transportation in the country, so this fact explains, to a degree, the regime's heavy-handed approach. The confrontation, however, continued to escalate as the people of Homs remained resilient, and increasing numbers of defecting soldiers began to make the city and surrounding areas one of their primary bases (BBC, March 12, 2012). The intensification of the conflict in Homs led many analysts to describe the situation as resembling a "civil war" by October 2011 (Shadid, October 1, 2011).

Protesters called themselves "revolutionaries" and, in some cases, took up arms for self-defense (Shadid, October 1, 2011). As the conflict escalated, assassinations (on both sides) became more common and the price of arms skyrocketed; in some areas of Homs rifles cost as much as \$2,000 apiece (Shadid, October 1, 2011).

**Figure 6: Intensified Conflict: Civilian deaths in Homs by month**



(source Human Rights Watch, November 2011)

### **5.2.5.2 GEOGRAPHIC AND SECTORAL DISPERSION**

The second feature, broad sectorial and geographic extension, seems to be applicable, at least in terms of the geographic scope of the protests. The first protest in Homs was on March 18th, just shortly after protest erupted in Daraa (Human Rights Watch, November 2011) and like Tarrow's model (1993) predicts, protest first erupted in major urban centers and gradually spread. Protest initially spread to other urban centers like Tal Kalakh and Rastan (Human Rights Watch, November 2011; my data), and later to less urbanized areas including Tadmor (Palmyra) (my data). However, as in the previous case, lack of information regarding the demographics of the protesters makes it difficult to ascertain whether protest diffusion also spread through different segments of society.

### **5.2.5.3 EMERGING ORGANIZATIONS**

Tarrow's third element, the appearance of new social movements and the strengthening of older ones, is not entirely applicable due to the absence of organizations at the start of the protest



cycle. Homs, however, is one case where organizations began to emerge relatively quickly. In Bab Sba', for example, residents began to organize themselves in “local defense committees” and worked to obtain arms, and in some cases rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) (Human Rights Watch, November 2011). The explanation of this may be based on the degree of repression the capital and surrounding areas faced, as well as the fact that defected soldiers tended to gravitate to this region (Bassel, December 15-21, 2011). Therefore mounting repression, as well as the presence of soldiers who were accustomed to operating within the framework of an organization, may have facilitated this early emergence of organizations. The presence of the FSA in Homs also served as an important coordinating mechanism, offering at least some protection to protest and thus making it less costly. Its presence may have initially been important in convincing some Syrians who had previously not joined with the opposition due to the high costs (i.e. risk of death and capture). Although Syrian forces gradually gained the upper hand in their clashes with the FSA, the protection provided with the FSA may have triggered a cascade effect, allowing more risk-averse individuals to join the protest.

#### **5.2.5.4 COLLECTIVE ACTION FRAMES**

In terms of new “master frames,” identity, symbols and ideas played a critical role in Homs as they did elsewhere throughout the region. Identity has also been at the forefront of protests in Homs, particularly in terms of emphasizing the peaceful nature of the (majority of) protesters (Al-Jazeera, December 28, 2011), in light of the government's continual accusations that they were “terrorists” and “armed thugs” (Bassel, December 15-21, 2011). In this way, a continual tug-of-war is evident between how the government attempted to depict the people of Homs and how they simultaneously attempted to configure their own identities.

While attempting to both establish and defend their non-violent tactics of dissent, the opposition movement also tried to emphasize that, in Homs at least, the uprisings were not disintegrating into sectarian conflict. In fact, some analysts have pointed out that citizens of diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds have maintained considerable “social cohesion” (BBC, March 12, 2012) and protesters chanted, “Muslims, Christians and Alawites are one” and waved crosses (The Economist, July 21, 2011). In July 2011, several prominent Alawite figures distributed statements condemning the damage done to Sunni shops by security forces (The Economist, July 21, 2011). Additionally, while the opposition in Daraa emphasized tribal identity, protesters in Homs have capitalized on their Arab and Islamic identity, particularly their links to important Islamic sites (‘Knight of Hama’, 2011). In this way, protesters utilized familiar symbols and identity to justify their struggle against the regime.

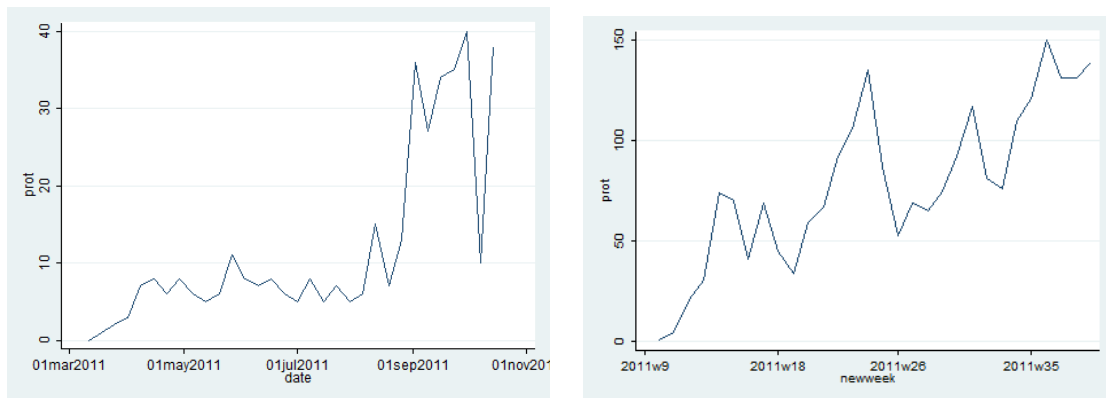
Homs was also one of the first cities where pictures of Assad were commonly torn and defaced (Bassel, December 15-21, 2011); a particularly grave crime in a country where Assad's image is ubiquitous. By utilizing symbols that were imposed on Syrian society, protesters challenged the regime’s legitimacy to serve as representatives of the Syrian people. Critical events also provided an opportunity for framing the struggle. After the death of Hamza al-Khateeb, the boy became a potent symbol of the government’s repressive response and activists circulated a video of the discovery of his body on YouTube (Stack and Zoepf. June 4, 2011). Such events gave the movement leverage, and protesters chanted "We won't forgive, we will kill the child killer" and warned that "We will continue until your end." (Stack and Zoepf. June 4, 2011).

### 5.2.5.5 REPERTOIRES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

The final feature of Tarrow's characterization includes innovative forms of collective action. In Homs, activists utilized tactics they had learned from abroad, such as "Egyptian-style sit-ins" (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). They also utilized other tactics to avoid confrontation with the security forces, such as shouting "Allahu Akbar" (God is Great) in unison from balconies at night (The Economist, June 4, 2011). In Homs, strikes were also used to express opposition to the regime and their policies in October 2011. Some strikes even included the participation of public employees, a very rare occurrence in Syria (Oweis and al-Khalidi, October 26, 2011).

### 5.2.6 HOW DO PATTERNS IN HOMS COMPARE TO SYRIA?

Figure 7: Protest Pattern in Homs and Syria



Given the high number of casualties (Figure 6), Homs stands apart from the uprisings in other regions and the country as a whole. Homs has seen greater degree of repression as well as greater participation in protests; participants frequently numbered in the tens of thousands (Bassel, December 15-21, 2011).

As we saw earlier, Homs is also distinct from the rest of Syria, particularly interior regions, because it shares a border with Lebanon (where many Syrian refugees have fled and some FSA soldiers operate), making it somewhat harder for the government to control. The presence of the FSA in Homs has been an advantage to the protestors (providing them with resources, protection, and an already established network of opposition), but has also made the region a target for the government's repressive efforts to crush the uprising. Furthermore, the government can arguably be more "justified" in its severe response and use of violence because it can monopolize on the fact that in this region it *is*, in a sense, in conflict with armed protesters (the FSA), regardless of the fact that the FSA, at least for some periods, was not launching an offensive campaign, but rather trying to protect the protesters (Al-Jazeera, "Syria: The People Awake").

Finally, like in Daraa, the people of Homs can be distinguished from their Syrian counterparts in terms of the threshold level required to propel them to engage in collective action. In Daraa the arrest of youths sparked protest, while the people of Homs began to protest only days after the initial mobilization in Daraa, driven by both opposition to the regime and solidarity with their fellow countrymen and women in Daraa (Al-Jazeera, "Interactive: Timeline of Syria Unrest", March 23, 2012). Lower thresholds in both of these regions helped set off a spiral of collective action throughout the country. Other regions, however, remained largely immune to large-scale mobilization for longer periods, as shall be illustrated below.

### 5.3 ALEPPO

The city of Aleppo, the capital of the province, was estimated to have a population of four million people (Bsyria, February 21, 2012) and is the largest city in Syria. Along with Damascus, Aleppo is considered Syria's economic center, home to both a large business community and a prosperous merchant class (CBS, February 10, 2012). The city is known historically for its important trading role, both in the country and region (Abd-Allah, 1983). The economy of Aleppo is driven by textiles, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, agro-processing industries, electrical manufacturing, alcoholic beverages, engineering, the manufacturing of metals and stones, and tourism. It is also the country's dominant manufacturing center, with more than 50% manufacturing employment (Aleppo City Development Strategy, November 14, 2010).

While other regions of the country have struggled economically more recently, Aleppo is distinct for its economic revival partially due to its proximity to Turkey (Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011). Due to the province's fertile lands, the region has also been known for being a highly productive agricultural zone (Aleppo City Development Strategy, November 14, 2010), though recent droughts have taken a toll there as well. Outside of the city and within the province of Aleppo, crop failures and drought have had a powerful impact, resulting in the exodus of more than 200,000 villagers from the region into various cities (Femia and Werrell, February 29, 2012).

During French colonial rule (1920-1946), as well as the following two decades, local Sunni landowning families dominated the city, as well as the region's politics, though this monopoly on both economic and political power was undermined due the land reforms initiated by the Ba'ath Party (Dumper and Stanley, 2007). Like most regions of Syria, the population is predominantly Sunni Muslim, Aleppo also has significant Christian and Alawites minorities

(Dumper and Stanley, 2007). Although it is commonly stated that Christians comprise about 12% of the population in Aleppo, some have argued the number is probably closer to 3% (roughly 100,000 Christians) (Ehsani, February 18, 2012).

### **5.3.1 PROTEST AND OPPOSITION HISTORY**

Despite the region's relatively minor showing of dissent against the Assad regime, the capital has traditionally played an important role in various opposition movements, including resistance to French colonial rule. Throughout the period of 1920 – 1923, the French were faced with significant insurgency movements in Aleppo (saylor.org, 2012). When the Syrian Revolt erupted in Southern Syria in 1925, the French held elections in Aleppo aimed at leading to the break-up of the union with Damascus and restoring the independence of the Aleppo State. After pro-French politicians of Aleppo led the French to believe that the people of Aleppo were supportive of such a decision, the French came to believe that they could successfully exploit traditional rivalries between the two cities (Abd-Allah, 1983). When a new council was elected, however, they voted to maintain the union with Damascus due to the efforts of Syrian nationalists who had conducted a large anti-secession campaign, mobilizing the people of Aleppo against the plan (saylor.org, 2012).

