The Damascus Spring: Assessing its Fragility and Stagnation

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Abstract

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This paper compares the Damascus Spring and Syrian Revolution through the political process model of social movement theory. In doing so this paper identifies the key differences between the two mobilizations which have utility in responding to the instrumental question of why the Damascus Spring was so fragile and why it succumbed to stagnation. Through this process, this paper seeks to deepen the utility of existing English-language scholarship on the Damascus Spring by structuring available information to distinguish the importance of different events and processes to the Damascus Spring as a whole.

For the past 12 years, scholars have looked to explain what conditions facilitated the Syrian Revolution of 2011 and why, in late 2012, it transformed into a civil war. Tomes of descriptive and experimental research have accumulated in the effort to uncover every hidden mechanism, challenge every unfounded assumption, and uncover every piece of evidence available. Some of the most exciting of this research, often published by Reinoud Leenders and Steven Heydemann, has applied the lens of Social Movement Theory (SMT) to describe and analyze the intricacies of how revolutionaries interacted with a changing political environment: casting light on the processes of mobilization, discourse, and contention.

Having immersed myself in this literature, however, I often became frustrated as authors revealed small pieces of information about a previous movement, the Damascus Spring of 2000, before quickly changing subjects after noting that it was repressed. I responded to this by gathering as much information as I could about the movement but found that relevant scholarship was largely limited to a few key texts: Alan George's *Syria: Neither Bread nor Freedom*, Eyal Zisser's *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, and Flynt Leverett's *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire*. Even these texts, however, which are the source of most available information related to the Damascus Spring, devote a mere 59 pages to the matter – largely conveyed as a summary of facts.

It would be one matter if the events of the Damascus Spring were of marginal importance to the study of Syrian history and the Syrian Revolution, yet the opposite is the case. Instead, key products of the Damascus Spring like the Statement of the 99 and Statement of the 1,000 formed the basis for networking Syria's political opposition – an effort which would only grow after the movement's suppression and eventually resulted in the formation of the Syrian National Council and the National Coordination Bureau for Democratic Change. Moreover, many of those figures

once central to the Damascus Spring like Michel Kilo, Riad Seif, Burhan Ghalioun, and Haitham Maleh re-emerged in 2011 to control in these organizations. But most importantly, the suppression of the Damascus Spring is the first of many crackdowns directed by Bashar al-Assad and reveals key insights into how Bashar developed his approach to governance and opposition.

Thus, in response to this gap in the literature, I decided to pose the following question: What made the Damascus Spring so vulnerable to suppression and why was it unable to develop a larger following? In asking this question I intend to use the Syrian Revolution as a comparative lens through which to apply SMT to the Damascus Spring. My goal in doing so is to use SMT to elucidate the Damascus Spring's political opportunity structure, mobilization structure, framing processes, and repertoire of contention while using a comparative framework as a basis for evaluating efficacy. I will limit this comparative framework, however, to the revolutionary period of 2011 and 2012. In doing so I hope to maximize comparability by isolating forms of organization and contestation that predated armed groups' development of para-state institutions.

My aim in answering this question is to extend previous scholarship and overcome its quantitative and qualitative limitations through a methodology that allows me to maximize its utility through structuring. This paper thus comprises a piece of descriptive research which I hope can be used as the foundation for future investigation of the Syrian Revolution's precursors and the Syrian opposition's development. As a graduate student hoping to break into the scholarship of Syria studies these are projects which I intend to pursue on my own as well as opportunities which I hope to open for others. Moreover, in writing this paper, I hope to make a small contribution in applying of SMT to the Syrian Revolution, an approach which I believe is and will be essential to understanding state-society relations in Syria.

I will thus introduce my paper by providing a historical overview of the Syrian political

system's development and features, as well as the historical context which factored into their development and which Bashar al-Assad grappled with upon becoming president. Next, I will provide an overview of SMT's development and explain its analytical toolkit. Once this foundation has been laid, I will move into an analytical treatment and comparison of the Damascus Spring and Syrian Revolution. Finally, responding to my instrumental question, I will extend my assessments of the Damascus Spring and Syrian Revolution to assess the importance of political opportunity, mobilization structures, framing processes, and repertoires of contention in limiting the potential of the Damascus Spring. As such, I will accomplish my goal of extending previous literature by structuring available information and assessing its importance.

Historical Overview

Since Hafiz al-Assad's 1970 coup d'état Syria has been described as a 'populist authoritarian' state built on patrimonialism, militarism, and populism: appealing respectively to a now-stimulated middle class for whom the state is a vehicle for upward mobility, a military which can be wooed by the concept of defensive modernization, and a peasantry consumed by land hunger and stifled by the political domination of landlords[1]. In Syria, this was also complimented by the instrumentalisation of the bureaucracy to provide social mobility and national integration for previously excluded groups like the Alawi, Druze, and Isma'ili sects[2].

In terms of proposing the creation of a large, interventionist state, the Ba'ath Party was non-unique[3]. Yet, when previous governments and rival parties attempted to introduce reforms, they were augmented to preserve the economic and political power of contemporary elites – most

[1] Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above* (London: Routledge, 2001), 3-4.
[2] Ibid, 4.
[3] Steven Heydemann, *Authoritarianism in Syria: Institutions and Social Conflict 1946-1970* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2018), 13.

notably landlords and urban merchants. The imposition of land ownership ceilings in 1952, for example, was accompanied by a provision allowing for the transfer of land to landowners' children[4]. Failure to institute reform in this manner highlighted the crises generated by conflicts within and across urban/industrial and rural/agricultural elite and non-elite interests[5].

While previous governments had tried and failed to build institutions and introduce reform, however, the Ba'athist populist formula broke this stagnation by displacing the old rural/agricultural elite while managing the masses and the urban/industrial elite. After the initial Ba'ath Party coup of 1963, this enabled the government to "[mitigate] the negative consequences of growth for certain social groups at the expense of others, notably capitalists and landlords"[6] while providing the state with the stability and breathing room necessary for institutional growth. The caveat to this, of course, is that the populist approach to state consolidation was founded on a condition of insecurity which inflexibly demanded increases in expenditure and revenue. The reshaping of Syria's political economy thus generated new crises which could only be managed, rather than solved, by the populist authoritarian state – protracting this condition of insecurity.

While economic growth became the basis for generating bureaucratic control, the government was at first divided as to how to promote it – fueling several internal coups which eventually opened Hafiz al-Assad's path to power in 1970. As opposed to the harder approaches of his predecessors, Hafiz proposed a pragmatic approach which reconciled elites to the state through dependent relations. In the rural/agricultural sphere Hafiz thus appeased larger landowners by easing back land ownership ceilings while returning land to select regime clients[7].

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[4] Syed al-Ahsan, "Economic Policy and Class Structure in Syria: 1958-1980," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, No. 3 (Aug. 1984): 312. https://tinyurl.com/ycyc32wz.
[5] Heydemann, *Authoritarianism in Syria*, 12.
[6] Ibid, 5.
[7] Al-Ahsan, "Policy and Class Structure in Syria: 1958-1980," 308.

Likewise, recognizing the failure of nationalization and import control schemes along with the threat of capital flight, Hafiz sought to conciliate urban merchants and business owners by: providing funding for light industry, allowing the issuing of private loans, increasing the issuing of import licenses, unfreezing foreign assets, allowing for foreign investment in the public and private sectors, creating free-trade zones, authorizing the proliferation of private banks, and contracting with the private sector[8] [9]. This final point became increasingly important as the distribution of opportunities through patronage networks ensured that political connections and loyalty became the determining factor in entrepreneurial success[10].

In order to preserve the state's populist credentials, this opening of the private sector was accompanied by massive increases in public spending. The rural/agricultural constituency proved easy enough to appease through massive, subsidized development initiatives. The Third Five Year Plan (1971-1975) stands as the strongest example of this strategy. The cornerstone of the plan, the Euphrates Dam Project, invested heavily in irrigation and hydropower to double Syria's irrigated land and provide electricity for agroindustry and rural dwellers[11]. Both during and after its implementation the project thus provided a sponge for excess labor, a tangible improvement in the lives of citizens, and a boost to Syrian agricultural production. Hafiz took a much more direct approach with the urban/industrial constituency, employing them within the state's growing administrative apparatus. Particularly during times of economic downturn, Hafiz found this strategy reliable in preserving internal stability and reinforcing dependence on the state. Thus, by the 1980's, nearly 1 out of every 5 Syrians worked in the bureaucracy[12].

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[8] Al-Ahsan, "Policy and Class Structure in Syria: 1958-1980," 310-312.
[9] Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above* (London: Routledge, 2001), 90.
[10] Ibid, 90.
[11] Ibid, 55.
[12] Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above*, 84.

While functional, the key problem with this approach lay in the high level of state expenditure necessary to continue to buy time for state consolidation. To paraphrase Raymond Hinnebusch, so long as Syria's economic base did not expand, expenditures risked outpacing it while the state's administrative functions exceeded their capacity[13]. As only 25% of state revenues came from taxation[14], most of which was consumed by debt financing[15], this was a threat which Syria was particularly vulnerable toward. Moreover, though patrimonialism and populism were effective mechanisms of control, they proved woefully insufficient in promoting meaningful economic development – driving speculative investment in real estate, currency exchange, and import-export schemes and deepening consumption rather than production[16].

To fund this scheme Hafiz courted foreign investment and aid from the Eastern Bloc and Arab neighbors supporting Syria as a bulwark against Israel[17] while utilizing oil rents to increase state autonomy from the private sector[18]. Entering the 80's, however, this balancing act was undermined by significant and simultaneous reductions to and cuts in aid from Arab neighbors and Eastern Bloc states.[19]. Foreign currency reserves dropped as low as USD$50 million while inflation skyrocketed and the trade deficit continued to deepen[20]. Factories were shuttered, imports were slashed, agricultural output declined for lack of inputs, and per capita income fell by 15% while austerity measures increased commodity prices while reducing access[21].

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[13] Ibid, 10.
[14] Ibid, 127.
[15] Ibid, 128.
[16] Ibid, 89.
[17] Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above*, 55.
[18] Ibid, 92.
[19] Ibid, 103.
[20] Ibid, 39-40.
[21] Hinnebusch, 129-130.

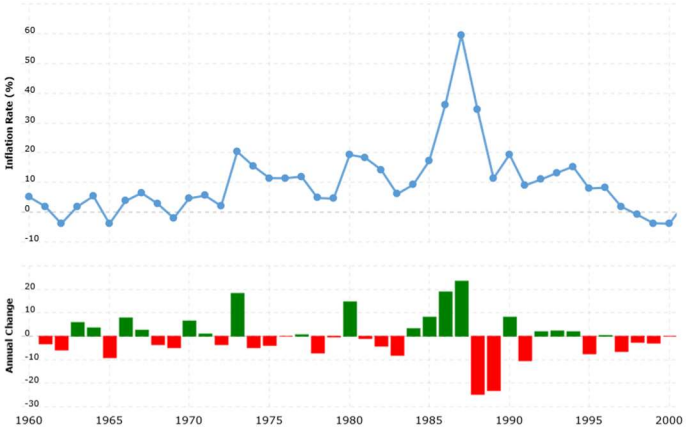

Figure 1 - Syrian Inflation Rate 1960-2000[22]

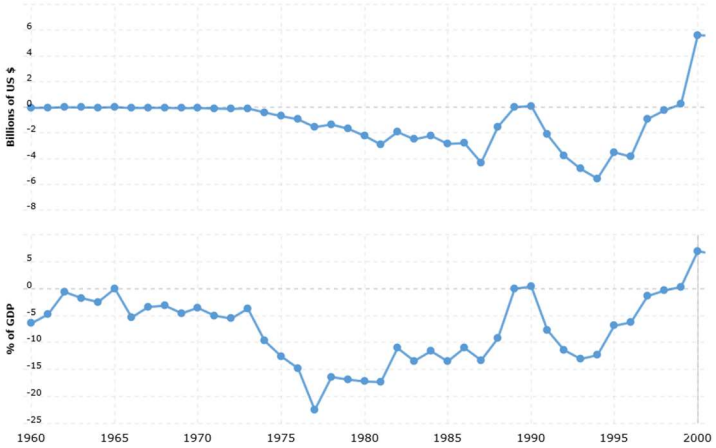

Figure 2 - Syrian Trade Balance 1960-2000[23]

Moving into the 1990s, Hafiz sought to halt this decline through a variety of unexpected policy shifts designed to draw foreign capital, increase exports, and placate Syria's increasingly dissatisfied populace. Participation in the Gulf War, peace talks with Israel, and diplomatic overtures toward Europe succeeded in opening the door for aid, debt refinancing, loans, and oil export opportunities[24] [25]. Moreover, this line of funding bought time for the regime to renegotiate its USD$12-billion-dollar debt to Russia[26]. Remaining gaps were plugged by increasing oil exports – constituting as much as 2/3rds of Syria's total exports in the 90s[27]. This strategy proved successful in revitalizing the Syrian economy, with GDP growth reaching as high as 10.6% in 1992[28]. This victory was limited, however, as oil dependence imperiled the regime when prices fluctuated as they did in 1998, tanking oil export revenues by 30%[29]. It thus became clear by

[22] Drawn from World Bank, "Syrian Arab Republic Inflation Rate 1960-2023," Macrotrends, accessed May 7, 2023, https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/SYR/syrian-arab-republic/inflation-rate-cpi.
[23] Drawn from World Bank, "Syrian Arab Republic Trade Balance 1960-2023," Macrotrends, Accessed May 7, 2023, https://tinyurl.com/ynva4df4.
[24] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy: Syria in Transition*, 79.
[25] Ibid, 190-191.
[26] Ibid, 85.
[27] Ibid, 190.
[28] Ibid, 191.
[29] Ibid, 192.

1997 that this model was unsustainable as projections showed protracted GDP decline[30].

The regime had attempted to use its limited opportunity to kick start the economy. In 1993, for example, investments in infrastructural modernization were allocated 51% of the state budget[31]. It became clear, however, that economic liberalization was necessary to reduce state burden and attract greater of foreign investment. As such, the public sector was put under tighter economic controls while private sector regulation was relaxed and state import monopolies were dismantled[32]. Most notably, the passage of investment law no. 10 in 1991 sought to attract foreign investment by loosening restrictions, permitting the repatriation of profits, waiving import duties and taxes, and slashing tax rates[33]. Despite these efforts, however, the Syrian economy eventually declined, with unemployment estimated to have hit a high of 30%[34].

Though failing to reverse Syria's economic trajectory, public investment achieved a degree of success in preserving populist consensus while conciliating and co-opting urban/industrial elites. Hafiz sought to enhance this effect through limited political reforms, expanding the People's Assembly by 22% and allocating 40% seats to vetted independent candidates, mostly from among urban merchants and manufacturers. Additionally, he loosened restrictions on legislative criticism of regime policy while granting the assembly a guiding role in planning the country's economic liberalization[35]. After his death Hafiz thus passed on a patchwork of economic and political reforms which temporarily preserved the state's ability to fund patrimonial, militaristic, and populist policies without providing the grounds for stability.

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[30] Ibid, 192.
[31] Ibid, 189.
[32] Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above*, 133-134.
[33]Ibid, 134.
[34] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy: Syria in Transition*, 192.
[35] Ibid, 187-188.

Coercive and Corporatist Conciliation

Where policy had been insufficient to advance state consolidation, Hafiz had also developed and passed on coercive and corporatist approach to managing state-society relations. In the aftermath of the coup of 1963 the coercive apparatus quickly took shape as heavy securitization was advanced alongside new political and economic reforms. Crucially for our interest, this period of consolidation set the stage for Syria's suffocating political culture by way of emergency laws suspending the civil rights and liberties of citizens.