Historically, the region of Aleppo has been perceived throughout Syria as only being second behind Hama as one of the most rebellious areas of the country. Aleppo was central in the revolt against Hafez al-Assad's regime in the early 1980s and came in only behind Hama as the region with the most “disappearances” by the security forces (Bsyria, February 21, 2012). In this period, residents of Aleppo protested against the regime and in support of the Muslim Brotherhood, though the Syrian security forces quickly repressed such acts, and cordoned off the

city of Aleppo in search for Sunni Muslim extremists resulting in numerous deaths, injuries, and arrests (Van Dam, 1996). During the massacre of Hama in 1982, merchants in Aleppo attempted to strike in solidarity with their fellow citizens in Hama, though the strike was called off after Hafiz al-Assad personally threatened to hang them outside of their shops (Abd-Allah, 1983).

### **5.3.2 CURRENT EVENTS**

Aleppo has been one of the quietest regions of Syria during the uprisings, with the exception of a few protests at the governorate's main university and several small Friday protests (Bsyria, February 21, 2012). The most active areas in Aleppo, with the exception of the protests at the University, have been mainly concentrated in the region's poorer neighborhoods, such as Fardous, Marjeh, and Sakhour where people have been protesting on a fairly regular basis (Bsyria, February 21, 2012). Kurdish regions have also been fairly active (my data). Nevertheless, the region still trails significantly behind protest hubs such as Homs, Idlib, Daraa, and Hama.

A common explanation of why the opposition of Aleppo failed to mobilize significant numbers of protesters is linked to the prosperity the region enjoyed under Bashar al-Assad's rule. The government's recent policies of economic liberalization have benefited Syria's "economic capital" (Bsyria, February 21, 2012). As one analyst explains, "A growing Aleppan elite felt it owed its prosperity to the stability the regime provided. Given Syria's rampant corruption, money and politics are intertwined -- and most of Aleppo's upper crust, especially those who have become rich in recent years, have ties to the government that the revolution threatens to shatter" (Bsyria, February 21, 2012).

Another factor may be the size of the city and surrounding areas. With a population of four million, Aleppo lacks the kind of social cohesion that existed in smaller areas such as Daraa, which facilitated organization and some protection against the government's ubiquitous intelligence service (Bsyria, February 21, 2012). As has been demonstrated for other regions, in the absence of established networks and organizations, personal networks play a critical role in recruiting more protesters and in coordinating collective action. The sheer size of the city may put a strain on the trust necessary for such personal networks to facilitate protest. This issue was made evident when Aleppo's local coordination committees, the grassroots networks which help to organize the protests, were infiltrated and broken-up (Bsyria, February 21, 2012).

There is another explanation linking the size of a city to the amount of protest activity. While Tarrow (1993) predicts that protest tends to move from the city to the less urbanized areas, both the factors discussed above, as well as other findings that support the idea that the stronger the bonds between people the more likely collective action can easily be facilitated (Snow and Oliver, 1995, 575). Furthermore, Snow and Oliver note that “not only because of residential proximity and network density, but also because people share significant social traits, hold similar beliefs and grievances, and encounter each other during the course of their daily routines” (Oliver and Snow, 1995, 575). It appears that in some cases homogeneity and close bonds may serve to facilitate collective action, thus further undermining the assertion that protest necessarily spreads from urban to less industrialized areas.

Nevertheless, the explanation of Aleppo's failure to participate in protest cannot be found entirely in structural or demographic factors, but is also linked to the effectiveness of the government's efforts not to “lose” Aleppo. The government has fought more strategically to maintain control over Aleppo than they have in other areas. For example, while the *shabbiha*



(loyalist thugs) are predominantly Alawites in other areas, in Aleppo they tend to be Sunni (Bsyria, February 21, 2012). While loyalty to the regime, in some other regions, has been associated with Alawites, Christians, and upper-class Sunnis, Aleppo has demonstrated an important variation with considerable Sunni support for the regime (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology; The Washington Post, May 3, 2011; Doucet, October 6, 2011; Alarabiya, October 12, 2011). Furthermore, the region, especially the capital, is believed to be under heavy surveillance, even prior to the initial outbreak of protest in Daraa (Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011).

### **5.3.3 POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES**

While the events in the Arab world provided an opportunity for the people of Daraa to express their dissent and mobilize, and while the events in Daraa provided the people of Homs with the crucial information that there were others in Syria who opposed the regime, Aleppo should be understood as a case of constraints, in which opportunity was either not present or failed to be perceived as such. Constraints were more important in this case. The idea of uprising was associated with considerable financial costs for segments of the population in Aleppo, namely those who had benefited financially from ties to the regime – either indirectly through the regime’s political liberalization policies, or less directly due to corruption. One analyst points out that the people of Aleppo have “been made complacent by government enticements” (Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011). Other important pay-offs to deter dissent included: “Construction code enforcement has all but disappeared as the city witnesses an illegal construction boom; electricians, plumbers and tile workers who have been unemployed for years are now barely able to keep up with the work. Roads in need of repair for years have been repaved. Traffic laws, which had become more strict, are no longer implemented. People steal electricity with no

repercussions” (Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011). In Aleppo, basic food stuff also tended to be cheaper, bribery was far less common than in other regions, and restrictions on street vendors were very lax (Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011).

However, financial payoffs do not explain the entire picture. As mentioned before, Aleppo has been tightly controlled by heavy surveillance and the presence of security forces for some time (Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011). This trend increased after the initial mobilization in Daraa. As one resident noted, "The security people out on the streets now outnumber the regular people." (Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011). Furthermore, factory and business employees were faced with the threat of losing their jobs if they joined the protests (Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011). Thus, the people of Aleppo may have perceived the government’s preventative, heavy-handed policies of interference on any attempt to mobilize, which further served to discourage public displays of opposition. In fact, perhaps the most likely indicator of what the regime’s response to an Aleppo uprising would be can be seen in the extremely high costs suffered by the people of Homs. Many analysts have pointed out that while places like Daraa present a threat to the regime, the Assad government would likely not survive if faced with large-scale opposition movements in the country’s three major cities – Aleppo, Damascus and Homs (Black, March 19, 2012; Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011).

One could also argue that Aleppo was even more important to the Assad regime than other cities, not only due to its size, but also due to the fact that it is undeniably the "economic center where much of the money flows" and is home to most of the country's factories, textile plants, and pharmaceutical companies (Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011). Another factor that served as an important constraint in Aleppo was the absence of elites siding with the opposition movement. In Daraa, for example, both Ba’ath party members and religious leaders sided with

the protesters relatively early on into the protest trajectory, while in Aleppo this wasn't the case. In fact, rather than simply staying neutral, different elites, most notably religious leaders, have come out in support of the government. Most religious leaders in Aleppo are followers of the country's Sunni Muslim mufti, Ahmed Hassoun, who has called the protests "mischief" (Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011).

#### **5.3.4 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION THEORY**

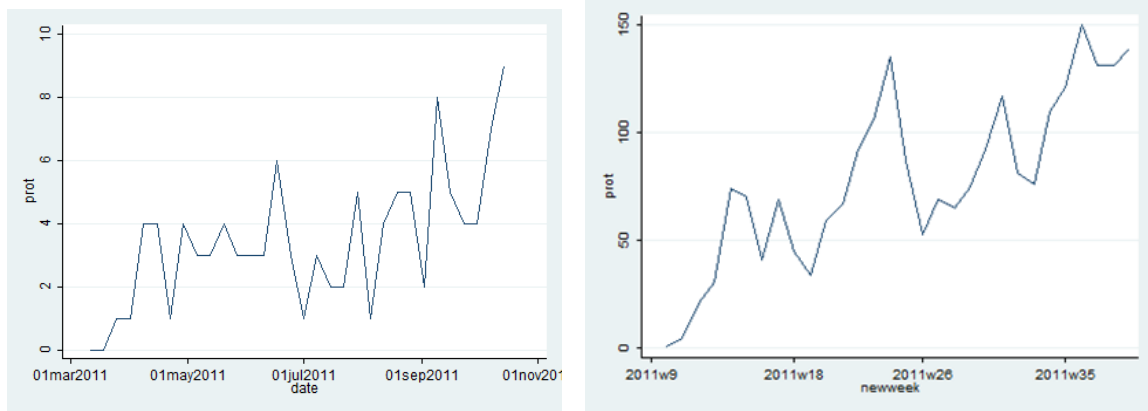
While Aleppo faced many of the resource shortages as seen elsewhere in the country, both in terms of established organizations and modes in which to organize and coordinate, the situation was further compounded by the fact that the city and surrounding areas had an “overwhelming presence” of security agents, informants and spies (Abdulrahim, August 7, 2011). Such a presence greatly hindered communications and the ability to form organizations or networks of activists. As seen above, because the religious establishment of Aleppo remained largely loyal to the Assad regime, mosques were not as easily transformed into mobilizing structures from which to launch collective action, differing significantly from Homs and Daraa.

#### **5.3.5 PROTEST WAVES**

Given the fact that there is not necessarily a cycle of which to speak in Aleppo, particularly in my main period of interest (March-October 2011) I do not apply this model to Aleppo.

### 5.3.6 HOW DO PATTERNS IN ALEPPO COMPARE TO SYRIA?

Figure 8: Protest Patterns in Aleppo and Syria



While in comparison to Daraa and Homs, it may appear that Aleppo is an anomaly; it is not the only region to have relatively limited protest activity. The province of Al-Raqqah, in the north of the country and to the west of Aleppo, also experienced very little protest activity, as well as the province of Suweida to the south which is primarily populated by Druze and also has a sizable Christian community (Al-Jazeera, Interactive: Timeline of Syria Unrest. March 29, 2012). For this reason, rather than being viewed as an exception to the rule, Aleppo should be viewed as a model of the constraints facing the people of Syria in mobilizing in opposition to the regime. The failure to mobilize in Aleppo is crucial for understanding why. This is due, in part, to the failure of large cities, such as Aleppo and Damascus, to rise up against the Assad government to the same degree as the people in Egypt did in Cairo, as well as the fact that Assad, whether through bribery, fear of the unknown, or genuine support, managed to still maintain backing from some segments of Syrian society.

Another way in which Aleppo differs from the rest of Syria, especially the two other regions previously examined, is in how the government has responded to the protests that have occurred there. Protests in Aleppo have largely ended in significant numbers of arrests (my own

data) while protests in Daraa and Homs have been met with high numbers of deaths (my data). While this refers more to the government's position in the protest cycle, it is also a reflection of what was suggested earlier: that the government cannot afford to "lose" Aleppo. It appears that the government utilized far more repressive tactics and regions where they doubted they could either quell the protest movement entirely or win back support (i.e. Homs and Daraa), while in Aleppo arrests may have been utilized with the fear that more extreme measures (i.e. deaths) may have cost the regime supporters.

#### **5.4 DAMASCUS**

Damascus is the capital of Syria and is also where the Ba'ath party was founded in 1940 (Van Dam, 1996). Despite this fact, the Ba'ath party struggled to gain popularity in the capital with the party traditionally appealing more to rural segments of the population outside of the capital (Van Dam, 1996). Damascus has experienced extremely high growth rates over the years, largely due to high levels of rural-urban migration (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012). Originally known for the manufacturing of luxury goods, especially textiles, the city has since attracted many new industries, such as chemical industries, cement works, and food-processing factories (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012). Although the city is primarily comprised of Sunni Muslims, Alawites (mainly through their presence in the army and intelligence services, al-mukhabarat), Druze, Kurds, Ismailis, Christians, and a small Jewish population are also present (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012).

#### 5.4.1 PROTEST AND OPPOSITION HISTORY

Damascus played an important role in the resistance to French colonial rule, and despite the devastating French bombardment of the city in 1925, the resistance there continued until early 1927 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012). Later, as discontent with the union with Egypt spread, a group of Syrian army officers seized power in Damascus, ultimately dissolving the United Arab Republic (BBC, "Syria Profile"). During the massacre of Hama in 1982 the merchants in Damascus, like the merchants in Aleppo, threatened to strike in solidarity with their fellow citizens in Hama, though the strike was called off after the regime threatened them (Abd-Allah, 1983). The attempted show of solidarity may have come as a surprise to some since Damascus had suffered casualties due to a violent attack by the Brotherhood in the previous year. In August, September, and November 1981, the Brotherhood carried out three car-bomb attacks against government and military targets in Damascus, killing hundreds of people, according to the official press. (BBC, Syria Profile).

Damascus was also the central site of a period of intense political and social debate, prompted by the ascension of Bashar al-Assad to the presidency after his father's death, which began in June 2000 and continued until later 2001. Activists were inspired by al-Assad's inaugural speech, which gave them the impression that political liberalization was on the horizon (Human Rights Watch, October 17, 2007). Numerous forums (known in Arabic as "muntadat") and groups sprang up across the capital to foster dialogue concerning human rights and reform in the country, eventually producing a set of demands quite similar to the demands of the opposition movement of 2011 – present. These included the cancelation of the state of emergency, abolition of martial law and special courts, the release of all political prisoners, and the right to form political parties and civil organizations (Human Rights Watch, October 17,

2007). However, the movement was quickly repressed, and many activists were arrested (Wieland, 2006).

There was little activity among opposition figures after this repressive response until October 2005, when a group of 250 major opposition figures united to launch the “Damascus Declaration”, led by pro-democracy activist Michel Kilo and Riad Seif. The Damascus Declaration was critical of the Assad regime but still relatively moderate in the degree in which it stipulated the strategy of a “gradual, peaceful” reform (Spyer, October 27, 2011). It was unique as well as it brought together both leftist activists as well as Islamic activists and was supported by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Kurdish Democratic Alliance, the Syrian Future Party and a number of smaller opposition groups all of which primarily operated abroad (Spyer, October 27, 2011). Although delayed, this action was also met by further repression, when twelve prominent supporters of the declaration received prison sentences in 2008, though the Declaration did at least make clear that opposition, however muted, still did exist in Syria (Spyer, October 27, 2011).

#### **5.4.2 CURRENT EVENTS**

Even prior to the events in Daraa, there were some public displays of discontent in Damascus. On March 15, a small gathering of individuals marched in the Syrian capital after a Facebook page called for a “Day of Dignity” followed by a silent gathering the following day when protesters held up pictures of imprisoned relatives and friends in Marjeh Square in Damascus (Al-Jazeera, "Syria Uprising: Key Events"). This early gatherings were extremely small, however, and failed to attract the attention of the regime or the international media and it was not

until the larger-scale mobilization in Daraa that the idea of a Syrian uprising became more plausible.

After the first protests in Daraa, protests grew in Damascus and protesters cited one of their reasons for participating in collective action as a showing of support for the “martyrs” of Daraa (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology; Al-Jazeera, "Syria: The People Awake"). Protests in Damascus continued in the following months, but failed to reach the same levels as they had in Daraa or they were beginning to reach in Homs. In fact, in the early months protests and demonstrations in the capital usually did not attract more than several hundred participants, while rallies in favor of the Assad regime attracted thousands of supporters around the same time (Muir, March 25, 2011). Certain suburbs of Damascus were particularly active, most notably Douma in the early months of the uprising (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology).

While the casualties in Damascus were far below the number in other areas, especially Homs and Hama, “disappearances” became common throughout April and May (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). In a single night, 300 people were reportedly arrested in a suburb of Damascus, while shortly afterwards, in another suburb, Muadhmiya, another 200 were arrested (BBC, May 5, 2011; BBC, May 9, 2011). Like Aleppo, university students were active in the opposition movement, and in May 2011 students from the Economics Department staged a sit-in (BBC, May 4, 2011). In Damascus, even as demonstrations of opposition gradually become more common, several large gatherings in support of Assad continued to occur, signaling that the President still enjoyed considerable support in the capital (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology). In July, pro-government demonstrators, as a result of the



actions of the ambassadors, attacked American and French embassies in Damascus (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology ).

Later in the protest cycle more and more individuals began to join anti-regime protests in the capital, with reports of tens of thousands of protesters gathering becoming more common by July 2011 (BBC, July 15, 2011). Nevertheless, the gatherings in Damascus tended to be extremely brief, with visitors to the capital often failing to find any visible signs of dissent (NPR, April 25, 2011). The *mukhabarat* has a strong presence in Damascus and protesters, both in the city and suburbs, often gathered for only 30 minutes before dispersing as soon as the security forces appeared (Folkesson, July 17, 2011). Protests were more prevalent in certain suburbs. In Midan, protesters turned out every Friday without fail, even in the face of security forces who used tear gas, batons, and electric cattle prods to break up the protests (BBC, June 18, 2011). During the month of Ramadan 2011 (August), protests that were once more common primarily in the suburbs of the capital became more common in the center of the city (Joshi, August 30, 2012). While protests continued to grow during Ramadan, after having lessened briefly in some areas, Damascus continued to fail to have a critical mass of opposition with some analysts pointing to the business class's reluctance to join the opposition as one of the principal causes (Joshi, August 30, 2011).

### **5.4.3 POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES**

If opportunities, as conceptualized by McAdam (1996), existed in Damascus, they were far more prevalent in the mid-2000s when the opposition still remained relatively active and some high level officials broke with the Assad regime (Wieland, 2006). By the time protest emerged in

Daraa in March, Damascus had experienced nearly six years devoid of any significant opposition or dissent. While in other cases I argued that opportunities in the region must also be considered, the burgeoning protest movement that was spreading through Arab countries seemed to fall short of producing anything similar in the capital, particularly when a call to mobilize in Damascus failed to attract participants in February 2011 (Al-Jazeera, February 9, 2011). Even once protest spread to Syrian towns and cities, protest in Damascus remained sporadic, brief, and largely concentrated either outside the capital or in certain suburbs. There are several factors that explain this, and in Damascus constraints seemed to be far more prevalent than opportunities.

Damascus, like Aleppo, was starkly divided between pro-regime and anti-regime individuals with pro-Assad demonstrations often attracting far greater participation (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology; The Washington Post, May 3, 2011). Reporters often noted that in Damascus residents, even those who were against the regime, were under the impression that Assad still enjoyed broad popular support (The Washington Post, May 3, 2011). This may be seen as a constraint not only because it erodes trust, making it more difficult to coordinate and mobilize, but also because a potential dissident may never be sure if he is confronted with an Assad supporter or not. Secondly, if individuals do have certain thresholds when it comes to the individual choice to protest, large showings *in support* of the president and smaller gatherings against the regime may have done little to persuade individuals currently on the fence to support the opposition movement.

Another critical constraint in the case of Damascus, like in Aleppo, has been a significant security presence (Folkeson, July 17, 2011). Even when anti-regime protests in Damascus were muted, it was common to see a bevy of security men standing on street corners, dressed in riot gear and carrying batons, while plain-clothed intelligence forces, known as the *Mukhabarat*,

were prevalent in buses, holding clubs or guns (FT, June 2, 2011). Additionally, while the presence of state-controlled media is present throughout the country, journalists pointed out that the media seemed to have a stronger presence in Damascus and appeared to be more influential (The Washington Post, May 3, 2011).

On the part of the regime, such a decision was logical; they could not afford to “lose” major cities such as Damascus and Aleppo. This policy may also be reflected in a tactic employed by the regime – a high number of arrests in Aleppo and Damascus, and a high number of deaths in other others (my data). While I argued earlier that repression may be a type of opportunity insofar as it transmits important information both about the movement as well as about the regime, perhaps arrests and deaths differ in their effect because high levels of arrests did not seem to set off the same sort of domino effect (my data). There are several possible explanations for this: 1) arrests of political dissidents is fairly common in Syria (Al-Jazeera, February 9, 2011; Wieland, 2006), therefore they may not have the same shock effect as the killing of protesters, and thus, not create the same sense of rage or solidarity; 2) arrests like “disappearances” is “uncertain harm”; and 3) the regime’s policy of arresting and then pardoning political prisoners (New York Times, Events in Syria: A Chronology) may have caused arrests to have a very delayed effect. Friends and families may have decided to wait and see the outcome of the arrested protesters before acting in fear and staying home or in outrage and continuing the protests.

#### **5.4.4 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION THEORY**

Unlike many of the other regions previously analyzed, Damascus, especially the capital, did have some active organizations that opposed the regime. It is worth noting, however, that most of

these organizations are human rights organizations which are quite small and do not exert much influence, like the Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies and the National Organization for Human Rights in Syria. While useful insofar as they provided coverage of the events, there is no evidence that they were active in launching or organizing protest.

Personal networks and linkages between friends, family and co-workers seemed to have played an important role in both Homs and Daraa; Damascus, however, like Aleppo, did not seem to exhibit this phenomenon. This may indicate that more densely populated areas were not able to foster the crucial inter-personal ties that helped to overcome the lack of established networks and organizations. However, the protest movement in Homs (the city) and Hama (the city) seemed to overcome this problem, therefore it is worth questioning why the people of Damascus were not also able to overcome this obstacle. It was not as if efforts were not made to overcome this obstacle. Protesters from Douma would come door-to-door attempting to recruit more protest participants (The Washington Post, May 3, 2011). The sheer size of the population in and of itself does not provide a convincing explanation, but rather, the strength and size of pro-Assad supporters (as well as extensive surveillance) may have further discouraged people to actively oppose the Assad regime or join protests. This raises an important question: is preemptive repression more effective than coercion after the fact? Both Aleppo and Damascus seem to give weight to this notion.

Like elsewhere, mosques have provided a site for coordination, as well as recruitment, in the absence of well-established networks of activists. The Ummayyad mosque in Damascus was important and served as one of the first venues for demonstrations directly after Friday prayers (Pierret, 2012). Though the interplay between government and opposition can be seen here, as mosques were gradually “neutralized” (*sic*) as the Assad regime created “mosque committees” –

groups recruited to fill mosques and break up subsequent demonstrations on Fridays (Pierret, 2012). Such individuals were drawn from the city's vast civil service sector and were ordered to attend prayers and after the conclusion of the prayers, shout pro-regime slogans, while others were assigned to guard outside to break up any potential demonstration (FT, June 2, 2011). In Damascus, however, some mosques escaped the vigilance of the regime, particularly al-Rifai in Kafr Souseh and al-Hasan in Midan (Pierret, 2012). In fact the Hasan mosque would eventually become a key symbol of anti-regime resistance (Pierret, 2012). This factor may be key in explaining the failure of the people of Aleppo and Damascus. In the absence of both established networks and organizations, as well as the ability to utilize personal ties in their place, mobilizing structures were critical. If most mosques, however, were robbed of the safety they offered in other regions, it would have been very difficult to launch large-scale collective action.