The state of emergency, declared on March 8th, 1963, would not be lifted until 2011 as a nominal bargaining chip toward protesters[36]. It would gradually be expanded, in fact, with the 1965 Law of Protecting the Revolution, Legislative Decree No. 6, and the elaboration of a new penal code[37]. As Salwa Ismail argues in *The Rule of Violence*, this approach established political violence as a key feature of state-society relations, with the detention camp and massacre standing as its pillars. In this environment political violence both neutralized opposition and ordered citizens' interpretive horizons through brutality and decisive consolidation[38].

Law of Protecting the Revolution	Legislative Decree No. 6	Penal Code
• Criminalized opposition to the principles of the revolution. • Regularized life imprisonment or execution as methods of coercion.	• Criminalized activities violating the socialist order or legislative decrees.	• Criminalized opposition to the state and public security (Articles 263-311). • Criminalized opposition to public authorities (Articles 369-387). • Criminalized undermining the spirit of the nation and public confidence (Articles 427-459).

[36] Salwa Ismail, *The Rule of Violence: Subjectivity, Memory, and Government in Syria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 32.
[37] Ibid, 33.
[38] Ibid, 33.

Political culture under the new Ba'athist state was also shaped by the influence of new mass organizations created and expanded to sustain Ba'athism's popular appeal and maximize the state's administrative capacity. 'Ba'athist corporatism' ordered the masses from the top down into organizations like the Peasant Union, Women's Union, Writers Union, trade unions, and professional and youth associations[39]: organizing previously excluded groups and according to them privileged access to power in exchange for stabilizing the state through the pursuit of defense and development goals and the performance of ideological loyalty[40] [41]. Notably, this structure and the pervasive instrumentalisation of political violence were also key in denying space for the organization of autonomous civil society.

As Lisa Wedeen wrote in *Ambiguities of Domination*, this combination resulted in a strategy of rule – epitomized in the construction of the Assad cult of personality – which was rooted in compliance and only papered over by shallow appeals to legitimacy. Thus, coercion served to stifle opposition and enforce compliance while mass organizations existed to disseminate the norms which the state sought to imbue in its citizen's political culture[42]. Regularized obeisance and self-conscience submission to the state[43] – critically facilitated by a shared condition of unbelief and the conscious limiting of interpretive horizons[44] – thus rested on three key pillars: (1) the acknowledgement of the state's coercive force, (2) the acknowledgement of the material benefits available through affiliation with the state, and (3) the lack of viable alternatives. Yet while policy and political neutralization had secured the state

[39] Flynt Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire* (District of Columbia: The Brookings Institution, 2005), 24.
[40] Ibid, 25.
[41] Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above* (London: Routledge, 2001), 83.
[42] Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 6.
[43] Ibid, 92.
[44] Ibid, 84.

during Hafiz' era, Bashar struggled to maintain these pillars upon taking power, first giving rise to the Damascus Spring of 2000 and later to the Syrian Revolution of 2011.

The Damascus Spring emerged rapidly in August 2000 after MP Riad Seif openly organized a political discussion group[45] modeled on a civil society forum which had formed one month before Hafiz' death in May 2000[46]. Shortly after its formation Seif formalized this group as the 'Friends of Civil Society in Syria,' before contacting then Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam to receive the organization's official approval[47]. Though Khaddam and the head of the General Intelligence Directorate were displeased with Seif's actions and disposition, they approved the organization and encouraged him to use the forum to prepare a political party on the condition that he kept no secrets and made no contact with Westerners[48]. As a result of this opening, political entrepreneurs across the country[49] soon opened their own civil society forums[50] which, like Seif's, were opposed to the state's existing policy and structure[51] but operated in a legal grey-zone rooted in the precedence of Seif's approval.

Gradually, these forums began to cohere and facilitated the networking of increasingly hopeful yet dissatisfied intellectuals. This process began to bear fruit on September 27th, 2000, when the London-based al-Hayat newspaper published a landmark political manifesto undersigned by 99 prominent artists and intellectuals[52]. Despite its significance, however, the

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[45] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 81.
[46] Ibid, 33.
[47] Ibid, 35.
[48] Ibid, 36.
[49] "In Damascus alone, there were five forums alongside Seyf's forum, including the Cultural Forum for Human Rights, established and managed by Khalil Ma'tuq, an attorney known for his close connections with the Communist Party. Forums were also established in Aleppo, Tartus, and Ladhiqiyya, and even in provincial towns such as Hasaka, Qamishli, Misyaf, and Suwayda." Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 81-82.
[50] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 37.
[51] Ibid, 35.
[52] Ibid, 39.

document limited itself to advocating liberal reforms and the growth of an autonomous civil society[53] - thereafter the document's distribution was restricted, and its signatories slandered[54]. Nonetheless, the document became a cornerstone for increased coordination between hard and soft-line dissidents who soon issued a follow-on publication entitled the Statement of the 1,000. More inflammatory than its predecessor, the Statement of the 1,000 expanded its demands to include democratic elections and the deconstruction of the Ba'athist state[55]. Before it was finalized or signed, however, the document leaked to the Beirut newspaper As-Safir[56]

A flurry of dissident activity followed the leak as the disorganized opposition tried to stay ahead of events: creating an organization dedicated to uniting all of Syria's civil society[57], issuing another publication entitled "Towards a National Social Contract in Syria" which reiterated reforms and urged civil society invigoration[58], and receiving a statement of implied support from the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, which affirmed its support for multi-party democracy in its "Covenant of National Honor for Political Activity"[59]. Nevertheless, these efforts led nowhere as Vice President Khaddam directed harsh a harsh crackdown[60], censoring the media and shuttering civil society forums across the country within a month[61]. During this

[53] Their four core demands were (1) an end to the state of emergency and martial law, (2) amnesty for all political dissidents and exiles, (3) the establishment of civil liberties and their protection by the law, and (4) the reduction of the security apparatus and the adoption of more inclusive governing practices. See appendix.
[54] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 50-51.
[55] Atop the Statement of the 99's reforms this included demanding (1) civil liberties and the rejuvenation of civil organizations – labor unions in particular – outside of state control; (2) the reinstatement of the freedom of the press; (3) the creation of a democratic elections system monitored by an independent judiciary; (4) the independence of the judiciary; (5) the fulfillment of citizens' economic rights to a fair share of the national wealth and a clean environment, in addition to more humane working conditions; (6) a rejection of the concept of 'the leading party in society and the state'; and (7) the abolition of legal discrimination against women. See appendix.
[56] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 43.
[57] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 85.
[58] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 189-192.
[59] Ibid, 85.
[60] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 49.
[61] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, 94.

time, prominent activists were also subject to targeted harassment[62] [63], culminating in August of 2001 when 10 prominent activists, including two MPs (Riad Seif and Ma'moun al-Homsi), were sentenced to between 2.5 and 10 years in prison[64]. Several prominent forums managed to survive the turmoil and operate legally and some activists who were not swept up in the subsequent 'revolving door of arrests'[65] continued to convene[66] yet survivors were never able to resurrect the Damascus Spring as a movement and largely clung to its remnants until 2005[67].

A decade later, however, Bashar confronted a much greater challenge after a group of schoolchildren were arrested by police for writing "the people want to topple the regime" on the wall of their school in late February 2011[68]. While their families originally plead for their release from local authorities, they were denied as police chief Atef Najib remarked that they should forget their children and make new ones, noting if they did not know how they could bring their wives and the police would do it for them[69]. The next day, after sharing the news with friends and relatives, the families gathered after Friday prayers and marched on the governor's mansion, where they were met with gunfire[70]. A cycle of protests began thereafter with regular confrontations between the police and protesters ending in deaths, injuries, and arrests, escalating

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[62] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, 48-49. Nabil Suleiman, for example, was beaten in front of his home by unidentified assailants, dragged in for questioning by the security service, and had his car vandalized.
[63] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 89. Suheir al-Atassi's car was also stolen, several Kurdish participants in the Jaladat Badrakhan Forum were beaten, and an unknown driver attempted to run lawyer Khalil Ma'tuq off the road.
[64] Hinnebusch and Zintl, *Syria from Reform to Revolt*, 94. These activists were Mamoun al-Homsi, Riad Seif, Riyad al-Turk, Kamal al-Labwani, Walid al-Bunni, 'Aref Dalila, Habib Saleh, Hassan Sadoun, Habib Isa, and Fawaz Tello.
[65] Joshua Landis and Joe Pace, "The Syrian Opposition," *The Washington Quarterly* 30, 1 (Winter 2006-2007): 60. https://tinyurl.com/yn37aazk.
[66] Wieland, Almqvist, and Nassif, *The Syrian Uprising: Dynamics of an Insurgency*, 15.
[67] This is when the Damascus and Damascus-Beirut Declarations were released, expanding on the Statements of the 99 and 1000 and finally organizing a coherent political bloc with both individuals and parties as signatories.
[68] Marcela Gaviria, "Transcript: The Regime Responds," Frontline PBS, accessed May 7, 2023, https://tinyurl.com/3wbeemmk.
[69] Gaviria, "Transcript: The State Responds."
[70] Kelly McEvers, "Revisiting the Spark that Kindled the Syrian Uprising," NPR, Mar. 16, 2012, https://tinyurl.com/28d6trut.

and spreading until, in late March 2011, the 'Association of Arab Tribes and Clans in Southern Syria' made a call for national revolution which would be published the following month as protests continued to spread across the country[71].

Week	Location of Documented Protests and Known Associated Casualties
1	Dar'a, Damascus, Homs, and Baniyas – 4 killed.
2	Dar'a, Damascus, Homs, Baniyas, Douma, Mouddamiyeh, Dier ez-Zor, Idlib, Hama, Nawa, Al-Tall, Qamishli, Aleppo, Latakia, Jableh, and Amouda – 50-150 killed.
3	Dar'a Damascus, Homs, Baniyas, Douma, Moudammiyeh, Dier ez-Zor, Idlib, Qamishli, Latakia, Jableh, and Amouda – at least 18 killed.
4	Dar'a Damascus, Homs, Baniyas, Douma, Mouddamiyeh, Dier ez-Zor, Idlib, Hama, Al-Tall, Qamishli, Latakia, Jableh, Amouda, Darayya, Harasta, Tartous and Abu Kamal – 47-107 killed.
5	Dar'a, Damascus, Homs, Baniyas, Douma, Mouddamiyeh, Dier ez-Zor, Idlib, Hama, Aleppo, Latakia, Jableh, al-Bayda, and Suweida – at least 42 killed.
6	Dar'a, Damascus, Homs, Baniyas, Douma, Mouddamiyeh, Dier ez-Zor, Idlib, Hama, Aleppo, Latakia, Jableh, and Suweida – at least 173 killed.
7	Damascus, Homs, Baniyas, Douma, Mouddamiyeh, Hama, Nawa, Aleppo, Latakia, Jableh, Amouda, Suweida, Tal Kalakh, Jassem, Ankhel, and Zabadani – 93-127 killed.
8	Dar'a, Damascus, Homs, Baniyas, Douma, Mouddamiyeh, Dier ez-Zor, Hama. Nawa, Al-Tall, Qamishli, Aleppo, Latakia, Jableh, Amouda, Abu Kamal, Suweida, Jassem, Ankhel, Zabadani, and Arbeen.
9	Dar'a, Damascus, Homs, Baniyas, Douma, Mouddamiyeh, Dier ez-Zor, Hama, Nawa, Al-Tall, Aleppo, Latakia, Jableh, Amouda, Abu Kamal, Suweida, Tal Kalakh, Jassem, Ankhel, Zabadani, Arbeen, Al-Harram, and Tafas – at least 16 killed, as the regime begins using tanks and artillery.
10	Dar'a and its suburbs, Damscus and its suburbs, Homs and its suburbs, Baniyas, Dier ez-Zor, Hama and its suburbs, Qamishli, Jableh, Amouda, Abu Kamal, Tal Kalakh, Jassem, Ankhel, and Kobani – at least 123 killed.
11	Dar'a and suburbs, Damscus and suburbs, Homs and suburbs, Baniyas, Dier ez-Zor, Hama and its suburbs, Qamishli, Jableh, Amouda, Abu Kamal, Kobani, and Rastan.

Figure 3 - Documented Protests During the First 11 Weeks[72]

Social Movement Theory (SMT)

Social Movement Theory (SMT) is a body of literature concerned with aggregation of

[71] The CNN Wire Staff, "Dozens of Syrians Reported Killed in Daraa," CNN, Apr. 26, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/musuenm5.
[72] Michael Weiss and Hannah Stuart, *The Syrian Opposition: Political analysis with original testimony from key figures* (London: The Henry Jackson Society, 2011), 7-13, https://tinyurl.com/2sywr29e.

beliefs and behaviors among populations – in other words, collective action and its prerequisites. As one would expect, however, a field of study this broad and influential has been rife with debates over the utility of different analytical models since its inception. These debates largely take place between the Marxian, Durkheimian, Millian, and Weberian traditions[73].

While present-day scholarship avoids these labels, their influence is relevant to the conceptualization of social movements today. Marxian and Durkheimian approaches, for instance, were influential in the articulation of grievance-based approaches to social movements which first characterized SMT[74]. This original literature was inconsistent with a Marxist approach to social movements yet shared its structural analysis and focus on grievances. Lying more within the Durkheimian tradition, the collective behavior theorists who dominated early SMT literature saw most social movements as non-routine events manifesting from social disintegration and dissatisfaction – i.e., grievances[75].

The Millian was thus invigorated by critique toward emphasis on the psyche in addition to a focus on the factors underlying mobilization rather than the mobilization process itself. This new literature reached its zenith after the articulation of the Resource Mobilization (RM) model by John McCarty and Mayer Zald. In their groundbreaking 1977 paper "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," they argued in favor of an evolution past SMT's roots in social psychology[76] and crowd psychology[77]. In their view, focus on grievances and deprivation was counterproductive to SMT, assuming that grievances are ever present but require

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[73] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1978), 15.
[74] Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 21.
[75] Ibid, 22.
[76] John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, No. 6 (May 1977): 1213. https://tinyurl.com/2p8dkkp2.
[77] For an example, refer to Gustave Le Bon's 1895 text, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, which heavily influenced the early development of both Social Movement Theory and the study of Crowd Psychology.

certain conditions to manifest in social movements – namely, resource aggregation, organization, opportunity, and the surmounting of the collective action problem[78]. Moreover, they argued, a social movement did not comprise a homogenous entity, but many social movement organizations (SMOs) constituting a social movement industry – in the same way that competing steel manufacturers constitute one industry[79]. Shortly after RM's articulation, however, authors identified opportunities for growth in the RM model which recentered ideas in accordance with the Weberian tradition.

When it came to the role of beliefs, for example, scholars began to interject that RM had it backward in assuming that movement ideas and meanings developed naturally around structural arrangements, events, and existing ideologies. Instead, they argued, SMOs played an active role in manipulating and generating ideas and meanings; through such work, they argued, SMOs engage in the "the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings" to advance their cause[80]. Through this process, they argued, SMOs create interpretive frames to formulate appeals and respond to the interpretive frames of their opponents. David Snow and Robert Bendford, two leading scholars on framing, thus defined such interpretive frames as "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities of the social movement organization"[81]. It is through such frames, they argued, that SMOs provided the means for individuals to understand themselves, communities, the social movement, and the countermovement[82].

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[78] McCarthy and Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements," 1216.
[79] Ibid, 1218.
[80] Robert Bendford and David Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26, (2000): 613. https://tinyurl.com/25tfbt69.
[81] Ibid, 614.
[82] Ibid, 614.