Like other protest movements throughout the country, the activists in Damascus attacked stalwart symbols of Assad and Baath Party control. For example, hackers managed to take control of the website for Tishreen, a state-owned newspaper that had been towing the regime's line concerning the nature of the protests (The Washington Post, May 3, 2011). By attacking one of the regime's mouthpieces, the protesters tried to seize the upper-hand in the tug-of-war of collective identity that we have seen elsewhere. Hackers also managed to broadcast revolutionary music and songs on the website for the Syrian parliament, again seizing a symbol of Ba'ath and Assad control (The Washington Post, May 3, 2011). In Damascus, protesters also transformed the Baathist mantra: "God, Syria, Bashar – that's enough" into "God, Syria, freedom—that's enough" (Foreign Policy, March 18, 2011).

The framing tug-of-war in Damascus was not only between the regime and the opposition, but also among the opposition and pro-Assad supporters. This can be seen in how

both sides defined “freedom”. While anti-Assad protesters commonly chanted “Freedom!” along with the common refrain of “Down with the regime!” (Doucet, October 6, 2011), pro-regime demonstrators painted a “free Syria” is one free of foreign intervention, chanting “America, out, out, Syria will stay free,” and warnings to the European Union not to intervene while carrying pictures of Assad and the Syrian flag (Alarabiya, October 12, 2011). Amid accusations that the anti-Assad protesters were armed gangs and terrorists, people waved mobile phones in the air, shouting, "The camera is our weapon."(Doucet, October 6, 2011), while other protesters held signs saying "No Terrorism, we want freedom" (FT, June 2, 2011).

## **5.4.5 PROTEST WAVES**

### **5.4.5.1 HEIGHTENED CONFLICT**

Much like the case of Aleppo, Damascus failed to clearly exhibit heightened conflict during the region’s protest wave. However, during the month of Ramadan (as well as the preceding month- (Holmes, July 22, 2011), protest did spread to a degree (Joshi, August 30, 2012). The increase of protest that occurred in this period was also accompanied with an increase in repressive tactics as violence escalated (FT, August 28, 2011). For example, at the Al-Rifai mosque in Kafr Souse, security forces, in an attempt to break up a burgeoning protest in the mosque and nearby square, fired live rounds and teargas, while beating the mosque’s imam (FT, August 28, 2011). The violence, towards the end of the period of analysis for this study, threatened to escalate further as defections from the Syrian army was reported in Damascus (Al-Ahram, September 29-October 5, 2011).

#### **5.4.5.2 GEOGRAPHIC AND SECTORAL DISPERSION**

The second feature of Tarrow's (1993) model was not evident in the case of Damascus. However, patterns indicate that protest did disperse among sectors of society to a degree. Early protests were primarily in working-class neighborhoods (Rosen, February 13, 2012) and at universities (Kunkle, April 11, 2011), examples of "traditional" protest participants. Protests, as they gradually spread, began to include more diverse groups of individuals, including middle-class professionals (FT, June 2, 2011). Geographically, protest did spread from the city to towns. However, the protests in the cities were not concentrated within the capital, but rather more common in several suburbs, such as Douma (FT, June 2, 2011), and gradually spread to smaller towns outside of the capital, such as Yabroud, al-Kiswah, and Darayya (my data).

#### **5.4.5.3 EMERGING ORGANIZATIONS**

There is little evidence of old organizations being involved in the early stages of protest, and a lack of information of 'new' organizations emerging later. While personal networks and ties were relevant in the case of Homs and Daraa, there seems to be little evidence that this was the case in Damascus.

#### **5.4.5.4 COLLECTIVE ACTION FRAMES**

The mobilization that did occur in Damascus appeared to rely heavily on fostering a sense of collective identity and framing the collective action in a way in which protesters hoped would attract broader support. While protesters in Homs had often emphasized their religious identity, and in Daraa there was a stronger emphasis on tribal identity, the protesters in Damascus emphasized solidarity with other protesters, especially those in Daraa. In late March, protestors chanted "Our souls, our blood, we sacrifice for you, Daraa!" while several activists insisted that

they would not “forget the martyrs of Daraa” (Karam, March 25, 2011). The protest movement in Damascus was more likely to embrace a broader collective identity, emphasizing the inclusive nature of the protest movement and unity among disparate groups. At the Umayyad Mosque protesters carried signs with a crescent and a cross (Weiss, July 5, 2011).

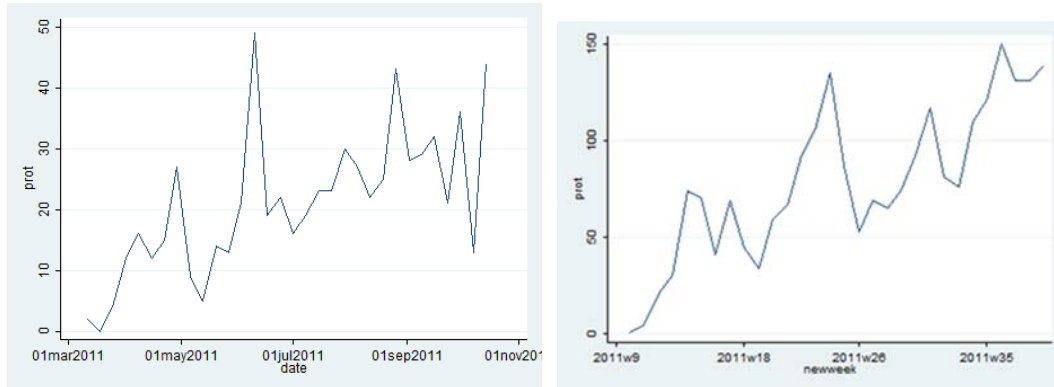
#### **5.4.5.5 REPERTOIRES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION**

As seen above, the protest movement in Damascus resorted to both conventional and unconventional tactics as the movement’s strategies evolved. The movement hacked both state-owned newspapers and government websites (The Washington Post, May 3, 2011). Night protests, an evolving tactic prevalent elsewhere, appears to have originated in Damascus and were frequently utilized by August 2011 (Macleod and Flamand, August 22, 2011). This tactic emerged in response to the fact that secret police, like most government employees, tend to work until 3 P.M. in Syria (Macleod and Flamand, August 22, 2011). For this reason, protesters would use the afternoon to rest and emerge for more sustained protest activity in the night (Macleod and Flamand, August 22, 2011). Such tactical innovation is important because, as Tarrow (1993) notes, protest movements must often make-up for their relative disadvantage in the face of the regime through tactical innovation.



## 5.4.6 HOW DO PATTERNS IN DAMASCUS COMPARE TO SYRIA?

Figure 9: Protest Patterns in Damascus and Syria



Despite the fact that the capital failed to gather critical mass at either early or intermediary points in the protest trajectory, it is actually, for this same reason, relatively representative of the patterns in Syria. In the same way in which Syria has pockets that have been extremely active in the protest movement (Homs, for example), the country also has areas that have seen very few protests (i.e. Suweida, al-Hasaqah). Damascus is symbolic in this sense with reporters who have visited the city, often noting on how life seemed relatively “normal” in the center of Damascus, while some suburbs were under complete lock-down (FT, June 2, 2011). Douma and al-Midan, for example, have both been quite active during the protest period (FT, June 2, 2011; BBC, June 18, 2011).

Damascus, however, is different than other regions in several important respects. Damascus is wealthier than most parts of the country and property prices in some areas are similar to those in large European cities (The Washington Post, May 3, 2011). Furthermore, there is also a prevalent tendency for upper-class families in Damascus to “look down on country folk.” These are opinions that existed even prior to the formation of the state while families were still divided into tribes (The Washington Post, May 3, 2011). While such sentiments certainly do

not permeate all societal segments of Damascus, dismissing protesters as “rural” or “uneducated” (The Economist, June 4, 2011) does little to inspire a sense of solidarity or facilitate the ability to see how their claims could come to be shared by Syria as a whole. As mentioned previously, the diffusion of protest is as much about accepting the claimants as it is about accepting the claims. Furthermore, those in the country’s larger cities have tended to benefit economically to a greater degree from recent economic liberalization and government reforms than those in rural areas (FT, June 2, 2011), thus effectively co-opting dissent to some degree. Other analysts have noted that even among those who harbor opposition to the Assad regime, stability is preferable to the uncertainty of a post-Assad Syria (FT, June 2, 2011).

## **5.5 HAMA**

Hama, the capital of the province by the same name, is Syria's fourth largest city with a population of nearly 700,000 people. Hama is reputed to be the most conservative Sunni Muslim city in Syria since French Mandate times. During that period there was an old saying reflecting this characteristic: "In Damascus, it takes only three men to make a political demonstration, while in Hama it takes only three men to get the town to pray (Dumper and Stanley, 2007, pg. 164). Some have chosen to explain the region’s religious tendencies as an extension of the relative isolation in which the inhabitants live, surrounded by the Orontes Valley (Dumper and Stanley, 2007). In the province, during the mid-1990s, Sunnis comprised about 67% of the population, while there were also sizable Isma’ilis (13.2%) and Greek Orthodox Christians (11%) communities (Van Dam, 1996). There are some areas of the province that are almost entirely Christian (Dumper and Stanley, 2007). Hama has been most well-known historically for

agricultural production (Dumper and Stanley, 2007). The area has also been a site of some manufacturing, particularly of textiles.

### **5.5.1 PROTEST AND OPPOSITION HISTORY**

Historically, Hama was also associated with some of the greatest *latifundias* (estates) in the country, which were controlled by several wealthy families (Dumper and Stanley, 2007). In the 1930s, of Hama's 114 villages, only four were owned by the local cultivators who owned the land, while the rest were owned by several families (Dumper and Stanley, 2007). This significant disparity in land holdings resulted in conflict starting in the late 1940s as agricultural workers began to mobilize, led by Akram Hawrani, and demanded land reform and better social conditions (Dumper and Stanley, 2007). The party he founded, however, was eventually subsumed under the Ba'ath umbrella.

The city of Hama, and the surrounding areas, has been a central site of anti-Ba'ath opposition since the 1960s. By 1964, as some Muslims began to see specific Ba'ath policies as anti-Islam, protests led by local leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood broke out in Hama and maintained momentum for nearly a month, though they were ultimately crushed by the government who responded by sending in tanks and troops (Dumper and Stanley, 2007; Ziaden, 2011; Pipes, 1996). The government's response ultimately increased the polarization between the Muslim Brotherhood and the regime, particularly when the security forces decided to break up a sit-in in the al-Sultan mosque, violating the sanctity of the space (Ziaden, 2011). The government, in the hopes that future unrest could also be crushed, decided to outlaw the Muslim Brotherhood that same year. The decision, however, was followed by strikes and mass

demonstrations throughout many of Syria's major cities, especially in Hama, though such acts of civil disobedience were again quickly crushed (Seale, 1988).

### **5.5.2 CURRENT EVENTS**

A protest movement in Hama did not directly take root, even after collective action in Daraa, Homs, and other areas of Syria. In fact, the first large-scale mobilization in Hama did not occur until April 22, 2011, nearly a month after the initial outbreak of protest in Daraa (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). The protest movement gradually grew in Hama, and the regime's initial attempts to enter the capital of the governorate, Hama, was thwarted, forcing the security forces to withdraw in early June 2011, after only several days (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011; Shadid, July 1, 2011). The reasons for the government's swift withdrawal remain unclear (Shadid, July 1, 2011). Analysts suggested that the government was concerned with giving the international community the perception that they would conduct another large-scale massacre of civilians as they had in 1982. However, repressive tactics were still the norm in their "brief military operation" in the city. For example, a crowd of 50,000 protesters carrying flowers was shot at with live ammunition, resulting in the death of 67 individuals in a single day on June 3, 2011 (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011).