In order to understand how these frames were created, Snow and Bendford distinguished between three key core framing tasks in which social movement organizations participate: diagnostic framing (problem identification), prognostic framing (explaining the problem's cause and offering a solution), and motivational framing[83] [84]. Moreover, they argued, these frames are employed in discursive, strategic, and contentious processes of interaction with constituents, allies, and opponents which present opportunities to engage in different framing tasks.

Discursive processes are characterized by the tasks of articulation and amplification; the former involves packaging events and experiences into a cohesive reality while the latter involves distilling the elements of this reality which are most salient[85]. The discursive process thus provides actual and potential constituents with a narrative as well as key arguments and slogans which invoke and strengthen the reality which they refer to.

Strategic processes, on the other hand, involve deploying and instrumentalizing this constructed reality through appeals to action and frame acceptance. As such, the four tasks involved in strategic processes are frame bridging, frame extension, frame amplification, and frame transformation. Bridging and extension involve expanding and inducing frame acceptance by respectively linking similar but structurally disconnected frames and convincing potential adherents that their interests align with a frame narrative and social movement goals[86]. Amplification and transformation, on the other hand, relate to frame renewal, where amplification refers to the integration and manipulation of values and beliefs to induce participation, and transformation refers to changing or generating beliefs and meanings[87].

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[83] Ibid, 615.
[84] Hank Johnston, *What is a Social Movement* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 65.
[85] Bendford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," 623.
[86] Ibid, 624.
[87] Ibid, 624.

Finally, contested processes involve the task of overcoming tension between frames and a variety of competing claims about their validity, relevance, and salience. These challenges typically arise from internal and external opponents, media representation of a movement, and incongruence between an organization or movement's actions and the values and beliefs it espouses.[88] Responding to such conflicts becomes an essential task in preserving the reality constructed with a frame and sustaining the mobilization which such frames promote.

Additionally, another critique of RM reacted to its amplification of tactical decision making in social movement analysis. Literature of this type largely concentrated on seeking to understand how SMOs interact with interest and identity groups and how their mobilization potential is affected as a result.[89] One author who became particularly relevant to this strain of literature is Charles Tilly, who elaborated many of the ideas which would rejuvenate structural analysis in his 1978 book, *From Mobilization to Revolution*. He identified, for instance, that mobilizable groups tend to be characterized by strong solidarity and dense interpersonal networks, which he argued by invoking the concept of CATNET. This concept, which he drew from the notes of Harrison White, posits that organization can be roughly indicated by a group's 'category-ness' and 'networked-ness' (CATNESS X NETNESS = ORGANIZATION)[90].

[88] Ibid, 625-626.
[89] Craig Jenkins, "Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 9, (1983): 550. https://tinyurl.com/2f8hr5y2.
[90] Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 62-63.

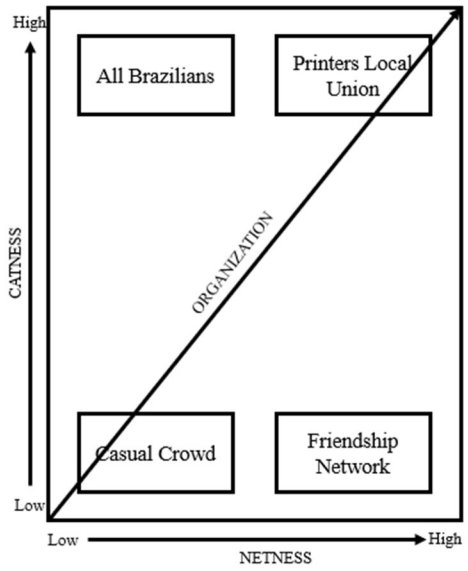

Figure 4 - CATNET Components of Organization[91]

The idea that the most mobilizable groups tended to be the most organized along the lines of CATNET proved important in assigning a place of importance to social movement network analysis. This is because, as opposed to RM, which stressed the importance of tactical decision making in social movement analysis, network analysis stressed the idea that different groups were variably mobilizable based on their characteristics. Moreover, Tilly suggests, this concept allows us to better understand how and where SMOs are formed[92], thus raising significant implications for social movement analysis. In the same book, Tilly would also elaborate the idea that social movements possessed different repertoires of contention, a concept which will be relevant to this analysis. As implied, this concept essentially describes the styles of contention (sit-ins, marches, skirmishes, bombings, etc.) which exist within a movement[93]. Like framing, this concept is influenced by the "cultural templates" which movements use to discern what is possible and what is appropriate – notions constantly altered by experience and learned

[91] Drawn from Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* 63.
[92] Ibid, 65.
[93] Ibid, 151-153.

information[94]. It also, importantly, suggests that the tactical decision making emphasized within the RM model is subject to constraints on information and familiarity – meaning that SMOs do not always pick the most effective options, but the most effective known options[95].

These developments, and the historical transformations of SMT literature, have for now culminated in a new model of social movement analysis termed the Political Process Model. Aimed toward explaining non-routine social mobilization, it was first introduced by Doug McAdam before being augmented by the concepts of collective action framing and repertoires of contention[96]. The structure of its logic follows from the idea that social disruptions alter the political opportunity structure for institutionalized and non-institutionalized political contention. Where the former largely revolves around mobilization within the government and reliance on its institutions, non-institutionalized mobilization tracks the development of contentious mobilizations challenging state institutions. Within this sphere of contention, the altered political opportunity structure fuels mobilization and framing which affect and are affected by one another and the repertoires of contention which characterize contentious political mobilization[97]. A useful figure from Hank Johnston's *What is a Social Movement* explains this process well.

[94] Johnston, *What is a Social Movement*, 66.
[95] Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 158-159
[96] Johnston, *What is a Social Movement*, 59-60.
[97] Ibid, 59-71.

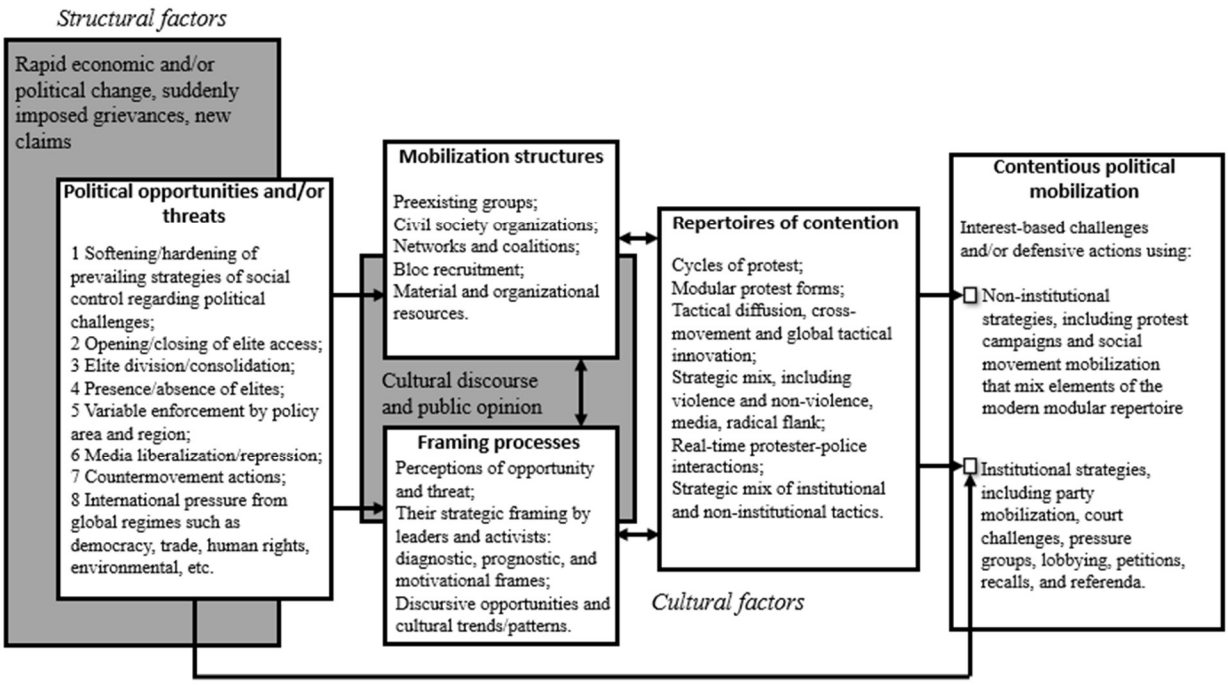

Figure 5 - The Political Process Model of Social Movement Mobilization[98]

Having studied the Damascus Spring and Syrian Revolution, it is my belief that this model offers the best clear-cut analytical toolkit for social movement analysis without abstracting each event and its underlying catalysts. In presenting a review of SMT literature's development, I believe that this decision is the correct one in light of the validity of the criticisms levelled toward SMT's traditions of social-psychological and purely rational analysis. Moving forward then, I will use the Political Process Model's antecedents of contentious political mobilization to ground my analysis of the Damascus Spring and Syrian Revolution.

Political Opportunities and Threats

By frontloading the political opportunity structure in its causal model, the Political Process Model demands that the Damascus Spring and Syrian Revolution must be treated differently. Essentially, we must recognize each moment to be situated in a unique historical

[98] Drawn from Johnston, *What is a Social Movement*, 61.

context with variable potential for contentious political mobilization. This variation advances our goal of answering the central question of the Damascus Spring's fragility and stagnation but does not negate the importance of analyzing later components reacting to the political opportunity structure. To reach this point, however, we must begin by explaining the context of each event.

Beginning with international factors, we find that neither event was preceded by a significant degree of state-based international pressure. Instead, as Bashar al-Assad first ascended to power in 2000 he was greeted warmly by Western leaders and journalists[99]; Bill Clinton even extended his somber and respectful condolences for the passing of his father[100], Hafiz, while Secretary of State Madeline Albright – representing the United States at Hafiz al-Assad's funeral – described Bashar as a "poised" man "ready to assume his duties"[101]. Moreover, despite memory of the subsequent Bush presidency being colored through the lens of foreign intervention, the Damascus Spring and its suppression preceded this post-9/11 shift. Although enough time had passed by 2011 for the international community to see beyond Assad's initial appearances, the international community was largely passive during the earliest months of the Syrian Revolution. Indeed, it was not until August 2011, half a year after protests first broke out in Dar'a,, when foreign governments began calling for Assad's resignation en masse[102].

State-based international pressure increased after this point, but never became a decisive factor in the political opportunity structure of the Syrian Revolution. The Syrian National Council (SNC) and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) were able to evade regime control by basing

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[99] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 50-51.
[100] "President Clinton Reacts to Death of Hafez Al-Assad," CNN, accessed May 17, 2023, https://tinyurl.com/3huk59pj.
[101] "Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright Press Stakeout, Sheraton Hotel Damascus, Syria, June 12 2000," U.S. Department of State Archive, accessed May 17, 2023, https://tinyurl.com/2wsbdsks.
[102] Raymond Hinnebusch and Adham Saouli, *The War for Syria: Regional and International Dimensions of the Syrian Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 9.

themselves out of Turkey and received some international backing[103] [104]. Yet, as we will discuss in the mobilization section, these organizations were only marginally relevant to mobilization within Syria. Protesters would attempt to solicit greater international pressure, particularly after October of 2011 when protesters coordinated a country wide protest demanding a no-fly zone[105] and in early 2012 when serious calls for foreign intervention began to emanate from the Syrian National Council[106]. Yet, as we know, these efforts ultimately went nowhere.

Instead, international pressure largely emanated from transnational solidarity between Arab Spring revolutionaries and their perception of political opportunity in Syria based on the revolutions in Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt[107]. As such, foreign slogans and organizing tactics filtered through media and communication networks, creating a blueprint for the Syrian revolutionaries to follow. Thus, much of the early revolution was referential, from the schoolchildren's graffiti message of "your turn doctor,"[108] to the popular adoption of the slogan "the people want to topple the regime"[109], and the use Egyptian revolutionary organizational models[110]. No such transnational solidarity can be found, however, in the Damascus Spring.

This difference, however, provides a useful opportunity to compare each movement's media environment given the extent to which such transnational solidarities were driven by

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[103] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad,* 175.
[104] Ignacio Alvarez-Ossorio, "Syria's Struggling Civil Society," *Middle East Quarterly* 19, No. 2 (Spring 2012): pp. 23-32. https://tinyurl.com/mry984b8.
[105] Micah Zenko, "More Syrians Are Calling for a No-Fly Zone—Should We Take it Seriously?," The Atlantic, Nov. 1, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/4kaw8t7n.
[106] "Rifts emerge as Syrian National Coalition contemplates military options," France24, Apr. 9, 2012, https://observers.france24.com/en/20120309-syria-rifts-emerge-syrian-national-council-fumbles-military-options-against-crackdown.
[107] "Dramatic revolutionary events in Tunisia and Egypt changed perceptions of political opportunity in Syria. The impetus, therefore, came from abroad." Leenders, "Collective Action and Mobilization in Dar'a," 430.
[108] Jamie Tarabay, "For many Syrians, the story of the war began with graffiti in Dara'a," CNN, Mar. 15, 2018, https://tinyurl.com/ydxzypz7.
[109] Leenders, "Collective Action and Mobilization in Dar'a," 419.
[110] Asya El-Meehy, "Egypt's Popular Committees," MERIP, accessed May 7, 2023, https://tinyurl.com/2edph3wz.

traditional and social media. In February of 2011, just before the Syrian Revolution began, it is particularly noteworthy that the regime lifted its longstanding bans on websites like Facebook and YouTube[111]. Given its previous use of internet records to target dissidents[112], it's likely that this was intended to flush out new networks, yet revolutionary activists developed complex communications security measures to enhance their use of new media and communications technologies. One activist interviewed by Steven Starr noted, "We use a combination of Tor, proxies, tunnels, and VPNs to surf the web and we talk in code using mobile phones [while using personal connections and reputation to gauge the trustworthiness of information]."[113] Notably, mobile phones also enhanced the revolutionary media environment by allowing activists and citizens to record and share footage of protests and regime violence[114].

The media environment in 2000, by contrast, was almost entirely controlled by the state – limited cell coverage had only been introduced in February of 2000 and internet had only been introduced to the public in early 1999[115]. In the early stages of the Damascus Spring, however, this appears to have been less problematic as Bashar decreased restrictions on the press. Within his first month in office, he appointed new directors for the Syrian Arab News Association, state TV, and state radio, as well as new editors-in-chief for the state-owned newspapers al-Ba'ath, al-Thawra, and Tishrin[116]. Newer directors were more assertive toward government policy, with Bashar's permission, and by October 2000 al-Thawra had even published a two-page critique of

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[111] "Syria lifts three-year ban on Facebook and YouTube," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Feb. 14, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/mt4h3evw.
[112] Reporters Without Borders, "Internet Enemies 2011 – Syria," Refworld, Mar. 11, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/5e267hck.
[113] Starr, *Revolt in Syria*, 151.
[114] Khalid Ali, "Syrian forces 'targeting mobile-phone videos'," The Independent, Jul. 5, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/yk3a3ezn.
[115] U.S. Embassy in Damascus, *FY 2001 Country Commercial Guide: Syria*, (District of Columbia: U.S. Department of State, 2000), 7, https://tinyurl.com/2rc5cf8y.
[116] Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire*, 89.

Ba'athist economics written by Syrian economist and Damscus Spring activist 'Aref Dalila[117]. Moreover, the government signaled additional liberalization by allowing National Progressive Front[118] parties to publish their own newspapers for the first time[119] and licensing an independent newspaper for the first time in 40 years in late 2001[120].