The protest movement in Hama has been unique not only in respect to the absence of security forces, but also in its ability to attract some of the largest crowds that Syria has seen in this period of analysis, from tens of thousands to half a million participants (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011; Estrin and Furst, July 19, 2011). The already substantial crowds received a boost in June and July 2011 as the lack of security personnel and the tacit support of the governor, Ahmed Abdul-Aziz, lessened the costs of mobilization. President Assad removed

Abdul-Aziz, however, in July 2011 (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). It was commonly believed that the governor's refusal to condone repressive tactics and his practice of going door-to-door to meet residents, combined with the increased growth of protest in Hama, led to his dismissal (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). The opposition responded with large demonstrations of 400,000 protesters in the city's central square (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). This was believed to be the largest protest gathering since the start of the protest wave (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). In the same month, the protest movement received a boost in morale when U.S. ambassador, Robert Ford, visited Hama (Al-Jazeera, August 3, 2011). Ford's actions, which broke with official protocol, were condemned by Syrian officials who accused him of "inciting instability" (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). The buoyant mood in Hama did not, however, last long, and by the start of Ramadan in late July, the Syrian army entered Hama and began what would become a prolonged assault on the city and surrounding areas (Al-Jazeera, August 3, 2011).

The following months were marked by intensified conflict and clashes with the Syrian government relying on mass arrests, killings, and house raids in an attempt to squelch the movement (Reuters, September 1, 2011). The death toll mounted and arrests were estimated to be in the hundreds (Reuters, September 1, 2011). After it was reported that 420 bodies were found in mass graves in public parks, the attorney general of Hama, Adnan Mohammad al-Bakkour, resigned from his post in opposition via a YouTube video (Reuters, September 1, 2011), as the protest movement continued to spread and grow, peaking in September, briefly dying down, and spiking again at the end of this period of analysis (my data),

### 5.5.3 POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

Hama is one case where political opportunities, as conceptualized by Tarrow (1993) are applicable, seen in both the presence of a relatively sympathetic governor, Abdul-Aziz, and later, in the resignation of attorney general, al-Bakhour (Yacoub Oweis, September 1, 2011; Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). As Tarrow (1993) suggests, such events help to further legitimize the protesters' claims and offer important allies. Another important opportunity, though distinct from the opportunities as conceptualized by Tarrow (1993) and McAdam (1996) is the fact that security forces did not have a sustained presence in Hama until nearly three months into the protest wave. This presented a crucial opportunity because it reduced the cost of protest and allowed the movement to both coordinate openly and more easily recruit other participants. The critical obstacle of Hama – the massacre of 1982 – seemed less likely to repeat itself due to such favorable developments.

However, opportunities eventually morphed into constraints, as the Syrian army entered Hama on July 31, 2011, killing dozens and wounding hundreds (Abouzeid, August 1, 2011). While such actions marked the increase of significant obstacles to mobilization, as mentioned previously, such a response on the part of the government may serve as an opportunity insofar as it conveys information about the regime's true nature. Furthermore, in the case of Hama, such policies of severe repression may have contributed to greater outrage based on the region's past experiences with government policies of repression.

Finally, regional events, including both the downfall and eventual killing of President Qaddafi of Libya, injected new-found enthusiasm and hope in the protest movement; after Qaddafi's death protests surged in Hama as participants chanted "Gadhafi is gone, your turn is coming, Bashar," (Kennedy, October 21, 2011). Such events were critical to the opposition in

Syria during this time-period. Other influential regional events, such as the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, had resulted in far more rapid, and arguably less costly, protest trajectories for the oppositions movements. In Syria, the prolonged nature of the movement threatened to dampen enthusiasm and commitment as the outcome remained uncertain. When the Libyan opposition movement achieved its short-term aims of ousting Qaddafi after a prolonged struggle, which had led to a civil war, to the opposition movement in Hama, and throughout the country, such an outcome further reinforced the possible efficacy of the movement in Syria.

#### **5.5.4 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION THEORY**

While opportunities played a significant role in facilitating the uprising in Hama, especially in the early months of the region's protest wave, resources were not as prevalent. In terms of mobilizing structures, mosques were commonly utilized as both sites from which to mobilize, as well as recruit participants for Friday protests (Abouzeid, August 1, 2011). The fact that the protest surge in Hama closely corresponded to the month leading up to Ramadan (when attendance at mosques tends to be higher) further enabled the protest movement to grow (Abouzeid, August 1, 2011). Participants of collective protest have commonly cited that they first learned about the events and were recruited through mosques (Macleod and Flamand, August 14, 2011). In Hama, mosques played another role as well in the transmission of information. Mosques made announcements regarding protest events, as well as a call that hospitals were in need of blood as injuries increased during the government's "operation" in the region in August (Macleod and Flamand, August 14, 2011). This role of the mosques was increasingly important, especially as electricity and phone lines tended to be cut off throughout

the period in which the Syrian security forces were in the region (Macleod and Flamand, August 14, 2011).

### **5.5.5 PROTEST WAVES**

Heightened conflict: The protest wave in Hama grew in intensity, as predicted, both in terms of turn out and the government's response to the events. By July 2011, turn out in Hama had reached crowds between 500, 000 and 600, 000 (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). This was a significant increase from the first protests in the region, which tended to attract around 10,000 participants (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). When the security forces entered Hama in late July 2011, both the death toll and number of arrests skyrocketed (my data). The precise number of deaths and arrests, however, remained unclear for some time, until the discovery of various mass graves in and around the city (near al Hamra and Sreheen in Khalidya) (Strategic Research and Communication Centre, October 16, 2011). The protesters of Hama continued to clash with security forces, attacking tanks with stones, their hands, and sticks (Abouzeid, August 1, 2011).

#### **5.5.5.1 GEOGRAPIC AND SECTORAL DISPERSION**

Protest followed Tarrow's (1993) model, originating from the city of Hama and gradually impacting less urbanized areas (my data). However, little is known about the demographics of the protesters in Hama so it is difficult to verify whether dispersion was also relevant across different sectors of society. Regardless, the fact that protests later in the wave in Hama reached 500,000 (in a city of 700,000) indicates that diverse segments of the population were involved in the movement, included less traditional participants.



### **5.5.5.2 EMERGING ORGANIZATIONS**

There is little information available.

### **5.5.5.3 COLLECTIVE ACTION FRAMES**

In Hama, traditional symbols of Syrian identity were frequently employed, such as the pre-Ba'ath era Syrian flag (Mahmud, February 16, 2012) to both emphasize Syrian identity, while also distancing this identity from the omnipresence of the Baath Party. Key locations were re-named to reflect the protesters' demands and aspirations. Protesters renamed the governorate capital's Aasi Square to "Freedom Square" (Shadid, July 1, 2011).

The framing tug-of-war, between protesters and the regime, was evident throughout the protest wave in Hama. While the regime tended to characterize the activists as "Islamist extremists", "foreign agents" and "armed gangs", the protesters frequently capitalized on symbols that undermined this narrative, such as flowers and rose petals (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011), the pre-Ba'ath Syrian flag (Mahmud, February 16, 2011,) and utilizing patriotic chants (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). The movement also attempted to undermine the regime's take on the protests by frequently calling themselves "the people" (i.e. "the people want to topple the regime!") (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). In this way, it was not "armed gangs" or "terrorists" attacking the regime, but rather the "people" of Syria. We have seen elsewhere that this position is critical, not only to ensure that the government cannot distance the movement from mainstream society, but also to attract greater participation in the movement. As seen throughout Syria, as repression impacts increasingly more people, this framing of the movement comprised of the "people" is reinforced.

In fact, while the regime attempted to depict the protesters as deviant or at least outside the mainstream, the protesters attempted to turn the table on the regime's response through the

popular anthem "Yallah Erhal Ya Bashar" ("Come on, Bashar, Leave") in which they called Assad a "wanted man" and linked him to widespread corruption (Mackey, July 21, 2011- really from video not anything he wrote). This served to undermine the legitimacy of the regime, particularly with respect to how representative the Assad regime still was. The ability to turn the tables and put Assad in the place of the protesters was further symbolized when an effigy of President Assad was carried through the streets of Hama hanging from gallows (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011).

When the protesters declared Hama a "liberated city" (Abouzeid, August 1, 2011) they highlighted the fact that freedom met an absence of security forces, as well as the fact that freedom was not synonymous with anarchy or danger. Hama was declared a liberated city when security forces withdrew and residents made efforts to demonstrate that even without security forces Hama was still safe and functioning by having residents put up check points, directing traffic, and cleaning up the squares after protests (Shadid, July 1, 2011; Abouzeid, August 1, 2011).

Critical events were also used to frame the movement and attract support. Like the death of Hamza al-Khatib in Daraa, who ultimately became a symbol of "martyrdom" and "resistance" (Mahmud, February 16, 2012), the alleged death of Ibrahim Qashush, who wrote a popular protest anthem, provided support for the opposition's narrative. Shortly after Qashush was filmed performing the anthem in front of a large crowd of protesters, his body was reportedly found in the River Orontes (Mahmud, February 16, 2012). His death was particularly symbolic, not only because it also fed into the narrative of martyrdom and resistance to the regime, but the condition of his body; his throat had been cut and vocal chords ripped out (Mahmud, February

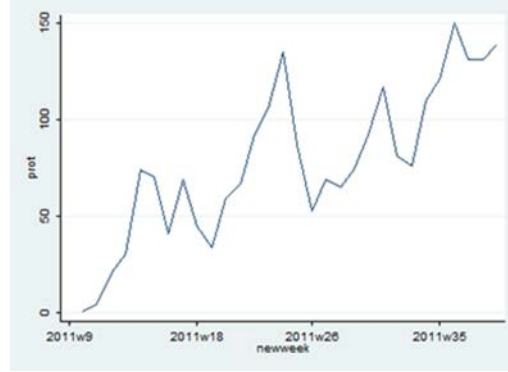
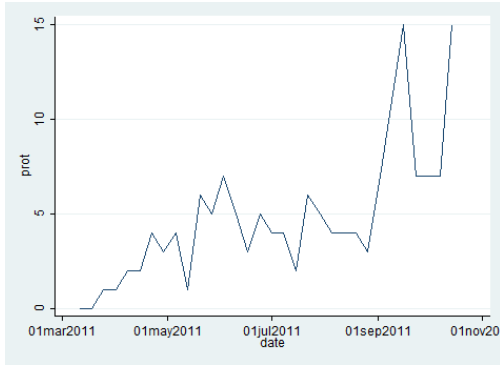
16, 2012). His death did not silence the movement and his anthem remained popular throughout the protest wave in Hama (Mahmud, February 16, 2011).

#### **5.5.5.4 REPERTOIRES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION**

While in other regions tactics related to protest and demonstrations evolved, the protest movement in Hama relied heavily on civil disobedience as residents refused to pay electric and water bills and burnt them in a symbolic gesture declaring that “we will not pay for the bullets you shoots us with” (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). Like other regions, strikes were prevalent as well (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). As mentioned above, evolving tactics can also be seen as a part of framing as Hama became a “liberated” city, protesters forced the closure of government offices, created check points, and directed traffic, essentially “running the city out of the state’s hands” (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011) and demonstrating that a Assad-free Syria was possible. A hand-painted sign conveyed this: “Hama is safe without the presence of Bashar's army or security forces” (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011). Other tactics included meetings declaring a boycott of all Baath Party officials in the city of Hama, as well as letters demanding the release of all political prisoners and the right to protest peacefully, and only under these conditions would the makeshift checkpoints and civil disobedience cease (Macleod and Flamand, July 10, 2011).

#### **5.5.6 HOW DO PATTERNS IN HAMA COMPARE TO SYRIA?**

**Figure 10: Protest Patterns in Hama and Syria**



The protest movement in Hama, like in Daraa and Homs, met with government policies of repression, thus presenting a variety of both constraints and obstacles. However, the fact that government security forces, after their initial withdrawal, did not enter Hama for nearly two months, presented an opportunity for the protesters to organize, coordinate, and develop some tactical innovations. While perhaps only a small advantage, this differed from Homs and Daraa where government troops entered almost directly. Furthermore, the protests in Hama exhibited a fairly broad showing of inter-religious cooperation as Alawites and Sunnis marched side by side (Weiss, Michael. (July 5, 2011).

The sheer size of protests in Hama also marks an important explanation as to why in which the protest movement differed with collective action attracting hundreds of thousands of participants (USA Today, July 8, 2011). While Hama did not experience protests until more than a month into the country’s protest wave, when protests erupted they quickly escalated in terms of the number of participants far more quickly than other regions in Syria and exhibited signs of “heightened conflict” (Tarrow, 1993) fairly early in region’s specific protest wave.

## **6.0 DATA**

My analysis is based on data collected daily on the number and locations of protest, deaths, and arrests in Syria, gathered primarily from Al-Jazeera (English and Arabic), the BBC, and the Syrian-based website chronicling the protest events, [www.syrianrevolution.org](http://www.syrianrevolution.org) (in Arabic). In some cases, however, values were missing and a LexisNexis search was conducted to obtain the missing information. When faced with two conflicting numbers, I consistently selected the lower of the two in order to not overestimate the effects of any of the variables. The data set is structured in a region-week format with 416 observations (13 regions and 32 weeks). (See Table 1 for a breakdown of the descriptive statistics for the continuous variables across regions and for Syria)

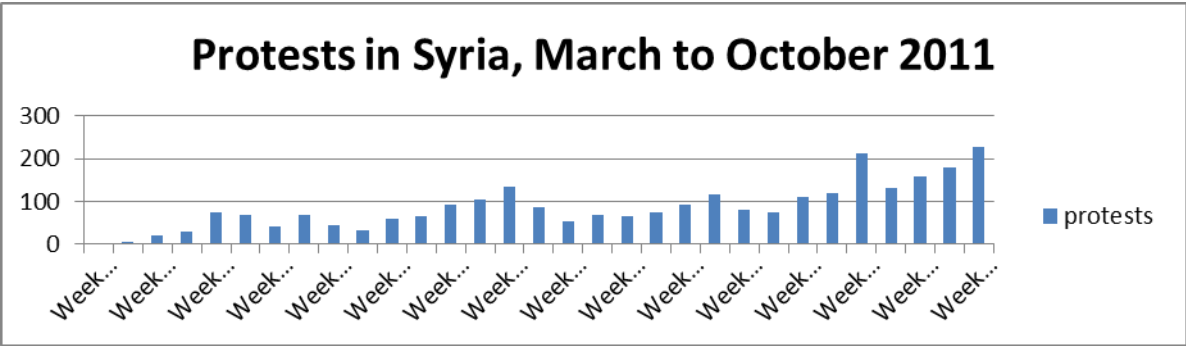
### **6.1 DEPENDENT VARIABLE**

Protest, for the purpose of this analysis, is considered any event that challenges the regime, such as picketing or a march (Rasler, 1996), in which 20 or more people participated, in a public space (Figure 8). In the case of Syria, this has most often occurred in the form of protests, demonstrations, and strikes. Such events had to explicitly express political grievances or opposition to the regime, which was assessed based on comments from participants in the newspaper articles I read, as well as determined through images and videos of the event. In order

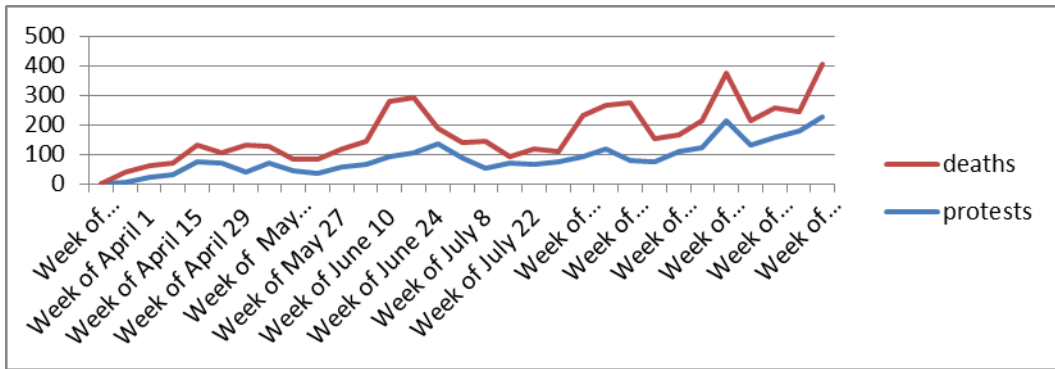
not to overestimate the number of protest events, when protest occurred in the same location on two consecutive days it was counted as a single event of protest (as suggested in Inclán, 2009, to avoid data inflation). Also, due to the fact that the governorates, as well as their capitals, share the same name, when unclear if an event occurred in both the governorate and its capital, it was also counted as one event. This may have negatively impacted the above analysis of dispersion, but occurred infrequently and was rectified by comparing two different sources to obtain more specifics about an event.

Protests are aggregated to the weekly level and the unit of analysis for this variable is the region. This variable was aggregated on the weekly literature based on a common trend in social movement literature (Rasler, 1996; Earl and Soule, 2010; Davenport, 2007). Also, since current protest is closely linked to past protest and there tends to be auto-correlation, R-squared (which explains the variance of the dependent variable explained by the independent variable) tends to be high due to this shared relationship. Therefore, I estimated this variable using first differences. In this way, protest in the current period is subtracted from protest in the previous period ( $protest[it]-protest[it-1]$ ), in this way time-constant unobserved heterogeneity is no longer an issue (Brüderl, March 2005, 6).

**Figure 11: Number of Protests Per Week in Syria (Country-wide)**



**Figure 12: Trends for Protests and Death Toll Across Protest Wave**



## 6.2 EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

Davenport (2000) defines any government act aimed at dissent as repressive if its target is to “bring about political quiescence and facilitate the continuity of the regime through some form of restriction or violation of political or civil liberties” (6). Although repression can refer to a wide-range of responses from restrictions on free speech to torture and imprisonment, I chose to concentrate on the number of deaths and arrests due to both their links with government policies of severe repression and the relative ease in which they can be measured. Other actions such as phone taps, surveillance, and the banning of opposition groups are fairly common in Syria (Blanford, 2011) and reliable statistics on such tactics and their enforcement is difficult to obtain. I use two variables to capture repression: the death toll and number of arrests aggregated to a seven-day period. However, I acknowledge that as Francisco (1995) aptly notes, “no single indicator of coercion can capture the full measure of its application to a population” (270). Due to issues with auto-correlation, as seen above, first differences estimator will also be used to estimate this variable. Deaths and arrests are region-specific. (See Figure 9 for protest and death toll trends across the protest wave).

Concessions are represented by a binary variable, and are considered any instance in which the government offers some form of accommodation, ranging from the closure of casinos to the announcement of future elections. Information regarding concessions were widely available and were broadcast widely on state sponsored television and in local newspapers so the news of such events did not take long to spread. While aggregated on the week-level, concessions are not region-specific and are coded the same for all regions.

Finally the two additional variables meant to also measure the likelihood of success are instances of foreign support (i.e. sanctions, condemnation of the Assad regime by foreign countries and international organizations) and victories of protest movements in neighboring countries, both of which will be binary variables and will not be lagged due to sources (various YouTube videos that showed participants with banners and chanting slogans that showed that they were aware of the regional developments). Like concessions, these variables do not differ across regions and are aggregated on a weekly level.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics, Syria**

| Variable | Mean | Standard<br>Deviation | Minimum<br>Value | Maximum<br>Value |
|----------|------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Protests | 5.6  | 8.4                   | 0                | 66               |
| Deaths   | 4.8  | 13.18                 | 0                | 195              |
| Arrests  | 53.1 | 694.24                | 0                | 2,440            |



**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics, Aleppo**

| Variable | Mean   | Standard<br>Deviation | Minimum<br>Value | Maximum<br>Value |
|----------|--------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Protests | 3.44   | 2.15                  | 0                | 9                |
| Deaths   | .78    | 1.24                  | 0                | 4                |
| Arrests  | 235.56 | 1235.74               | 0                | 7,000            |

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics, Damascus**

| Variable | Mean   | Standard<br>Deviation | Minimum<br>Value | Maximum<br>Value |
|----------|--------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Protests | 20.97  | 11.86                 | 0                | 49               |
| Deaths   | 6.78   | 7.65                  | 0                | 35               |
| Arrests  | 246.28 | 496.17                | 0                | 2,113            |

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics, Daraa**

| Variable | Mean  | Standard<br>Deviation | Minimum<br>Value | Maximum<br>Value |
|----------|-------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Protests | 9.09  | 7.07                  | 0                | 33               |
| Deaths   | 10.28 | 20.66                 | 0                | 100              |
| Arrests  | 72.09 | 300.31                | 0                | 1,700            |

**Table 5: Descriptive Statistics, Hama**

| Variable | Mean  | Standard<br>Deviation | Minimum<br>Value | Maximum<br>Value |
|----------|-------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Protests | 4.81  | 3.6                   | 0                | 15               |
| Deaths   | 10.19 | 21.19                 | 0                | 100              |
| Arrests  | 9.59  | 38.86                 | 0                | 214              |

**Table 6: Descriptive Statistics, Homs**

| Variable | Mean  | Standard<br>Deviation | Minimum<br>Value | Maximum<br>Value |
|----------|-------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Protests | 11.97 | 11.77                 | 0                | 40               |
| Deaths   | 18.66 | 23.94                 | 0                | 115              |
| Arrests  | 45.63 | 139.81                | 0                | 700              |

### 6.3 CONTROL VARIABLES

My analysis of the data also includes two control variables. One is the presence of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The FSA is comprised of military defectors and civilian recruits; while the original aims of the FSA was to protect civilians protesting the regime, they have increasingly begun to employ offensive means, such as an attack on a government military base in Harasta (Weiss, January 6 2012; Al-Jazeera, March 2, 2012). This variable is important to include because it may affect protests positively or negatively, thus explaining some of the variance in the number of protests. On one hand, this variable facilitates collective action as it provides some protection to the protest movement. On the other hand, the Syrian government has tended to use high levels of repression in areas that are considered FSA strongholds. Regardless of the effect, it is necessary to include this important variable in the analysis. The final variable is the presence of the Syrian government's security forces. While there have been defections that rose as the months of protest continued, the Syrian army, police, and *Mukhabarat* have largely remained loyal to the regime (The Economist, October 29, 2011). Like the presence of the FSA, this variable could have a variety of effects since the presence of the security forces would make protest more difficult, but also because it may create a sense of rage and anger among the civilian population or invite the presence of the FSA. Both of these variables are aggregated on the weekly level and differ across regions. Also, "presence" was defined as a sustained "operation" of several days or more. Therefore, instances in which the FSA or security forces (more common in the latter case) entered a location for only several hours to either facilitate protest or deter it, was not counted.