Despite initial reforms however, the persistence of state control proved decisive in suppressing the Damascus Spring's development and facilitating its disintegration. Even though the Statement of the 99 was carefully crafted to limit confrontation[121], for instance, the document and its signatories were subject to an organized smear campaign, while copies of the document were confiscated[122]. Likewise, after the the statement of the 1,000's publication Ba'ath Party circulars were distributed explaining that activists "harm[ed] their country because they serve the county's enemies."[123] Activists were able to subvert this response to some extent by publishing in foreign newspapers like al-Safir, where the Statement of the 1,000 was first leaked[124], but these publications could still be confiscated and also often gave the state the opportunity to respond. In an interview with an Abu Dhabi news outlet, for instance, the defense minister even claimed that signatories to the Statement of the 99 had been paid as agents of the CIA[125].

Regardless, partial state-driven reforms – like media liberalization – were decisive as signals to the Syrian opposition of 2000 that the time had come to push their demands. The first

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[117] Ibid, 89.
[118] The National Progressive Front is composed of several small Nasserist, Communist, and Socialist parties – half of which split from the other half – which are allowed to participate in the legislature in return for subordinating themselves completely to the policy and direction of the Ba'ath Party.
[119] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 41.
[120] Andrew Hammond, "The State of Syria's Media: 'Damascus Spring' or Indian Summer?," Worldpress.org, Jan. 3, 2002, https://tinyurl.com/36tajhnr.
[121] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, 4.
[122] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 50-51.
[123] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 52.
[124] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 43.
[125] Ibid.

notable sign of decompression, in fact, preceded Bashar's full ascendency when Mundhir al-Muwassali, an independent in the People's Assembly, objected to a constitutional amendment allowing the young Bashar al-Assad to become president. Going so far as to call the move illegal, he stressed that while he supported Bashar, the amendment's lack of justification was unconstitutional[126]. In the end, however, he was not punished, and Bashar went as far as to insist that al-Muwassali had exercised his right and performed his duty in criticizing the process[127]. This stood in marked contrast to the experiences of objectors under Hafiz al-Assad. Just 2 years earlier, for example, when independent MP Riad Seif criticized economic reform implementation in the People's Assembly he was accused of corruption and forced into bankruptcy after being given notice that he owed millions of Syrian pounds in back-taxes[128].

Political openings were expanded further in August of 2000, just one month after Bashar became president, when he convened the National Progressive Front to discuss its reinvigoration as a controlled opposition body. Uninspiring as this initially appears, the fact that 'rival' parties which had completely subordinated themselves to the Ba'ath Party line could soon open regional offices and publish newspapers[129] was a dramatic shift in regime policy. For even the Ba'ath Party National Congress had not convened for 15 years before Hafiz al-Assad's death[130]. Such shifts helped substantiate the strong reformist rhetoric which Bashar had been expounding since his first address as president, when he stood before the People's Assembly and, while rejecting a project of

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[126] "While Muwassali did state that he was in complete agreement with Bashar and his path, he argued that the decision made by the People's Assembly to amend the constitution was clearly illegal. According to Muwassali this was because, in full contradiction of Article 149 of the constitution, no explanation at all had been made to the members of the assembly specifying the reasons for the proposed amendment" Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 78.
[127] Ibid.
[128] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom,* 31.
[129] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 41.
[130] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 5.

'western democracy,' proclaimed that "Democracy is obligatory" … [so] we must adapt a democracy distinctive to us, founded in our history, culture and civilization and stemming from the needs of the society and reality in which we live."[131]

This combination of democratic signaling and regime reform was also accompanied by a decompression of the security apparatus. Most notably, in November of 2000, 600 left-wing political prisoners[132] – comprising 40% of Syria's political prisoners – were released. This move in particular not only signaled the expansion of political opportunities, but also fed into the Damascus Spring's activist pool. As while we might initially expect prisoners' experiences to dissuade them from political involvement, it is worth noting that many of the most active dissidents of the time had been released within several years of Bashar's ascendency: Riyad al-Turk, a prominent figure of the Damascus Spring, for example, resumed his dissidence just two years after his 1998 release, which had marked the end of an 18-year period of confinement and torture[133]. Security decompression, however, should not be conflated with absence. Instead, it is estimated that in 2001 there was roughly one secret police agent for every 257 Syrians[134]. While far from the popular assumption that one in four people could be informing for the state in some capacity[135], we should not overlook the scale of this infiltration.

Similar political openings are not observable in the period of the Syrian Revolution, however. Instead, its leadup is marked by a renewed crackdown on civil society organizations[136]

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[131] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 41.
[132] Radwan Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria: Intelligence Services, Foreign Relations, and Democracy in the Modern Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 44.
[133] The Syrian Observer, "Who's who: Riad al-Turk," The Syrian Observer, Jun. 21, 2013, https://tinyurl.com/2dd74cpn.
[134] Alan George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom* (London: Zed Books, 2003), 2.
[135] Heiko Wimmen, *Syria's Path from Civic Uprising to Civil War* (District of Columbia: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), 9, https://tinyurl.com/mphxdant.
[136] Laura de Elviera and Tina Zintl, *Civil Society and the State in Syria: The Outsourcing of Social Responsibility* (Fife: The University of St. Andrews Centre for Syrian Studies, 2012), 23-24.

and the rollback of benefits acquired by corporatist social organization[137]. Effectively, this destroyed the few mechanisms providing limited social participation in public policy and social organization. By the time the revolution began some openings were created as the government offered limited concessions by appointing new government officials[138], ending the state of emergency in April 2011[139] and approving a a new constitution in February 2012[140]. Yet given their inability to halt the revolutionary movement leading into 2012 and 2013, such concessions altered the political opportunity structure primarily by signaling the state's weakness. State weakness and denial of popular participation, however, is nuanced by the degree to which state-society relations were altered by protracted state-withdrawal.

Indeed, over the previous decade Bashar pursued disastrous economic policies which undermined the regime's strategy of rule – which heavily relied on patronage and the absence of alternatives. In urban/industrial regions hiring for public sector jobs – in which 25-30% of Syrians worked – was cut off[141] while public sector employment declined by roughly 9.4% between 2004 and 2009[142]. Simultaneously, in the private sector Syria signed free trade agreements with Turkey and Iran[143] and cut tariffs from 255% to 65%, devastating the

[137] "Bashar al-Asad, conscious of a pressing need to encouraged investment, deliberately began to open up privileged access for businessmen directly to the president [whereas they had previously enjoyed equal access with corporate social organizations under Hafiz]." … "At the same time, the trade unions lost the privileged power position they had enjoyed in the late Hafiz period" … "[For] [a]s long as the power balance between the president and the party lasted, workers and peasants retained the clout to obstruct liberalizing measures overtly favoring investors." Hinnebusch and Zintl, *Syria from Reform to Revolt*, 43.
[138] "Assad appoints new governor for Daraa," Al Jazeera, Apr. 4, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/2uj7xf3y.
[139] Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Syria's Assad ends state of emergency," Reuters, Apr. 20, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/yvpth3y2.
[140] Ammar Shams Aldin, "The Syrian constitution will only be words on paper until power is devolved to the local level," Middle East Institute, May 18, 2020, https://tinyurl.com/496vw37y l.
[141] Hinnebusch and Zintl, *Syria from Reform to Revolt*, 51.
[142] Hinnebusch and Imady, *The Syrian Uprising: Domestic Origins and Early Trajectory*, 97.
[143] Ibid, 58.

uncompetitive private sector which was overwhelmingly comprised of small family businesses[144] [145]. Making matters worse, the government failed to invest or direct investment to areas which could make up for its withdrawal, with 87% of domestic and foreign investment being directed toward services and tourism[146]. Simultaneously, land reform rollbacks[147] and an extreme drought lasting from 2006 to 2011[148] led to a 40% decline in the agricultural workforce between 2002 and 2008[149]. This drought highlighted state weakness and agricultural sector decline as the state was forced to appeal for international aid to feed one million Syrians at risk of food shortages[150].

On a generalized level as well, declining oil revenues forced a halt in public investment and subsidies[151] and by 2011, an estimated one third of Syrians lived underneath the poverty line in urban slums[152]. The immediate significance of this is not necessarily in the poverty of citizens, but the poverty of the state and the effects of population concentration in areas of minimal state control – a phenomenon that gave rise to urban crime in years preceding the revolution[153].

If we think back to the regime's strategy of rule, the full effects of this unraveling come into view. A withdrawal from the public sector constituted abrogation of populist economics

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[144] Forat Suliman and Homam Khwanda, "External Sector: Between Congestion and Sanctions – 'Syrian Economy Case, 1987-2018'," *Foreign Trade Review* 55, No. 3 (Aug. 2020): 385. https://tinyurl.com/4fupj59s.
[145] The private sector did not absorb enough university graduates [or other workers], largely because 99.5% of private businesses had fewer than 15 employees and were predominantly family-run." Hinnebusch and Zintl, *Syria from Reform to Revolt: Political Economy and International Relations*, 52.
[146] Hinnebusch and Zintl, *Syria from Reform to Revolt*, 57.
[147] Myriam Ababsa, "Agrarian Counter-Reform in Syria (2000-2010), in *Agriculture and Reform in Syria*, ed. Raymond Hinnebusch (Fife: University of Saint Andrews Centre for Syrian Studies, 2011), 106.
[148] Peter Glieck, "Water, Drought, Climate Change, and Conflict in Syria," *Weather, Climate, Society* 6, No. 3 (July 2014): 332. https://tinyurl.com/bdx8n4fu.
[149] Hinnebusch and Zintl, *Syria from Reform to Revolt*, 200.
[150] Ibid, 199.
[151] Ibid, 52.
[152] Ibid, 61-62.
[153] Caroline Donati, "The Economics of Authoritarian Upgrading in Syria: Liberalization and the Reconfiguration of Economic Networks," in *Middle East Authoritarianisms: Governance, Contestation, and Regime Resilience in Syria and Iran*, eds. Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 55.

while simultaneously threatening patronage networks which ran from the president down to the lowest officials in the smallest villages in Syria. For our purposes, this constitutes a significant decrease in the ability of the Syrian regime to control its population as well as an increase in elite division, as competition for patronage promoted strife within networks of control. Caroline Donati describes both phenomenon in "The Economics of Authoritarian Upgrading in Syria," noting that privatization gave rise to violent social strife in rural areas[154] and often divided state-adjacent entrepreneurs and the officials who they needed to approve their plans[155].

Coping with the consequences of state withdrawal, impoverished Syrians appear to have developed solidarities and social networks at the peripheries of state control. Unplanned urban slums, for instance, have been described as self-organized and administratively neglected[156]. By 2011 this social re-organization appears to have formed the basis for revolutionary mobilization and agitation. In Aleppo for instance, dissidents tended to concentrate within poor, informal settlements because of the lack of state presence there[157]. Similarly, although Damascus itself remained a stronghold of the regime from 2011 onward, the poorer suburbs of Douma and Harasta became early hubs of revolutionary activity[158]. In a contemporary article from the New York Times, one oppositionist described the dynamic of Damascus' suburbs, noting, "We used to call them the poverty belt, and now we call them the revolution belt," while noting that the regime had abandoned the suburbs due to the difficulty of controlling them[159]. The same

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[154] Ibid, 53.
[155] Ibid, 50.
[156] David Kilcullen and Nate Rosenblatt, "The Rise of Syria's Urban Poor: Why the War for Syria's Future Will Be Fought Over the Country's New Urban Villages," 36-37, https://tinyurl.com/2ectj283.
[157] Adam Baczko, Gilles Dorronsoro, and Arthur Quesnay, *Civil War in Syria: Mobilization and Competing Social Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 77.
[158] Ufuk Ulutaş, "The Syrian Opposition in the Making: Capabilities and Limits," *Insight Turkey* 13, No. 3 (Summer 2011): 99-100, https://tinyurl.com/5bpbs5ua.
https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A265104202/AONE?u=seat57527&sid=googleScholar&xid=4d480e35.
[159] Liam Stack and Katherine Zoepf, "Protesters in Syria Plan Large March Near Capital," The New York Times, Apr. 7, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/mrx47azc.

dynamic played out in more rural areas like Dier ez-Zor, which residents noted had been 'forgotten' by the regime, and which became active during the second week of protests in March 2011[160]. As a result, the regime was eventually forced into a near country-wide withdrawal to the wealthier, better administered urban hubs of Damascus and Aleppo[161]. It was the dependent citizens of these areas, 'the modern business class,' who the revolution failed to shake[162].

It is not as though Syria lacked economic pains during the Damascus Spring – with minimum wage purchasing power falling below 1987 levels and 68% of government salaries lying below average nourishment costs[163]. Yet the reforms which Bashar instituted during this period Spring differed significantly from those which would later induce a kind of shock treatment on the public and private sectors. Instead, they included an update of the investment law, approval for the personal import of cars, allowing private sector film imports, an update of housing rental law, an increase in government salaries and pensions to keep up with inflation, and an order to plan for the development of a modern banking sector[164]. Economic conflict during this period thus was largely internal to the regime as elites fractured along the fault lines of economic reform while Bashar struggled to control his father's inherited networks.

Bashar stood firmly in the reformist camp, even suggesting in his inaugural speech that Syria's state-dominated economy and bloated bureaucracy impeded development[165]. He lacked, however, the political capital necessary to push through Syria's eventual 'social market

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[160] Zendetta, "The Story of Dierezzor," Zendetta, accessed May 7, 2023, https://tinyurl.com/2v6wsb7b.
[161] "there is an increasingly marked lack of central authority, command-and-control tools, or even popular compliance outside Damascus and Aleppo." … "The army has been reduced to holding down forts with tactical maneuvering, not strategic planning." Bassam Haddad, "Syria's Stalemate: The Limits of Regime Resilience," *Middle East Policy* 19, No 1. (Spring 2012): 87. https://tinyurl.com/22v52684.
[162] Steven Starr, *Revolt in Syria: Eye-witness to the Uprising* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 21.
[163] Samer Abboud and Ferdinand Arslanian, *Syria's Economy and the Transition Paradigm* (Fife: University of St. Andrews Centre for Syria Studies, 2009), 16-17.
[164] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 119.
[165] David Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 4.

economy' in 2005[166]. Instead, he was stonewalled by a largely corrupt gerontocratic cadre who looked unfavorably toward Hafiz's economic reforms in the 1990s and Bashar's commitment to them[167]. In a 2004 interview, Bashar expressed his frustration with this dynamic, complaining that the old guard were not just a few problematic key officials, but a whole network of mediocre and fossilized bureaucrats impeding development and modernization[168].

This significantly altered the political opportunity structure for dissident organizing in 2000-2000, as Bashar initially supported participation in civil society forums. To this end he not only encouraged Ba'ath Party members to join in their discussions[169], but initially responded to security officials concerned about their growth by stating, "You have the right to know what these people are doing, but you can't stop them from doing it."[170]. We of course know that this support had limits given the Damascus Spring's suppression, but it is worth noting that this only followed an escalation in dissident demands for democratic elections and the dismantling of the Ba'athist state. Through this lens it seems likely that the movement was initially supported to pressure the old guard and influence the disposition of rank-and-file Ba'athists toward reform.

Such moves seem to suggest that Bashar increasingly lacked faith in the capacity of the existing Ba'ath Party to implement his desired modernizing reforms without outside pressure. This interpretation also meshes with several key openings which we have previously discussed, including: Bashar's toleration of al-Muwassali's criticism of government officials and processes[171], Bashar's reinvigoration of the National Progressive front as a base of controlled

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[166] Abboud and Arslanian, *Syria's Economy and the Transition Paradigm*, 3.
[167] Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria: Intelligence Services, Foreign Relations, and Democracy in the Modern Middle East*, 48-49.
[168] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, 31.
[169] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 36.
[170] Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire*, 92.
[171] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 77-78.

opposition[172], and the early instructions given to Seif to use his form to prepare a political party[173]. Alternatively, we could try to incorporate these facts by arguing that Bashar's tolerance was simply intended to neutralize the movement, particularly given the fact that he encouraged Ba'ath party members to saturate the forms. Yet this approach seems insufficient to explain why the regime would have tolerated the forums in their infancy, why the regime would not simply suppress them, or why Bashar would defend a movement which he opposed to security officials.

A significant difference thus stands out between the Damascus Spring and Syrian Revolution insofar as openings in the political opportunity structure in 2000-2001 were largely dependent on regime tolerance – if not support – while openings in 2011 were created despite the regime and as a result of its failure. Thus, even as liberalization and the softening of the regime's strategy of rule allowed for the Damascus Spring to flourish, allowances were reversed as quickly as they were granted. Media liberalization, for instance, was reversed in 2001 as the regime organized a smear campaign[174] while the release of political prisoners was counterbalanced by renewed arrests. Moreover, even as elites struggled amongst themselves over reform implementation, they still commanded a relatively strong state with a robust security apparatus presiding over a population which was incorporated into controlled institutions.

Activists in 2011, however, were working in a completely different environment, for while the state maintained its coercive capabilities, it lost its exclusivity as a source of material benefits and social organization. Moreover, as we can note from the regime's withdrawal from poor informal settlements, this loss negatively impacted the efficacy of coercion as brute force became necessary to dislodge activists and fighters from areas which they found to be

[172] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 41.
[173] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 36.
[174] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 50-51.

permeable. This assertion is particularly congruent with the initial outbreak of protests in Dar'a in March of 2011, as much of the initial conflict centered on the alteration of state-society relations under its police chief Atef Najib.

Najib, a relative of Bashar, had only recently been given authority over Dar'a before drastically increasing surveillance and harassment in order to monopolize his control of the area in order to demand payment from local businesses, buy up local land, get a cut of money laundering, and consolidate control over cross-border smuggling[175] [176]. The centrality of the illicit economy to this conflict seems to highlight the degree to which reform undermined the regime's exclusivity as a source of economic stability. Notably, we also find that other early rising regions were strongly integrated into illicit networks, like Dier ez-Zor, which became a point of contact for smugglers after the invasion of Iraq fueled cross-border smuggling[177].

Moreover, we find that in Dar'a the police originally attempted to suppress protests through sweeping arrests which targeted prominent local clans like the Abu Zeids[178]. Hardly a show of strength, this approach highlights the degree to which state-society relations had been altered by Bashar's policies; for whereas tribes and clans had traditionally been relied on them to violently suppress dissent on behalf of the regime[179], it had now been turned against them as

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[175] Phil Sands, Justin Vela, and Suha Maayeh, "Joined in Blood," The National, Mar. 19, 2014, https://tinyurl.com/48w6c676.
[176] Tarabay, "For many Syrians, the story of the war began with graffiti in Dara'a.".
[177] Edmund Andrews, "Iraqi Smugglers are Brazen and they Don't Stop at Oil," Jun. 23, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/23/world/after-the-war-economy-iraqi-smugglers-are-brazen-and-they-don-t-stop-at-oil.html.
[178] "the early days of the uprising, security forces arrested en masse members of the Abu Zeid clan in Dara'a instead of taking out its key mobilizers." Reinoud Leenders, "How the Syrian Regime Outsmarted Its Enemies," *Current History* 112, No. 758 (Dec. 2013): 333. https://tinyurl.com/y9uyjm3e.
[179] "Jamil al-Assad, Hafiz' brother, visited Boueidar, the stronghold of the Hadidiyn tribe, in 1981. Jamil asked the al-Hayidiyn tribe to be the government's eyes and ears in the countryside of Hama and Aleppo and to monitor movement between the two governorates. The al-Haidiyn built military checkpoints around Hama, watched the desert, captured some members of the Muslim Brotherhood who wanted to escape to Iraq after the bombing of Hama, and handed them over to the Syrian regime. In march 2004, the governorate of al-Hasakeh witnessed Kurdish

family solidarities re-formed around new sources of personal and material security[180].

At a general and specific level we can thus again affirm that the previous decade of reform had severed state-society relations such that they became apathetic on the part of the regime and antagonistic on the part of its citizens. As a whole the regime was, despite the surface-level appearance of stability, one in collapse. Bashar had alienated elites from the populous and each other through reshuffling[181], marginalized the state's influence over a large swath of the population pushed to the periphery, and in doing so undermined its ability to enforce policy in lieu of brute force. Varying levels of international support and the subversive use of new and traditional media only added fuel to the fire, but it was the regime which laid the kindling, struck the match, and the allowed the blaze to grow until it could not be ignored.

Yet acknowledging these disparities in the political opportunity structure is insufficient to explain the Damascus Spring's fragility, stagnation, and decline. Instead, acknowledging that political opportunities are made as well as received, we must note that the activists involved in the Damascus Spring accepted a condition of insecurity as the foundation for making their demands and remained dependent on the goodwill of the regime. As such, although we recognize the greater constraints on the Damascus Spring, we still have reason to interrogate the way its

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riots encouraged by the American presence in Iraq. The Syrian army did not have a strong presence in the eastern part of the country, and it therefore sought assistance from the Arab tribes in the governorate. The al-Jabbour tribe has a strong presence in Hassekeh and was entrusted with protecting the government buildings there. They were allowed to take up arms, surround government buldings, and protect them. The Tay tribe, headed by Sheikh Mohammed al-Fares was entrusted with defending the other major city in the governorate: Qamishli."
Haian Dukhan, "Tribal Mobilization during the Syrian Civil War," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 33, No. 7 (Apr. 2022): 4. https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2022.2069970.

[180] Hadeel al-Saidawi, "Informal State-Society Relations and Family Networks in Rural Idlib," in *Local Intermediaries in post-2011 Syria*, eds. Kheder Khaddour and Kevin Mazur (Beirut: Friedrich-Ebert Siftung, 2019), 69. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/beirut/15547.pdf.

[181] "By curbing and ultimately diluting the Ba'th Party, Asad not only lost the party as a main pillar of his regime, but also isolated many of the informal networks of patronage Ba'th strongmen had knitted" Hinnebusch and Imady, *The Syrian Uprising: Domestic Origins and Early Trajectory*, 27.

activists interacted with their environment. On this note, we must look to how activists mobilized and framed for their movement, as well as how they directed their energies toward contention.

Mobilization Structures

2000

What is most important in reviewing the mobilizing structures of the Damascus Spring is the absence of organizations focused on drawing from and connecting to the street. The Muslim Brotherhood, perhaps most equipped for the task, was remarkably aloof from the civil society movement and only expressed solidarity with the Damascus Spring as it unraveled[182]. In their absence only the currents hard and soft-line opposition currents existed to fill this function, yet the most prominent figures of each made it clear that they were not interested in the street.

Michel Kilo, the leading figure of the soft-line current, explained this disposition on the basis that, "the only force able to implement a political project is the middle class" … "[they are the only ones] who can transmit the ideals of democracy and freedom to society"[183]. Thus, while influencing the public was his goal, he sought to do so through a cultural project which the middle class would convey onward, "offering knowledge, ideas, experiences, reflections, and emotions to [society]"[184]. What this attitude reveals is not only a lack of interest in the confrontational potential of the street, but a distrust in their ability to be mobilized until the middle class, as the conveyer belt of ideas, had remade the street in its image.

The hardliners, led by Seif, on the other hand, sought to place a more generalized pressure on the regime through forums and committees which could be used to pressure the

[182] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 85.
[183] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 34.
[184] Ibid, 33-34.

government in general and reformers in particular[185]. In this he was much more ambitious than Kilo and the soft-liners, placing a premium on organizations over ideas and striving to bring together Syria's many civil society forums in order to amplify their pressure on the regime[186]. This organizational ambition even extended to plans for an illegal political party, the "Social Peace Party," which he announced in in January of 2001[187]. Yet, although Seif had grander unfulfilled organizational plans, the middle-class focused model of the civil society forum forced hard- and soft-liners to organize the same pool of potential participants.

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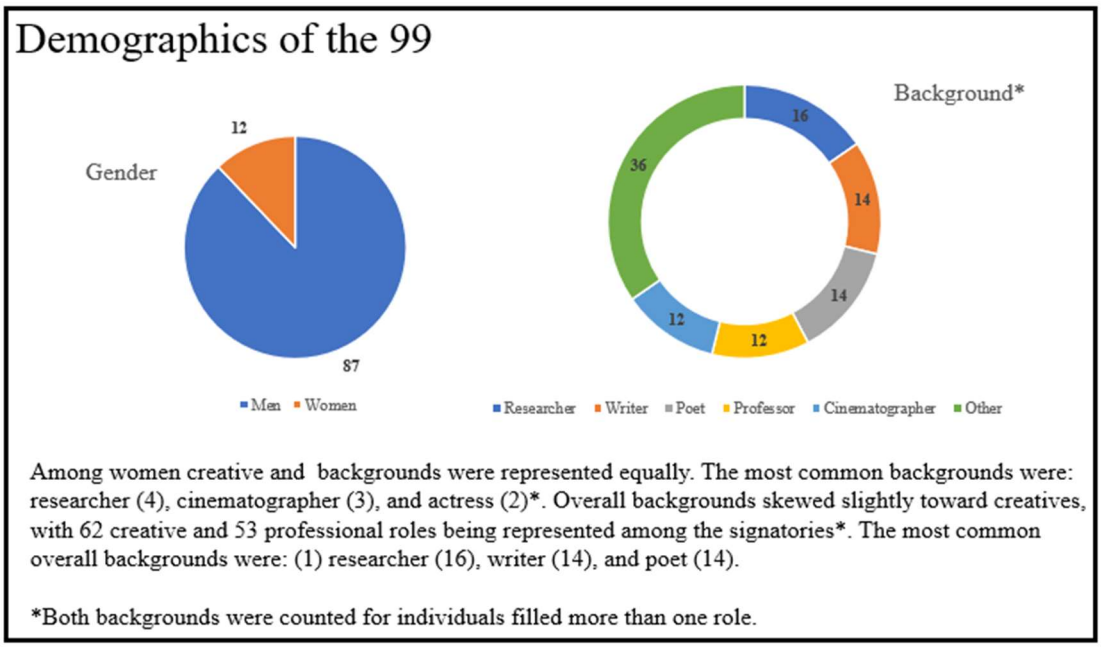

Figure 6 - Demographics of the 99

Overall, this focus on the middle class also limited the Damascus Spring's ability to represent Syrians as a whole. Whereas the Syrian Revolution would draw participants and defectors from many sectors of society, the Statement of the 99 reveals the extent to which the

[185] Ibid, 35.
[186] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 85.
[187] "Syria's MP Saif Still in Damascus, to Announce his Party Wednesday," Albawaba, Jan. 29, 2001, https://tinyurl.com/zm953pft.

Damascus Spring was restricted to middle class intellectuals and artists.

Moreover, on closer inspection, one finds that the constituency of the Damascus Spring was actually much narrower than it appears on first examination. As rather than organizing previously quietist middle class dissidents, political activists who had been active since the 1980s as part of the National Democratic Gathering were frequently recycled[188]. Formed in 1979, this organization joined 5 dissident political parties of leftist and Arab nationalist tendencies to organize against the regime, but rapidly disintegrated under Hafiz' 'Great Repression'[189]. Members who survived or were released from prison in the 1990s adapted, as a result of their experiences, to pursue non-violent resistance, and became active in the Damascus Spring[190].

Whatever advantages might have been garnered from these affiliations were wasted, however, as parties failed to issue political manifestos or seek representation within civil society forums as organized bodies[191]. Moreover, as Joe Pace commented in his 2006 reflection on Syria's civil society movement, these parties and their members failed to offer substance to the public, with young people frequently complaining that activists "were stuck in the 1960s, bogged down in the mire of petty ideological debates over the fine points of Leninism, Socialism, or Nasserism"[192]. Thus, failing to inspire broader mobilization or take advantage of the party structures which members affiliated with, civil society forums proved to be largely ineffective.

The best organized element of the Damascus Spring, as it would turn out, ended up being

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[188] Hinnebusch and Imady, *The Syrian Uprising: Domestic Origins and Early Trajectory*), 292.
[189] Aron Lund, *Divided they Stand: An Overview of Syria's Political Opposition Factions* (Uppsala: Foundation for European Progressive Studies and the Olaf Palme International Center, 2012), 13. https://tinyurl.com/2fyeswcv.
[190] Hinnebusch and Zintl, *Syria from Reform to Revolt*, 105.
[191] Max Friedman, "Syria: A Predictable Future? Domestic Power Shifts in the Arab Spring Era," B.A. Thesis (University of Michigan, 2012), 36.
[192] Joe Pace, "A Better Way to Protect Civil Society in Syria," SyriaComment, Feb. 22, 2006, https://tinyurl.com/czjzun6u.

human rights organizations like the Committees for the Defense of Democratic Freedoms, which was re-founded in July of 2000[193]. These groups, while not public facing in the same way as the civil society forums, played a pivotal role in documenting the failings and abuses of the regime[194] and produced tangible products as opposed to talk and the vague notion of cultural change[195]. They were, admittedly, quite brittle and austere[196], yet possessed a level of communications savvy which allowed them to influence domestic and international actors[197]. Unfortunately, however, due to the loose and ambiguous structure of the Damascus Spring, literature does not seem to suggest any concerted mobilizational action between the civil society forums and the human rights organizations. Instead, they seem to have existed alongside and admired one another – with members of human rights organizations also likely to have been involved in the civil society forums – but failed to produce combined effects.

On the whole then, setting aside critiques of each component, we can note that the Damascus Spring effectively neutralized the benefits of pre-existing groups and civil society organizations through its unstructured approach to mobilization. Moreover, as we see through the soft-line and hardline approaches to mobilization, the Damascus Spring also neglected the process of bloc recruitment and instead appealed to individuals of a narrow class which was undoubtedly stunted by decades of economic crisis.

2011

Whereas examining the mobilization structures of the Damascus Spring were relatively simple to describe as a result of their weakness, the Syrian Revolution introduces a level of

[193] Ibid, 41.
[194] Joshua Landis and Joe Pace, "The Syrian Opposition," 48-49.
[195] Ibid, 49.
[196] Ibid, 48-49.
[197] Ibid, 48-49.

complexity which will require segmenting analysis. Discussion of mobilization structures will thus be divided into three topics, mobilization at the level of the street, mobilization at the level of armed resistance, and mobilization at the level of formal political and military groupings. While it may at first seem somewhat odd to take this approach given the way in which these levels typically interact in revolutionary situations, complexity and the oddity of their interaction in the Syrian Revolution requires this approach.

Civil society organizations were notably absent on account of the repression of an independent civil society movement in 2000 in addition to subsequent repression. For while the regime allowed civil society organizations to expand as a way to shirk welfare responsibilities between 2000 and 2010[198], it neutralized them as independent bases of power by opening a pathway to legal authorization. As a result of this authorization, civil society organizations were put under the supervision and direction of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor[199] and embedded within a network which allowed government-organized non-governmental organizations – often connected to the Assad family – to monopolize control of key civil society sectors[200]. Thus, while some of those involved in the civil society sphere likely joined the SMOs of the Syrian Revolution, the civil society sector had largely become a spent force by the time it began. Nonetheless, numerous SMOs engaged in both non-violent and violent confrontation would quickly fill this void and push forward the mobilization of the Syrian public.