## 6.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

I use panel data with fixed effects and first differences estimator to estimate the following model:

$$\text{Protests}(it) - \text{Protests}(it-1) = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{deaths}(it) - \text{deaths}(it-1) + \beta_2 \text{arrests}(it) - \text{arrests}(it-1) + \beta_3 \text{concessions}(t) + \beta_5 \text{foreign support}(t) + \beta_6 \text{regional opposition success}(t) + \beta_7 \text{presence of FSA}(it) + \beta_8 \text{presence of pro-gov forces}(it) + \epsilon$$

The data is a balanced panel. Panel data helps to eliminate the effect of omitted variables that differ across entities but are constant over time (Stock and Watson, 2011). In the case of Syria, this is important because some factors, which may be relevant (i.e. the percentage of the population which is Sunni), were not available. Standard errors are clustered because this approach allows for standard errors to have an arbitrary correlation within the various groupings (Stock and Watson, 2011).

The panel data set is structured in a region-week format with 416 observations (13 regions and 32 weeks). Using first differences estimator, the change in the number of protests is the dependent variable and the change in the number of deaths and arrests, as well as concessions, foreign support, and regional events of opposition success from the current week, are independent variables. The latter three variables are binary variables in which zero signifies the absence of any significant event and one signifies the occurrence of the variable.

**Table 7: Panel Data OLS Regression Results,**

***Dependent Variable: Protests***

| <b>Protests</b>           | <b>Model 1:</b>      | <b>Model 2</b>        | <b>Model 3</b>         | <b>Model 4</b>     |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
|                           | Impact of Repression | Explanatory Variables | All Relevant Variables | Damascus dropped   |
| <b>Intercept</b>          | 3.48                 | -8.67                 | -9.47                  | -10.48             |
| <b>Deaths</b>             | .126***<br>(.044)    | .116***<br>(.041)     | .115***<br>(.04)       | .115***<br>(.041)  |
| <b>Arrests</b>            | .0008<br>(.0005)     | .0009<br>(.0006)      | .0009<br>(.0006)       | .0005<br>(.0003)   |
| <b>Concessions</b>        |                      | .843<br>(.61)         | 1.07<br>(.656)         | 1.48***<br>(.542)  |
| <b>Foreign Support</b>    |                      | 2.36***<br>(.728)     | 2.35***<br>(.723)      | 2.32***<br>(.758)  |
| <b>Regional Events</b>    |                      | 3.74***<br>(1.27)     | 3.57***<br>(1.22)      | 3.01***<br>(1.15)  |
| <b>FSA Presence</b>       |                      |                       | 2.33**<br>(1.06)       | 3.35***<br>(.839)  |
| <b>Pro-Govt Presence</b>  |                      |                       | -1.69***<br>(.711)     | -1.64***<br>(.898) |
| <b>Adjusted R squared</b> | .073                 | .112                  | .118                   | .15                |
| <b>P-value of F test</b>  | .02                  | .036                  | .008                   | .00                |
| <b>N</b>                  | 416                  | 416                   | 416                    | 383                |

**Note: The individual coefficient is statistically significant at the \*10%, \*\*5%, or \*\*\*1% level.**

**Table 8: Impact of Stage of the Protest Wave on Explanatory and Control Variables**

*Panel Data OLS Regression Results,*

*Dependent Variable: Protests*

|                           | <b>Model 5</b>             | <b>Model 6</b>              | <b>Model 7</b>            |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
|                           | (first 12 wks of protests) | (second 12 wks of protests) | (final 8 wks of protests) |
| <b>Intercept</b>          | -12.81                     | 2.19                        | 5.53                      |
| <b>Deaths</b>             | .157*                      | .043*                       | .123**                    |
|                           | (.082)                     | (.023)                      | (.053)                    |
| <b>Arrests</b>            | .0009                      | -.006***                    | .026***                   |
|                           | (.0008)                    | (.002)                      | (.008)                    |
| <b>Concessions</b>        | 4.81***                    | -.152                       | ---                       |
|                           | (1.74)                     | (.800)                      |                           |
| <b>Foreign Support</b>    | 3.89***                    | -.481                       | 2.32*                     |
|                           | (1.38)                     | (.336)                      | (1.18)                    |
| <b>Regional Events</b>    | -1.41                      | -.388                       | 6.04                      |
|                           | (.95)                      | (.617)                      | (4.83)                    |
| <b>FSA Presence</b>       |                            | .731                        | .18                       |
|                           | --                         | (.963)                      | (.172)                    |
| <b>Pro-Govt Presence</b>  | 1.67                       | -1.52                       | -7.83***                  |
|                           | (2.63)                     | (1.79)                      | (.999)                    |
| <b>Adjusted R-squared</b> | .133                       | .008                        | .767                      |
| <b>P-value of F test</b>  | .021                       | .021                        | .00                       |
| <b>N</b>                  | 156                        | 156                         | 91                        |

**Note:** The individual coefficient is statistically significant at the \*10%, \*\*5%, or \*\*\*1% level.

## 6.5 REGRESSION RESULTS FOR EXPLANATORY VARIABLES AND TIME SPAN

The regression results for Model 1, which only included the two variables for repression, regressed on protests, shows arrests to not be significant, either statistically or substantially. Deaths, however, is significant at the 1% level and positively impacts protest. In Model 2, which includes concessions and the other explanatory factors (foreign support and success of regional opposition movements), the fit improved significantly from an adjusted R-squared of .073 in the first model to an adjusted R-squared of .112 in Model 2, thus indicating that the inclusion of additional variables explains around 11% of the variance in the dependent variable. In Model 2, deaths, foreign support, and regional events are all statistically significant at the 1% level, positively impacting the change in the number of protests. However, concessions – another variable I believed to be linked to the likelihood of success – was not statistically significant. However, further analysis should take into consideration which types of concessions are offered and to whom they are aimed to assess the differing impacts of a variety of accommodating policies. Based on the study of Syria, however, it appears that perhaps concessions were not perceived as meaningful and rather than having a positive effect on protest (as I hypothesized) the ultimate impact was negligible.

In Model 3, in which all of the explanatory and control variables are included, the explanation of the amount of variance in the dependent variable, protest, increases somewhat based on the adjusted R-squared. The findings were as expected, with the exception of arrests that were still not significant. This presents an interesting puzzle. On a theoretical level, it may be possible that arrests simply do not spark the same degree of outrage. Deaths, on the other hand, may have a multiplier effect. While deaths (physically) eliminate some activists, the outrage they spark may not only replace the fallen protesters, but also lead to greater overall

turnout. Arrests also eliminate protesters, but may not have the same multiplier effect because they could be perceived as uncertain harm. This is especially true in the case of Syria where amnesties were occasionally offered to political prisoners. In Model 3, deaths were statistically significant (at the 1% level) and had a positive effect on the change in the number of protests in a given period. Concessions, in this model, were statistically significant at the 1% level and positively impacted the number of protests, as did Foreign Support and Regional Successes of Protest Movements. The two control variables – the presence of the FSA and the presence of pro-government security forces – were both statistically significant (at the 5 and 1% level respectively). While the presence of the FSA had a positive impact on the change in the number of protests, the presence of the government’s security forces had a negative impact.

In Model 4, I dropped Damascus, due to the fact that I believe the data may be somewhat misleading. While qualitative analysis of the events in Syria indicated that regions such as Idlib, Homs, Hama, and Daraa experienced more widespread, sustained collective action than Damascus, the data put the number of protests in Damascus quite high (an average of 21 protests per week – see Descriptive Statistics). This is likely because journalists may tend to report more frequently on this location, as opposed to others. At the same time, the number may be accurate, but since there was a lack of information regarding the number of participants in each protest, the number of protests in Damascus does not convey the fact that while the region may have possibly experienced higher numbers of protest at a given time than Hama, for example, the crowds may have only been in the hundreds, while in Hama protests often attracted hundreds of thousands of participants. In order to ensure the robustness of my results, I dropped Damascus in Model 4 and found that most of the results were still quite similar. Arrests were not significant. Deaths, foreign support, regional success, and the presence of the FSA were all statistically



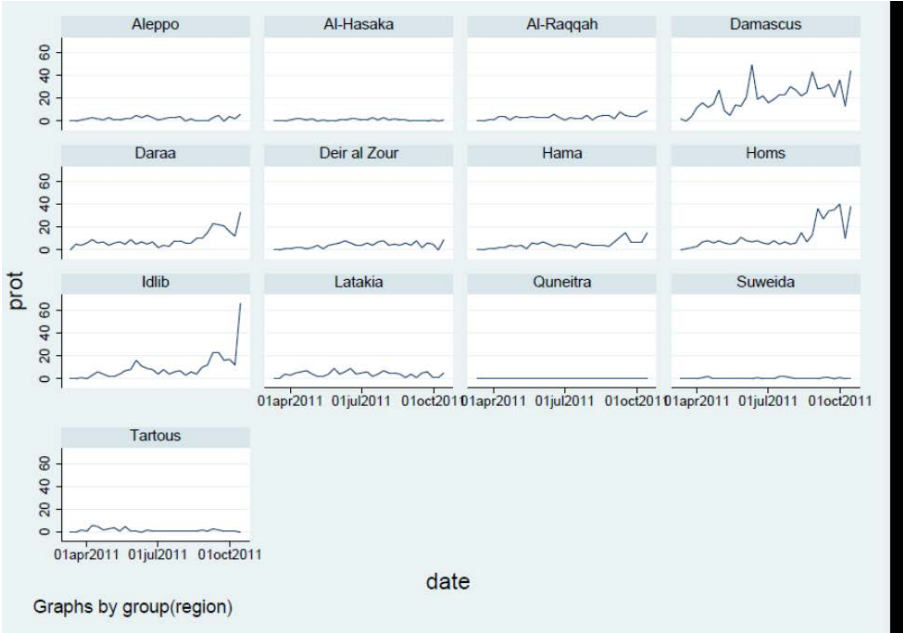
significant at the 1% level, positively impacting the change in the number of protests. The only discernible difference was that the presence of the regime's security forces still had a negative impact on the change in the number of protests and also was statistically significant but less so than in Model 3. The most significant difference, however, was that concessions was now statistically significant at the 1% level, unlike in the previous models.

Table 2 takes into account the time dimension and is divided into three periods: the first 12 weeks, the second 12 weeks, and the final eight weeks. This was done because as Tarrow (1993) notes, protest cycles are characterized by surges and declines. I identified spikes and drops in the data in order to find a period in which to divide the data. This presents an incomplete picture, however, since the middle and end of the wave are not really representative of the true events. The protest in Syria is currently in its 15<sup>th</sup> month, but the period analyzed here only covers until October 2011. In Model 5, which covers the first period of 12 weeks, concessions and foreign support were significant at the 1% level, positively impacting the change in the number of protests. Deaths were significant as well, but only at the 10% level, positively impacting the change in the number of protests.