The revolution's defining organizational model the Local Coordination Committee, was

[198] Laura de Elviera and Tina Zintl, *Civil Society and the State in Syria: The Outsourcing of Social Responsibility* (Fife: The University of St. Andrews Centre for Syrian Studies, 2012), 7.
[199] Ibid, 20.
[200] Ibid, 21-22.

first employed in Dar'a before rapidly proliferated across the country[201]. This model was not original to Syria and was in fact borrowed from the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, but nonetheless proved extremely effective[202]. LCC's functioned on two levels, addressing the problems of movement growth and sustainability and communications respectively. Within them, activists came together to coordinate localized activities and enhance their collective tactical and mobilizational efficacy. Even those activists which were not 'in' the LCCs typically remained tightly tied to their network as they became loci of revolutionary organizing.

In the physical space, LCCs typically chose and implemented protest tactics in addition to providing material support for their local community[203]. This activity usually fell to key leaders, often middle-class youth respected within their communities[204], who worked to deciding where, when, and how to protest before rallying participants[205]. We can understand this form of engagement to have three unique benefits. First, aid provision, particularly amidst events like the 2011 Siege of Dar'a[206], meant that LCC networks were able to provide exclusive goods which enhanced their interaction with local communities. Second, elevating leaders offered the opportunity for organizations to draw on their reputation within such communities. And third, coordination allowed for LCCs to concentrate the effects of revolutionary activity within their areas of operation. Complimenting this activity, committee members working in the information space ensured that they could share and receive information about protests taking place across

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[201] Reinoud Leenders and Steven Heydemann, "Popular Mobilization in Syria: Opportunity and Threat, and the Social Networks of the Early Risers," *Mediterranean Politics* 17, No. 2 (Jul. 2012): 153. https://tinyurl.com/y75x7mx4.
[202] El-Meehy, "Egypt's Popular Committees."
[203] Leenders and Heydemann, "Popular Mobilization in Syria: Opportunity and Threat, and the Social Networks of the Early Risers," 153.
[204] Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, XVI.
[205] Ibid, XV.
[206] "Syria: Lift the Siege of Daraa," Human Rights Watch, May 5, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/yf778avz.

the country, enabling coordinated escalation, pressure campaigns, and relief, and making the LCCs the most connected organizations in Syria in the early revolutionary period[207].

Some LCCs received funding for these activities from sources both inside and outside Syria, yet their localized nature created disparities in funding between committees and regions[208]. It seems that these disparities were also exaggerated by variations in the strength of local community networks. In Dar'a, for example, where strong interpersonal ties had been the foundation for mobilization[209], vast resources were mobilized to sustain communications networks and maintain vital resource flows[210]. Additionally, criminal networks were also drawn into local mobilizing networks to provide aid in the form of material, skills, and information[211]. What this seems to indicate is that LCCs spung from pre-existing forms of community organization rather than organizations themselves. The downside of this augmentation and the localization of protest activity, however, was that communities' competing interests began to divide LCCs as the revolution grew[212]. These divisions were overcome in some regards, however, when LCCs begin to unify within larger bodies like the Syrian Revolution General Commission – which, in August 2011, united 99 committees within a single organization[213].

Yet as a result of LCC's non-violent tactics, their leadership rapidly depleted as the regime escalated its use of violence. Typically, security services would observe protests and either shoot organizers from afar or arrest them soon after before occupying the area[214] leading

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[207] Starr, *Revolt in Syria*, 98.
[208] Starr, *Revolt in Syria*, 99.
[209] Leenders and Heydemann, "Popular Mobilization in Syria: Opportunity and Threat, and the Social Networks of the Early Risers," 153.
[210] Ibid, 148.
[211] Ibid, 148.
[212] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad,* 114.
[213] Lund, *Divided they Stand: An Overview of Syria's Political Opposition Factions*, 21.
[214] Starr, *Revolt in Syria*, 176.

many LCC leaders to go into to hiding if they were not killed or detained[215]. Protests typically renewed after several weeks[216] and new leaders emerged to fill the gaps[217], yet this cycle was unsustainable as escalation and depletion rendered the LCCs largely irrelevant by 2013[218].

However, because the regime escalated its use of violence in response to the protests, the militarization of the conflict appears to have been pivotal in overcoming the free-rider problem and enabling bloc recruitment for armed mobilization. For although the LCC's opposed militarization[219], their inability provide security led to the rapid proliferation of local armed organizations in the summer of 2011. These groups were mostly self-organized and typically mobilized pre-existing communal networks to provide protection to protests and engage in limited skirmishes with regime forces[220] [221].

These groups tended to saturate areas exposed to higher levels of regime violence in a manner which is notable for understanding armed mobilization as a response to violence. In early 2012, for instance, it has been reported that the old city of Homs – which was an epicenter of regime confrontation – was home to roughly 50 different local armed groups[222]. Looking to individual rebel accounts, we also see that regime violence – particularly indiscriminate regime violence – offered a boon to armed mobilization and organization. One rebel noted, "I did not participate much in the demonstrations," … "[b]ut then the regime began bombing our

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[215] Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, XVI.
[216] Starr, *Revolt in Syria*, 176.
[217] Hinnebusch and Zintl, *Syria from Reform to Revolt*, 301.
[218] Mohammed Ahmed and Michael Gunter, *The Kurdish Spring: Geopolitical Changes and the Kurds* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Press, 2013), 204.
[219] Abeer, "Statement to the Syrian People," Local Coordination Committees of Syria, Aug. 29, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/3n57davd.
[220] Baczko, Dorronsoro, and Quesnay, *Civil War in Syria: Mobilization and Competing Social Orders*, 104.
[221] Kevin Mazur, *Revolution in Syria: Identity, Networks, and Repression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 224.
[222] Ibid, 224.

neighborhood." … "Being in the movement or not made no difference. The repression, the risks, we were all in the same boat. That's how I joined a group in Ghouta."[223] Another rebel similarly noted, "Believe me, in Latakia, if you were living in a poor neighborhood, you did not really have a choice: we had to take up arms."[224] This phenomenon seems to be consistent with scholarship on free ridership in conflict suggesting that indiscriminate violence should drive an increase in recruitment when rebel organizations can provide protection as an exclusive good[225].

When considering armed groups' relationship to the non-violent LCCs, it seems that the two worked in a kind of symbiosis; LCCs drew on and mobilized networks with distance from the state while seeking to expand separations elsewhere, while local armed groups provided an outlet for continued participation and new recruitment in the face of repression. In both cases, although organizationally fractured, each component was able to continually expand the amount of material and participation available for confrontation with the state. Of course, the LCCs lost relevance in the long run[226] - making the relationship seem more parasitic than symbiotic in some ways – but the mobilizing effects of this relationship stand out as significant in enabling what might have otherwise been called protests to become a revolution.

Yet, while the LCCs and local armed groups were able to accomplish a great deal, the formal political and military groupings of the Syrian Revolution largely fell flat. Outside of the youth section of the Democratic Arab Socialist Union, which played a significant role in organizing protests in Douma[227], parties remained in the background of street mobilization and

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[223] Baczko, Dorronsoro, and Quesnay, *Civil War in Syria: Mobilization and Competing Social Orders*, 104.
[224] Ibid, 107.
[225] Stathis Kalyvas and Matthew Kocher, "How "Free" is Free Riding in Civil Wars? Violence, Insurgency, and the Collective Action Problem," *World Politics* 59, No. 2 (Jan. 2007): 212-213. https://tinyurl.com/3jnryjbf.
[226] Ahmed and Gunter, *The Kurdish Spring: Geopolitical Changes and the Kurds*, 204.
[227] Hinnebusch and Imady, *The Syrian Uprising: Domestic Origins and Early Trajectory*, 304-305.

proved incapable of producing a coherent organizational platform[228]. Instead, they largely sat by until revolutionary activity had subsumed the country[229]. Yet even groups which were eager to mobilize in Syria, like the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, struggled to overcome the vast differences which existed between their exiled leadership and local networks[230].

Likewise, at the level of armed resistance, the Free Syrian Army's command structure was so poorly organized that it rendered the organization a mere label for local armed groups[231]. From the beginning the FSA set itself on bad footing by designating leadership for the war effort to Colonel Riad al-Assad, a defector from the Syrian Air Force. Making matters worse, almost immediately after his defection, he was cantoned by Turkish intelligence which screened and controlled his activity, limiting him to issuing statements and directing money[232]. Conditions deteriorated further as rival commanders contested his control of the FSA, severely undermining the organization's function and disconnecting it further from rebels within Syria[233]. By July of 2012, even the FSA representatives in Syria began to lose control as local armed groups ignored the FSA to pursue their own objectives. The most infamous example comes from the Battle for Aleppo, when the FSA-affiliated Aleppo Military Council learned of local groups' plans to attack the city hours before they began and joined them for fear of losing authority[234] [235]. Moreover, demonstrating the scale of their incompetence, the Aleppo Military Council only managed to

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[228] Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, XVI.
[229] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, 99.
[230] Baczko, Dorronsoro, and Quesnay, *Civil War in Syria: Mobilization and Competing Social Orders*, 183.
[231] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad,* 176.
[232] Aron Lund, *Syria's Salafi Insurgents The Rise of the Syrian Islamic Front* (Stockholm: Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2013), 11, https://tinyurl.com/mueapfvv.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Charles Levinson, "Leadership Rifts Hobble Syrian Rebels," The Wall Street Journal, Sept. 10, 2012, https://tinyurl.com/bdzwa4ee.
[235] Yezid Sayigh, *The Syrian Opposition's Leadership Problem* (District of Columbia: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013), 17, https://tinyurl.com/5n7anhwv.

supply ten bullets for every fighter[236]. Similarly, during the Battle for Damascus, the FSA again lost control over local forces to the better armed and organized Ahrar al-Sham[237].

As a result of its repeated failures, international backers began shifting funding directly toward local groups in 2012, dooming the FSA to near-irrelevance[238]. Thus, when U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta was questioned about the possibility of supporting the armed opposition in 2012, he responded that, "It is not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition – there has been no single unifying military alternative that can be recognized, appointed, or contacted."[239] Cumulatively then, the FSA failed to achieve organizational unity, exercise command and control, or sustain the resource flows it had available – rendering it an organization more engaged in demobilization than mobilization.

Moreover, just as larger political and military formations failed to coordinate with forces in Syria, they also failed to coordinate with one another. Politically, the opposition split almost immediately between the parties which were open to dialogue with the regime and those which were not – coalescing into the National Coordination Bureau for Democratic Change (NCB) and Syrian National Council (SNC) respectively. This split cleaved a significant section of the old-guard opposition and their organizations away from the revolutionary movement and severely undermined coordination[240]. In November 2011, for example, representatives of the dialogue-supporting National Coordination Bureau for Democratic Change, including Michel Kilo, Louay Hussein, and Hassan Abdul-Azim, were attacked on their way to a meeting with the Arab League

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[236] Levinson, "Leadership Rifts Hobble Syrian Rebels."
[237] Sayigh, *The Syrian Opposition's Leadership Problem,*19.
[238] Hinnebusch and Saouli, *The War for Syria: Regional and International Dimensions of the Syrian Uprising*, 131.
[239] Joseph Holliday, *Syria's Armed Opposition* (District of Columbia: The Institute for the Study of War), 6.
[240] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, 170.

in Cairo[241]. Conversely, the NCB criticized the dialogue-opposed Syrian National Council as an unrepresentative body dominated by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and bought and sold by the United States [242]. The NCB eventually became irrelevant as dialogue became indefensible in the face of regime violence[243], yet even still the initiative consumed by this split is confounding.

Such splits were also internal to organizations like the SNC which from the outset was plagued by deficiencies undermining its capacity for resource mobilization and institution building. Most notably, the organization's prioritization of representativeness for the sake of international recognition[244] meant that it was riven with decades-old intrigues and personal grievances which paralyzed the organization's decision making[245]. Intra-organizational relations and decision making deteriorated further over time as Saudi and Qatari funders backed rival groups within the SNC[246]. Making matters worse, the organization also inhibited regularized interaction with 60% of its members who lived in Syria[247] by basing itself out of Turkey.

To overcome these problems, the SNC depended on its executive committee to force decisions and extended its president's term multiple times[248]. Yet this resulted in members, parties, and groups regularly threatening to and/or following through with withdrawing from the organization – including LCC representatives[249] [250]. The effects of this discord only further degraded the SNC over time: The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood began to use its funding to

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[241] Wieland, Almqvist, and Nassif, The Syrian Uprising: *Dynamics of an Insurgency*, 39.
[242] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, 171-172.
[243] Wieland, Almqvist, and Nassif, The Syrian Uprising: *Dynamics of an Insurgency*, 39.
[244] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 170.
[245] Alvarez-Ossorio, "Syria's Struggling Civil Society."
[246] Hinnebusch and Saouli, *The War for Syria: Regional and International Dimensions of the Syrian Uprising*, 43.
[247] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, 168.
[248] Ibid, 230.
[249] Ibid, 197-198.
[250] Ibid, 230.

support its own clientele networks[251]; the SNC unilaterally declared control over the FSA, only to be rebuked[252]; it spoiled its reconciliation with the FSA by promising and failing to deliver monthly salaries to its fighters[253]; and finally, in October of 2012, it reorganized itself within a new, broader alliance called the National Coalition for Syrian Opposition and Revolutionary Forces. So, despite receiving over USD$250 million dollars from international backers between November 2011 and 2012[254], the SNC failed to build any lasting institutions. Instead, like the FSA, it wasted valuable resources without significantly expanding or sustaining the revolution.

Comparison

Comparing mobilization structures between 2000 and 2011 reveals three key differences relevant to the Damascus Spring's inability to mobilize people and resources against the regime: the proximity and affiliation of organizations with localized identity networks, the provision of exclusive goods, and institution building.

Beginning with the matter of communal identity, we by note that whereas LCCs and local armed groups sprung from and integrated communal networks into their organizations, the individualized approach of the Damascus Spring neglected the availability of such groupings. By referring to Charles Tilly's invocation of CATNET we can begin to explain the organizational effects of this decision, identifying that the Damascus Spring targeted a weak social category – the middle class – with an individualized recruiting approach which largely drew in active dissidents without significantly expanding the networks involved in dissident activity. This implies that while the Damascus spring sprung from existing dissident, its strategy for expansion

[251]Hinnebusch and Zintl, *Syria from Reform to Revolt*, 307.
[252] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, 198.
[253] Baczko, Dorronsoro, and Quesnay, *Civil War in Syria: Mobilization and Competing Social Orders*, 137.
[254] Sayigh, *The Syrian Opposition's Leadership Problem*, 11.

was disorganized and ineffective, failing to exploit existing networks or create a broad appeal.

We can also notice that while LCCs and local armed groups were able to provide exclusive goods – material aid and protection – in the face of state absence or indiscriminate violence, enhancing their communal connections, the Damascus Spring operated by taking without giving. Activists and potential constituents were expected to contribute their time and efforts while assuming personal risk without any reciprocal benefits. We can understand this as depressive of mobilization insofar as it both neglects bloc recruitment through resource provision while sapping the resources of those few individuals who were mobilized.

And finally, while we can note that the Damascus Spring had well-articulated national aspirations, activists failed to build effective institutions in a similar fashion to how the FSA and SNC neglected institution building despite the resources available to them. In each of these cases we can thus identify organizational deficiencies as contributors to demobilization. On the other hand, LCCs developed organizational structures which maximized their mobilizational efficacy at a local level while also mitigating their divisions through national-level institution building.

Thus, instead of a mobilizing structure, the Damascus Spring thus appears to have had a mere aspiration to mobilize. One segment from Alan George's *Neither Bread Nor Freedom* speaks to this fact well as George presses Sadiq al-Azm on the Damascus Spring's failures and al-Azm insists that intellectuals reflected mainstream political opinion[255]. This assertion is partially supported, for instance, by the fact that participation in the first parliamentary elections

[255] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 56.

under Bashar in 2003, for example, were reported to have been as low as 10 per cent[256] [257]. Yet if we accept that mainstream opinion was truly with the civil society movement, this speaks only to activists' failure to exploit such discontent for the purposes of mobilization. It is on this note of perceptions, beliefs, and public opinion that we can advance to the framing processes of 2000 and 2011.

Framing Processes

2000

The main resources which we have for evaluating the interpretive framing of the Damascus Spring are its two landmark publications, the Statements of the 99 and 1000 (see appendices). Through these texts we can access both the soft-line interpretive frame of dissidents through the Statement of the 99 while evaluating how hardliners built on and transformed dissident discourse through the Statement of the 1,000. With this information we can come to understand the Damascus Spring on its own terms, as well as through a broader lens which accounts for alternatives and comparisons with reference to the Syrian revolution.

In its diagnosis of reality, the Statement of the 99 uses notably weak language, referencing vague threats related to, "the challenges posed by peace, modernization, and opening up to the outside world." It continues to argue that without reforms, Syrian 'national unity' may be threatened, and demands reforms to "steer the country toward safe shores". The Statement of the 1000, by comparison, is explicit, exorcising vague references and instead describing how Syrians suffer from social, political, economic, and cultural *deterioration* while facing threats from "globalization, economic integration, and the Arab-Israeli conflict." In the same tone the

[256] Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria: Intelligence Services, Foreign Relations, and Democracy in the Modern Middle East*, 56.
[257] An estimate cannot be found for the previous electoral turnout in 1999 outside of the absurd official statistic of 98%.

Statement of the 1,000 argues that inaction "[doubles Syria's] backwardness in relation to the pace of international development", and risks replicating the Soviet experience of collapse. Differences in these diagnoses are striking in light of their similarity; as where the Statement of the 99 references vague threats to national unity, the Statement of the 1,000 invokes state collapse and explicitly argues that the Ba'athist state and its policies have deteriorated Syria. Even the three future challenges which the country faces are described in noticeably different language as modernization is substituted for economic integration, opening up to the world is substituted for globalization, and peace is substituted for the Arab-Israeli conflict.

While the Statement of the 99 was, of course, carefully written to avoid provoking the state[258], the consequence of this decision is obvious. Where diagnostic framing constructs a reality and primes mobilization, the Statement of the 99 fails to offer a reality which differs from the one described by the state. As previously mentioned, Bashar was not shy about emphasizing the need for reform and identifying state failures, but rather did so to reinforce his authority. Thus, we cannot say that the Statement of the 99 *failed* to provide diagnosis, we can identify that it was extremely weak both in identifying threat and in distinguishing its diagnosis from that offered by the regime. The Statement of the 1,000, by contrast, describes a reality which is drastically different from the one Bashar offered, as the Syrian people are confronted not only by the new millennium's challenges, but by the legacy of the Ba'athist state and its policies.

Similarly, the Statement of the 99 fails to offer any prognosis, and while it does offer solutions through reform, these are given neither justification nor explanation. This absence reads as absurd considering the requested reforms include: an end of martial and emergency law,

[258] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, 4.

political amnesty for dissidents, respect for the law and civil liberties, the end of political censorship, and some vague form of institutional participation. Each demand contains a subtext, but by refusing to challenge or abrogate the Ba'ath Party's role this messaging is undercut. By contrast, the Statement of the 1,000 rejects the constitutional role of the Ba'ath Party as "the leading party in society and the state"[259] and explicitly calls for democratic elections. Justifying this, it argues that Syria's backwardness is caused by the substitution of constitutional legitimacy for revolutionary legitimacy, the division of the wealth into feudal estates demarcated along the lines of identity, and the depoliticization of Syrian society. More importantly, however, the Statement of the 1,000 identifies civil society rejuvenation as a cure for these ailments. Its demands are also more extensive and grow roots in the diagnostic and prognostic narratives which it constructs. The demand for an end to martial and emergency laws, for instance, gains substance because of the fact that political repression is identified as both a key outcome of the Ba'athist state and a cause of social, political, economic, and cultural deterioration.

Strikingly, but unsurprisingly, the Statement of the 99 also fails to provide a mobilizational frame. As a result – and despite its origination in non-institutionalized civil society networks with an aspiration to challenge the state – it reads as though it originates from institutionalized as opposed to non-institutionalized popular contention. The Statement of the 1,000 on the other hand, a product of the same civil society movement, identifies mobilization as logically following from accepting its diagnostic and prognostic frames, proclaiming:

> *"we call for the establishment of committees for reviewing civil society in all sectors of Syrian life as a continuation and development of the concept of 'friends*

[259] "The Syrian Constitution - 1973-2012," Diwan – Carnegie Middle East Center, Dec. 5, 2012, https://tinyurl.com/mpd6hsrd.

> *of civil society.' From a sense of national responsibility and independence, we hope that these committees will play their part in overcoming the negativity and demoralization and emerge from the stagnation that doubles our backwardness in relation to the pace of international development. Through these committees, we hope to take the step to a free, independent, and democratic society that takes part in laying the foundations for a renaissance that will ensure a better future for the Arab nation."*[260]

This call to action is not, perhaps, as immediately salient to us as 2011's calls to revolution, yet a subtext runs through it referencing to the Eastern Bloc's revolutionary civil society movements. In fact, Michel Kilo, describing the hardline movement and Riad Seif's activity during the Damascus Spring went so far as to complain, "He (Seif) thought that he was [Lech] Walesa and that Syria was Poland and that the regime was about to fall."[261] Particularly given their close contact[262] it seems likely that such a comparison was drawn from their own conversations and reveals a piece of Statement of the 1,000's motivational frame which we may otherwise overlook, being further removed from the turbulence of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Shifting away from core framing tasks and towards those tasks associated with discursive, strategic, and contested processes, we continue to notice significant disparities between the framing work done by, in, and for each statement. Yet, one fact that we must acknowledge in approaching this section of frame analysis is that the Statement of the 1,000 provoked a level of state response that cut short activists' ability to engage in framing tasks. I will not refrain from evaluating the Statement of the 1,000 on this basis, and will make note of its

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[260] Refer to appendix.
[261] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 42.
[262] "[Seif] had close links with Kilo's group and attended their meetings in August and September 2000." Ibid, 35.

aspirations, but this reality is nonetheless important to note.

Beginning with the Statement of the 99, it is difficult to identify the existence of any discursive, strategic, or contested framing. The reason for this profound absence lies in the fact that the statement merely expressed the opinions of associated soft-line intellectuals. As a result, we have no SMO to use in evaluating discursive, strategic, and contested processes which center on the way SMOs form, sustain, and change their interpretive frames. Instead, we are can only look toward the document to understand how this association temporarily engaged in these tasks.

Discursively, we must again begin by reiterating that the narrative proposed by the Statement of the 99 is weak and fails to distinguish its reality from the regime's. Thus, in terms of articulation, we cannot say that the association of the 99 engaged in any meaningful or significant articulation. In terms of amplification on the other hand, we can identify that the document elevates the salience of human rights discourse. In fact, the statement begins in this way noting that, "Democracy and human rights today constitute a common humanitarian language, gathering and uniting peoples' hopes for a better future." The caveat, of course, is that this is accompanied by Bashar's clause regarding the need to develop democracy in line with Syria's experiences and needs. Yet, by making a specific note of the importance of democracy and human rights as core values of the Statement of the 99, the document makes an important appeal to its target audience, the middle class[263], which it believed to share these same values. In terms of strategic and contested processes, however, we can proceed no further due to the lack of an organization standing behind the Statement of the 99. Under these conditions, nothing could possibly be done to bridge, extend, transform, or defend the interpretive frame offered up by the

[263] "the only force able to implement a political project is the middle class" … "[they are the only ones] who can transmit the ideals of democracy and freedom to society" George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 34.

Statement of the 99. The one exception to this rule is that amplification exists as both a discursive and strategic process, but this has already been discussed.

The Statement of the 1,000, on the other hand, is more complex, born of a union between the soft-line and hardline opposition[264]. We can thus slightly extend analysis of discursive, strategic, and contested framing processes, but again must largely rely on textual interpretation.

Discursively, as we have previously noted, the Statement of the 1,000 proposed a rich narrative which broke with the reform and modernization path proposed by the regime. In this sense, its articulative work is strong, particularly given the explicit fracture point provided by a rejection of the concept of 'the leading party in society and the state.' In terms of amplification, we similarly find that the document's drafters engaged in an explicit process of value and belief signaling, offering readers salient principles which could be used to understand the document. As such, the document clarifies that:

> *"Our philosophy and practice consider that: human beings are aims unto themselves; freedom, dignity, welfare, and happiness are the purpose of development and progress; national unity and the general interest are yardsticks for all policies and practices; and all citizens are equal before the law" ... "[and] the foundations of our political philosophy and practice are that: the correct practice of politics is that based on patriotic, national, and human interest rather than on private interests; national achievements are attributable to the people, not to individuals; social groupings and political parties are defined by the entire national social entity; and the people are the source of all powers."*[265]

[264] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom,* 42-43.
[265] Refer to appendix.

Strategically, we can also take this core value amplification as a means to bridge the similar but disconnected frames of the soft-line and hardline civil society currents. In uniting these groups to issue a joint statement, it seems likely that these principles served the purpose of outlining the basis for cooperation. Given that after the Statement of the 1,000 such statements of principles were regularly incorporated as more diverse individuals and groups came together – as in the 2005 Damascus Declaration[266] – this seems particularly likely.

In terms of frame extension, however, it seems inappropriate to argue that the Statement of the 1,000 attempted to reflect the interests of undecided individuals or groups. Though more standoffish, the democracy and rights-based discourse in the Statement of the 1,000 makes no meaningful attempt to appeal to the undecided and immobilized, assuming that such core values are sufficient. Frame extension would eventually come to opposition discourse in 2005 with the publication of the Damascus Declaration, which pays special homage to the value of Islam to Syrian society and the rights of Kurds[267], but nothing comparable is present in this text.

Finally turning to strategic frame amplification and frame transformation, there is little to identify in the Statement of the 1,000 that has not already been mentioned. It is, perhaps, possible to argue that the individuals who organized around both the Statement of the 99 and the Statement of 1,000 engaged frame transformation by adopting a more hardline stance toward the regime. Yet, given the fact that the document was leaked before being signed and published[268], this interpretation seems half-baked. Instead, it seems more fitting to argue that these individuals' participation indicates a hardline frame extension toward the soft-line current.

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[266] Joshua Landis, "Damascus Declaration in English," SyriaComment, Nov. 1, 2005, https://tinyurl.com/yc3cw6rs.
[267] Ibid.
[268] "A draft of the Statement was leaked before the 1,000 signatures had been collected and an article quoting extensively from the document appeared in the Beirut daily *As-Safir* on 11 January 2001. Shortly after, the entire text was reproduced in the Arab press." Ibid, 43.

Furthermore, as was the case with the Statement of the 99, it seems imprudent to argue that the Statement of the 1,000 and those associated with it engaged meaningfully in frame contestation during the Damascus Spring. The exception which we can perhaps make is the reaction to activists' arrests. Yet these displays are of little significance and arguably fall outside the Damascus Spring's scope. All we can note is that the Committees for the Revival of Civil Society denounced the arrests and while these individuals defended themselves in court[269].

2011

Turning to 2011, at the level of the street, frames of contention are almost impossible to speak of through a macro lens. This is because, despite somewhat valid claims that the early revolution was driven by a desire for democracy and freedom, SMOs did not operate at a national level and instead appealed to local communities. As a result, when looking to SMOs, the construction of frames and their deployment through protests "reflected local concerns rather than national agendas"[270]. While we can, at one level, identify benefits to this approach in providing interpretive frames that were more salient to the communities for which they were formed, this also seems to have become a detriment as the revolution progressed.

In particular, the localization of frame discourses played a significant role in opening the door to sectarianism and ethnic conflict. Along the coast, for example, where large Alawite and Sunni communities lived in close proximity, narratives which referenced their unequal treatment opened the door to division. Common demands in these cities during the early uprising, for instance, focused on rectifying inequalities in public employment where Alawis were favored[271].

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[269]Ibid, 59-60.
[270] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, 100.
[271] Wimmen, *Syria's Path from Civic Uprising to Civil War*, 7.

At a broader level, the fact that Alawis were known to be overrepresented in the security services also led to their regular exclusion from opposition activity[272]. As the revolution proceeded and frames continued to transform, these localized frame disputes intensified and resulted in greater exclusivity despite the nationalist rhetoric emerging from high-level organizations[273].

Among Kurds in northern Syria these kinds of exclusivist frame transformations are particularly notable. Early in the revolution, when activity was largely driven by youth activists[274], Kurds and Arabs typically engaged in a level of joint-frame construction through activities like selecting slogans[275]. Within a year, however, this dynamic began to shift as local organizations largely pushed exclusively ethnic claims[276] [277]. Efforts were made to incorporate Kurdish ethnic representation in the macro level discourse of the Syrian revolution in exchange, most significantly in April of 2011 with the designation of an Azadi Friday (Friday protests were each given a unique name)[278]. Yet major blunders also undermined these efforts, most notably in 2012 when Burhan Ghalioun, president of the Syrian National Council, remarked that, "there is no region or area called "Kurdistan." Syria is Syria."[279]

Moving above the street, however, we can look to the SNC as an important framer despite its organizational deficiencies and considering its status as the recognized representative of Syrians[280]. As such, to understand some of the larger developments – or attempted developments – in framing the Syrian Revolution we can reference several of its key publications

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[272] Ibid, 9.
[273] Wieland, Almqvist, and Nassif, *The Syrian Uprising: Dynamics of an Insurgency*, 55.
[274] Ahmed and Gunter, *The Kurdish Spring: Geopolitical Changes and the Kurds*, 203.
[275] Ibid, 203-204.
[276] Ibid, 203-204.
[277] Mazur, *Revolution in Syria: Identity, Networks, and Repression*, 226.
[278] Nour Malas and Joe Lauria, "Azadi Friday," The New York Times, Apr. 28, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/yh4v5rnp.
[279] Mazur, *Revolution in Syria: Identity, Networks, and Repression*, 240.
[280] "'Friends of Syria' recognize SNC as 'a legitimate representative' of Syrians," Apr. 1, 2012, https://tinyurl.com/2z9p8eac.

to understand how it represented the revolution and itself to Syrians and the world. The publications which I have chosen to review here include two of the organization's founding documents, its National Consensus Charter and Political Program, as well as the Eid speech which SNC president Burhan Ghalioun gave on Al-Jazeera in November of 2011.

Diagnostically, these publications tend to focus impacts of regime oppression and unfulfilled goals which the SNC elevates to justify its existence as well as the support which it seeks to elicit. The National Consensus Charter, for instance identifies the lack of a "serious national project that will support the revolution and accomplish its objectives"[281] and the consequences of historical and contemporary tyranny as imminent threats to the Syrian people. Likewise, the SNC's Political Program describes and claims to respond to the existence of an "urgent need for a political framework that represents revolutionary work being done on the ground since March 15, 2011 to overthrow the regime"[282]. Subsequent goals and principles clarify, furthermore, that this need arises from threats to the peaceful nature of the revolution – which the SNC aims to preserve, protect, and enhance – and threats to civilians[283]. In his more public-facing Eid speech, Ghalioun expands this further by noting that, "there is no home in Syria without a missing father, a raped daughter, a detained young man, or a violated child", and arguing that the regime's Syria was one of "oppression, discrimination, and exclusion" where "rights are deprived and where dignity and freedom are beyond reach"[284].