In the second period, some unusual changes occurred. Variables that I had linked to the likelihood of success were no longer significant, and both deaths and arrests were significant statistically. Arrests were significant at the 1% level, positively impacting the number of protests which is unlike what we previously saw when we took into account the entire protest wave of 32 weeks. In the final eight weeks, both deaths and arrests remained significant, and deaths actually increased in statistical significance. Foreign support was statistically significant at the 10% level, positively impacting protest and the presence of government security forces was statistically significant at the 1% level, though negatively impacting the change in the number of protests.

While the second two periods confirm my hypothesis regarding repression, it is somewhat striking that repression seems to become more relevant as the protest wave progresses.

**Figure 13: Regional Variation**



**Table 9: Regional Variation in Protest*****Panel Data OLS Regression Results,  
Dependent Variable: Protests***

|                          | <b>Model 7</b>    | <b>Model 8</b>    | <b>Model 9</b>         | <b>Model 10</b>  | <b>Model 11</b>   |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
|                          | <b>Aleppo</b>     | <b>Damascus</b>   | <b>Daraa</b>           | <b>Homs</b>      | <b>Hama</b>       |
| <b>Intercept</b>         | -9.84             | -10.48            | -7.38                  | -10.01           | -9.89             |
| <b>Deaths</b>            | .115***<br>(.041) | .114***<br>(.041) | .129**<br>(.048)       | .091**<br>(.038) | .152***<br>(.033) |
| <b>Arrests</b>           | .0009<br>(.0006)  | .0005*<br>(.0003) | .0008<br>(.0006)       | .0008<br>(.0006) | .0008<br>(.0006)  |
| <b>Concessions</b>       | 1.12<br>(.711)    | 1.48**<br>(.542)  | .72<br>(.613)          | 1.05<br>(.69)    | 1.15<br>(.72)     |
| <b>Foreign Support</b>   | 2.52***<br>(.771) | 2.31***<br>(.758) | 2.06***<br>(.678)      | 2.1***<br>(.73)  | 2.29***<br>(.768) |
| <b>Regional Events</b>   | 3.74***<br>(1.32) | 3.01**<br>(1.15)  | 3.31**<br>(1.26)       | 3.57**<br>(1.35) | 3.70***<br>(1.27) |
| <b>FSA Presence</b>      | 2.27*<br>(1.08)   | 3.35***<br>(.839) | 2.15*<br>(1.19)        | 2.72*<br>(1.38)  | 2.19*<br>(1.18)   |
| <b>Pro-Govt Presence</b> | -1.76**<br>(.709) | -1.64*<br>(.898)  | -<br>2.38***<br>(.406) | -1.21<br>(.749)  | -1.32*<br>(.718)  |
| <b>AdjustedR-squared</b> | .121              | .150              | .122                   | .076             | .141              |
| <b>P-value of F test</b> | .009              | .00               | .00                    | .067             | .00               |
| <b>N</b>                 | 32                | 32                | 32                     | 32               | 32                |

**Note: The individual coefficient is statistically significant at the \*10%, \*\*5%, or \*\*\*1% level.**

## **6.6 REGRESSION RESULTS FOR REGIONAL VARIATION**

In order to assess if the individual regions I examined were impacted differently by the explanatory variables I selected, I ran OLS regression on each of the five regions. There were several important similarities. First, in all five regions the number of deaths was statistically significant, positively impacting protest. Arrests were not statistically significant, with the exception of Damascus. As mentioned before, arrests tended to be higher in Damascus and Aleppo so this may explain this variation to a degree, but not why arrests had no discernible impact in Aleppo. Concessions were also only statistically significant in the case of Damascus, but as mentioned earlier, the data for Damascus may be somewhat misleading given the fact that journalists' accounts of the Syrian protest seem to cover the capital more than other regions. In terms of other indicators of the likelihood of success (foreign support and regional events) in all five regions, both were statistically significant, impacting the change in the number of protests positively.

## **6.7 DISCUSSION**

The regression results draw attention to some interesting factors in explaining the sustained protests in Syria. First, the effect of arrests was neither statistically or substantively significant and the sign was the opposite as predicted. I did not expect there to be any significant difference between arrests and deaths; both, I theorized, would reduce the number of dissidents in the short-term, but both would also be likely to fuel outrage and anger at the regime, thus leading to greater mobilization of protestors and thus, a greater number of protests. Other studies have

found that widespread arrests, such as the case in the First Intifada, lead to backlash (Khawaja, 1993). There are a few possible explanations as to why my findings demonstrated the contrary, including ones mentioned above. First, it is possible that in Syria, where there were estimated to be thousands of political prisoners prior to the protests (Aljazeera, 2011), arrests may not produce the same level of outrage as deaths and may not work as effectively to mobilize protestors. Finally, as discussed above, another factor worth considering is that in the case of arrests, they do not always result in detention as some protestors were released shortly after being taken into questioning. For example, President al-Assad has, at various points, released some of the arrested protestors (Sly, 2011), so arrests may potentially have a more delayed effect while others wait and see if their family members and friends will be released. As suggested above, perhaps a more accurate way of measuring arrests would be a cumulative count. Concessions also failed to be statistically significant in most of the models though the fact that this variable was coded as a binary variable may have robbed it of some of its explanatory value. If the variable had been coded as to reflect who specifically the concessions targeted and how substantial they were, the variable may be found to be more significant than this analysis showed it to be.

The time dimension showed different variables to be more or less relevant at different stages. However, the time dimension offers an incomplete picture due to the fact that the protest wave is really much longer than represented here. An interesting factor, which also lines up with the literature, is that concessions were only found to be relevant in the first period. Setting aside the possible shortcomings in the measurement of this variable, this may indicate that concessions were only taken seriously by the movement in the early stages, and as some failed to materialize or were delayed, they ceased to have any discernible effect. This may be linked to the country's

history, and even regional developments; promises to reform have often failed to materialize. As mentioned earlier, the impact of concessions on protest could be both positive and negative. In the case of Syria, when having a discernible impact, concessions tended to impact the change in protest positively. In this case it appears that concessions were taken as a sign that the movement could be successful and thus fueled collective action.

In the later stages, measures of repression (deaths and arrests), as well as a control variable that also can be considered a form of repression (presence of government security forces), increased in statistical significance, indicating that the outrage sparked by repression did not dissipate as it became more common. The presence of the security forces, however, had a negative effect on the change in the number of protest, and may be linked to an observation made earlier. While the presence of the government's forces was a form of punishment after the fact, it can also be seen as a preventative tactic which may indicate the preventative measures are more effective in deterring protest, at least in the case of Syria based on these results, as well as trends described in Aleppo and Damascus.

Finally, the regional dimension of protest showed a great deal of consistency across regions. The one region to exhibit the most significant variation was Damascus, and as explained earlier this may be due to the extensive coverage this region has received meaning that the Damascus-specific variables may be overestimated. The consistency among regions is interesting because, as we saw previously, the five regions are quite distinct on a number of factors. While there have clearly been considerable constraints at play in Aleppo and Damascus, the results may indicate that once protest does manage to overcome a variety of obstacles and costs, the drivers are very similar, even across regions.

## 6.8 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

The qualitative and quantitative analysis in this paper sheds some light on the events in Syria. Due to a lack of data, however, certain puzzles remain. First, regions such as Aleppo and Damascus indicated that perhaps preventive repressive measures are more effective in deterring dissent than repression (even of a more severe nature) after initial outbreaks of collective action. Further analysis should include other factors, other than deaths and arrests, to assess the impact of different types of repression. Furthermore, deaths, instead of being counted individually, could be coded to assess if different causalities (i.e. women, children, Christians) have differing impact on the increase in protests.

Also, as mentioned earlier, concessions are not all equal. In some of the models above, concessions failed to have a discernible impact on protest; however, for this analysis, concessions were a binary variable. Concessions may yield more meaningful results if they are coded in terms of whether they are procedural or substantive (Rasler, 1996) or on the basis of who they aim to appease. The same could be applied to the other variables meant to capture the likelihood of success. Foreign support for a protest movement comes in many forms, not all of them equal. For example, an indictment to the ICC is not the same as a foreign leader merely giving verbal support to the cause and may, consequently, have different effects. Also, as mentioned before, claimants matter as much as claims. In the case of foreign support, it may also matter who is offering the support and what is the perception of this leader or country within Syria (i.e. in terms of credibility). Events of success for other protest movements could also have been coded differently (to capture the degree to which they may be indicative of foreshadowing the likelihood of success in Syria) but for both of these variables, it is difficult to determine the coding without more information about what public opinion in Syria is concerning such events.

The final factor, which would have improved the quantitative model, would have been more variables that captured individual-level factors. While the qualitative analysis of Syria indicates that mosques, for example, played a central role in the absence of established organizations and networks, this is difficult to determine by quantitative methods alone. It would require not only information regarding the percentage of Muslims in each region, but also how high mosque attendance is (ideally before and after the uprisings) to assess how great a tool mosques were in terms of recruitment and coordination. Also, personal ties have been emphasized as another factor that the movement utilized to overcome resource scarcity. However, even in countries where data is more easily available than Syria, this is difficult to measure. In the case of Syria, it presented a considerable obstacle.



## 7.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, both the qualitative and quantitative approaches used in this paper aimed to answer the question of what are the relevant factors in sustaining prolonged protest. Repression was critical in sustaining protest. While repression has been viewed by some scholars as presenting a constraint, I argue that repression may serve as an opportunity. This is not to downplay the very significant costs associated with severe repression, but repression, insofar as it creates a sense of outrage and unity, may serve to fuel a movement. The protest movement in Syria may have been sparked due to the desire for greater political freedoms, and while this demand remains critical, the high degree of repression which ultimately impacted every region of Syria served to unify large segments of Syrian society. This fact is critical. In the same way the identity of claimants matter as much as the claims, the targets of repression, rather than just repression in and of itself is critical. The Iranian Revolution was successful, in part, because the Shah chose to target vast segments of society through repression, thus creating a coalition of opposition against him that encompassed many regions and segments of society.

While the quantitative analysis found support that repression and possible indicators of success are critical, the qualitative analysis shed light on some factors were not as easy to measure, but nevertheless very relevant. Dominant approaches to social movement theory tend to emphasize the role of opportunities and resources. While on the surface, Syria seemed to be lacking such favorable factors, I argue that these factors have been defined too narrowly. In the

absence of organizations, activists are creative, seizing other mobilizing structures such as religious sites in order to mobilize and coordinate. While networks are important, personal ties may also foster greater recruitment and serve to sustain a movement. Personal networks may actually be even more relevant, especially in authoritarian countries, where suspicion and fear are pervasive. Individuals have been conditioned to conceal their political preferences and even the most close-knit organization or network may not provide the same security that bonds between families and friends may foster. Such dominant approaches to social movements only tell half the story – what happens to a social movement in the absence or presence of critical protest-sustaining factors. The more interesting story, however, is what activists manage to do without such resources and how they transform even unfavorable conditions into windows for collective action. Syria is such a case.

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