The strength of this diagnosis lies in positioning the SNC as necessary institution for

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[281] "Syrian National Council National Consensus Charter," Foreign Policy, accessed May 7, 2023, https://tinyurl.com/2s4y52r7.
[282] Freedomman1978, "Political Programme for the Syrian National Council," Selections from the Syrian Revolution, Nov. 23, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/25jayffp.
[283] Ibid.
[284] "Burhan Ghalioun Addresses to the Syrian People (Video and Translated Transcript)," Jadaliyya, Nov. 6, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/drfk72fb.

confronting these problems by representing the revolution domestically and internationally. Unfortunately, however, its language is largely directed toward groups and individuals who align themselves with the revolutionary movement. Arguments regarding the revolution's needs, however, are moot for those who are undecided while relying on tyranny as a generalized diagnosis in the National Consensus Charter and Political Program offers no arguments as to *why* and *how* the Syrian people are oppressed. President Ghalioun's Eid speech begins to redress this problem by invoking victims of state violence which Syrians could identify in themselves and their communities. Going further, in fact, Ghalioun ties those who "remain hesitant or afraid" into this diagnosis by arguing, "It is for you just as it is for us. You are our brethren. Your blood is sacred just like ours is. The fate and future of your children and ours are the same."[285]

Prognostically, we find similar weaknesses in the National Consensus Charter and Political Programme which Ghalioun later expands on in his Eid speech. The former two documents, for instance, avoid attributing blame, leaving implication to fill the gaps. This absence is slightly understandable given that the SNC was subsumed within a larger existing revolutionary movement which clearly placed blame on the regime. Yet, again, this absence means that the documents speak largely to those who are decidedly in the revolutionary camp while abrogating responsibility for prognosis. This absence, particularly given the proliferation of localized frames which enabled the rise of sectarian and ethnic prognoses, stands as a striking failure for an organization espousing to represent the revolutionary movement. Ghalioun's Eid speech, at the very least, identifies the "unjust" and "despotic" characteristics of the regime – including power inheritance – as the proximate cause of the Syrian people's woes[286], but

[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid.

continues to avoid causes, instead devoting its attention to aspirations.

On this basis these publications make several implicit and explicit calls to action. The National Consensus Charter and Political Program importantly call signatories to bind themselves and remain faithful to a unified plan of action. For civilians however, there is an implied call to continue their participation in the "revolutionary, peaceful, and civilized struggle on Syria's blessed ground"[287]. The Eid speech, on the other hand, more explicitly argues that, "With each passing day, and with every drop of blood shed, we advance another step on the road to freedom"[288]. Even in this, however, we see that the SNC largely speaks to the revolutionary audience while refraining from the construction of an interpretive frame facilitating movement growth within a unified and national interpretive framework. This framing, while useful for an SMO seeking to dominate its movement, provides little that can facilitate its growth.

Despite problems in core framing tasks, however, the discursive, strategic, and contested processes which underlie the SNC's publications offer opportunities for movement growth.

Discursively the National Consensus Charter and Political Program continue in the Statement of the 1,000's tradition of outlining core principles with which signatories and readers are invited to identity. While they are not principles rooted in the same ethical and political-philosophical soil as those of the Statement of the 1,000 they still offer up an aspiration toward national unity, equality, freedom, dignity, peace, and democracy. In amplifying these principles, Ghalioun distills them into the simple argument that the Syria which the SNC and the revolutionary movement seek to construct is, "the Syria of freedom and not the Syria of slavery; the Syria of dignity and not the Syria of discrimination; the Syria of love and not the Syria of

[287] "Syrian National Council National Consensus Charter," Foreign Policy.
[288] "Burhan Ghalioun Addresses to the Syrian People (Video and Translated Transcript)," Jadaliyya.

hate; [and] the Syria of progress and not the Syria of backwardness."[289] Particularly in light of the SNC's weak prognostic framing, this construction appears to be particularly useful in providing a succinct appeal to immobilized Syrians. A statement of contrast may not offer an argument which can be digested and replicated, but it does pose a choice of preferences favorable to the SNC and the revolutionary movement.

Strategically, we also see a significant use of frame extension toward Syria's minority groups. It should be noted that the SNC was not the first to offer such an extension, which – at least in the history of the 21st century Syrian opposition – was first made by the Damascus Declaration,[290] which began referencing the need to redress Kurdish grievances in 2005[291]. Still, it is significant insofar as the SNC makes a concrete policy commitment to, "constitutional recognition of Kurdish national identity and the creation of a just democratic formula for the Kurdish question within the framework of unity of the homeland"[292]. Moreover, by making this commitment within the larger framework of ethnic representation, the SNC opened the door to further extension in its Political Program which made an identical commitment to Assyrians[293]. In his Eid speech Ghalioun would amplify this commitment further in noting that, "Syria's new constitution will protect minorities and their rights, including the Kurds, who have been deprived of rights and subjected to discrimination"[294]. Again, this decision compensates for the SNC's failure to appeal toward undecided Syrian's by drawing similarly disgruntled but disconnected

[289] Ibid.
[290] The Damascus Declaration was both a statement and an organization.
[291] Joshua Landis, "Damascus Declaration in English," SyriaComment, Nov. 1, 2005, http://joshualandis.oucreate.com/syriablog/2005/11/damascus-declaration-in-english.htm.
[292] "Syrian National Council National Consensus Charter," Foreign Policy.
[293] Freedomman1978, "Political Programme for the Syrian National Council," Selections from the Syrian Revolution.
[294] "Burhan Ghalioun Addresses to the Syrian People (Video and Translated Transcript)," Jadaliyya.

Syrians into a unified revolution – an effort of relevance to Kurds in light of their 2004 revolt[295].

In addition to extending the SNC's revolutionary frame these appeals also seem relevant to the contested processes of framing. The Political Programme's commitment to Palestinian rights and the reclamation of the Golan, for instance, undercut the Syrian regime's historical claim to being the staunch vanguard of the Palestinian cause. Similarly, reiterated commitments toward religious and sectarian impartiality – which the Political Programme promises to uphold by criminalizing discrimination[296] – seems to serve a unique function in undercutting the sectarian fears that Bashar sought to provoke in response to the revolution[297].

Cumulatively, these framing processes push beyond the SNC's most proximate base of support in a way which enhances its standing as an SMO and the revolutionary movement. As an organization these discourses, extensions, and contestations allowed it to stand out within the revolutionary movement and gave it a basis on which to claim representativeness. Yet beyond enhancing its own position, by stressing the unity that it sought to achieve the SNC's interpretive frame provided an 'in' for those who might otherwise remain on the sidelines. As we know, this level of representativeness would not necessarily serve the organization's best interests as division begot paralysis, but we can at least, and perhaps most importantly, note that this served the interests of the revolutionary movement.

Comparison

Between the Damascus Spring and the SNC's interpretive framing, we seem to find a level of continuity in how each – in terms of core framing tasks, at least – failed to speak to

[295] This refers to the Qamishli Riots of 2004.
[296] "Syrian National Council National Consensus Charter," Foreign Policy.
[297] Nour Ali, "Syrian regime steps up propaganda war amid bloody crackdown on protests," The Guardian, Jul. 20, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/twcdurs.

constituencies outside their own. In each case, leading figures appear to have made a conscious decision to formulate their appeals almost exclusively toward those who already agree with them while shirking the responsibility of mobilization. Ghalioun, as mentioned, provided some redress for this in his Eid Declaration by speaking to those who were unsure or afraid[298], yet for as much praise as this deserves, these words are only spoken in a few breaths.

If we look back to a core argument of Resource Mobilization Theory, we can begin to understand further the fault in this approach. One of the core arguments which it advances is that every person, everywhere, at every moment has some set of grievances that could form the basis for mobilization. But more often than not, the collective action problem inhibits them from doing so on the foundation that by their calculations, costs are too high and benefits are too low – generating the need for the SMO to address these problems, and as framing analysts would argue, to change the way people think about them. With this in mind we can look to the Damascus Spring and the framing of the SNC and nod approvingly as diagnoses recognize that the Syrian people have and are suffering – even if they fail to provide important explanations. But is suffering/grievance sufficient for mobilization? Of course not, a person needs to be convinced that by acting they are, by some calculation, enhancing their position.

We see some acknowledgement of this in frame extension toward aggrieved minority groups, yet this extension is limited by a lack of prognoses and motivations. Hypothetically, for example, if the Statements of the 99 and 1,000 extended their frames to Kurds and Assyrians, would it be likely that this would enhance participation in the Damascus Spring? Most likely not, at the most it might capture a few Kurdish intellectuals but leave others wondering, even if your

[298] "Burhan Ghalioun Addresses to the Syrian People (Video and Translated Transcript)," Jadaliyya.

ideas are good, how will you enact them and how will participating be good for me?

As such, by pulling at this common thread we seem to uncover that the SNC's framing wasn't of particular importance to the revolution as a concept – as admired as it might have been by some revolutionaries – just as the Damascus Spring wasn't of particular importance to most Syrians. Instead, the many micro-level interpretive frames, problematic as they may be, seem to have driven the mobilization of the Syrian Revolution and brought people into its broader macro-level discourses on freedom and democracy. Let us not forget, the uprising did not begin in Dar'a because someone thought it would be nice to have freedom and democracy, they did so because they saw localized mobilization as a way to advance the release of community members. It is only a result of the state's response, political opportunity, and mobilization structures that this reaction grew into the Syrian Revolution. But isn't something missing? Of course, the question of how they did it and why it worked: their repertoire of contention.

Repertoires of Contention

2000

The vast majority of the civil society movement's activity took place within its forums. Yet, as much as the opportunity to comment upon and challenge political policy represented a transformation of the political opportunity structure, these forums fail to stand out as a challenge to the regime. Instead, as we know, the government provided a semi-legal green light for their organization[299] and Bashar eventually responded to their proliferation by encouraging Ba'ath Party members' participation[300]. As a result, it seems erroneous to recognize forums as forms rather than sites of challenge. In doing so, we must recognize that the Damascus Spring's

[299] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 35.
[300] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 82.

predominant form of contestation was the individual speech of loosely connected activists.

Certainly, The Statements of the 99 and 1,000 stand out as the Damascus Spring's most important *forms* of contestation – evidenced by the crackdowns they precipitated[301] [302]. Yet, the fact that these documents were the product of discussion amongst disorganized individuals reinforces the fact that individualized contestation was a primary method. This does not negate the importance of consensus publications in challenging regime authority but is notable in recognizing that such publications extended rather than differing from individualized contention. Likewise, when we look to other key moments of challenge we can note their reliance on the individual. Examples of this include Mundhir al-Muwassali's objection to changing the constitution[303], the defenses given by arrested activists[304], and MP Ma'moun al-Homsi's hunger strike[305] - which, among all these, is the only form not to rely on speech. Cumulatively then, we see that the Damascus Spring had a limited and disorganized repertoire of contention.

This conclusion raises the question, *why*? Remembering that repertoires of contention are a result of choice and reaction, this appears confusing. The cultural availability of this form of contention perhaps provides some hint, given that many of the Damascus Spring's activists had participated in a similar civil society movement in the late 70s and early 80s[306]. Yet the failure of

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[301] Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, 94.
[302] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 50-51.
[303] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 78.
[304] "Al-Homsi affirmed, 'I repeat the demands made earlier'. When a lawyer claimed that the presence of journalists proved the existence of democracy in Syria, the MP shouted from the cage which acted as the dock: 'Had there been democracy in Syria I wouldn't be standing here. We went to prison for the sake of freedom.'" … "Seif, too, vehemently denied the allegations against him, declaring: 'I'm certain that he who wrote and filed the accusations against me is himself convinced of their falsehood'" … "'The existing regime in Syria does not accept any opposition or argument other than its own … I did not violate the constitution. I am here because I demanded a break of the political, cultural, economic, social, and media monopoly in Syria.'" George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 59-60.
[305] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 56-57.
[306] Ibid, 34.

that movement seems to muddle such an explanation unless we take the opposition's experience with mass-organizing and violence into account. For the opposition had witnessed the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's success employing these forms of challenge in the in the 70's and 80's, as well as the brutal crackdown that followed[307], likely removing such tactics from the realm of acceptability. Furthermore, if we account for the availability of civil society movements in the Eastern Bloc, it seems likely that this approach resulted from a simultaneous desire to provoke a rejuvenated civil society to dissent while remaining hesitant toward the risks of organizing.

Of course, MP Riad Seif eventually overcame such hesitation in announcing his plans for a political party[308] and forum unification[309], but the Damascus Spring's only real organized contention came from the human rights organizations. These organizations, as one would expect, confronted the regime in the information sphere through press releases and information sharing[310] which built pressure on the regime from within and without Syria.

In evaluating the Damascus Spring then, we find that it employed an extremely limited repertoire of contention which failed to meaningfully challenge or deconstruct state institutions. Moreover, despite the Damascus Spring's vague strategic end-goal of toppling the regime it failed to meaningfully challenge or deconstruct state institutions. Instead, it relied on regime tolerance[311] and became saturated with its supporters[312], further obstructing organization beyond the loose temporary associations which begot the Statement of the 99 and Statement of the 1,000.

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[307] Robert Danin, "Remembering the Hama Massacre," Council on Foreign Relations, Feb. 2, 2012, https://tinyurl.com/ycyn3wbu.
[308] "Syria's MP Saif Still in Damascus, to Announce his Party Wednesday," Albawaba.
[309] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 85.
[310] Landis and Pace, "The Syrian Opposition," 48-49.
[311] George, *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*, 35.
[312] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 82.

2011

The Syrian Revolution, in complete contrast to the Damascus Spring, employed a wide array of confrontational tactics which undermined the regime at a material and ideological level. With the accumulation of such challenges, the revolutionary movement was able to grow beyond the first demonstrations in Dar'a and undermined regime control. An important preface to make before describing the composition of these tactics is that each was amplified and reproduced thanks to the use of traditional and social media. The use of these outlets, I would argue, comprises a unique form of challenge in and of itself by allowing Syrians to share evidence that, for example, a protest was peaceful – thus disrupting the regime's projection of stability and disinformation. As was the case for the statements of the Damascus Spring, however, this information war largely extends rather than differing from the methods of confrontation which I will discuss – that is to say, it replicates their effects rather than producing new ones. With this preface, which I hope you keep in mind in engaging with revolutionary tactics, we can proceed.

In areas where revolutionaries had a weak presence or proved unable to congeal on account of the security services, they would often resort to flash mobs and "flying protests" designed to confuse, surprise, and outmaneuver their foes[313]. *The War Show*, a 2016 documentary following a group of revolutionary activists, provides an example of this approach while following several women through Damascus. Moving together, the group arrives at a set location and waits for their leader to begin chanting, "one, one, one, the Syrian people are one" and "God is the greatest,"[314] among other slogans to pedestrians who are forced to either support, ignore, or oppose the protest. Unfortunately, this example also shows the risks of flash mobs, as the protest

[313] The Ajnabi, "Flash Mobs: The Changing Tactics of Syria's Protesters," Mideast Posts, Aug. 8, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/2sm96mpm.
[314] *The War Show,* directed by Obaidah Zytoon and Andreas Dalsgaard (Fridthjof Film, 2016), 23:53 – 25:55.

both begins too early and quickly attracts unidentified regime agents who force the protesters to flee. Surprise tactics, however, did not always demand such high risks. Wendell Smith, for instance, notes that Damascene activists whom he interviewed:

> *"tied messages of defiance to balloons" ... "tucked them inside packages of dates given out at mosques" ... "[and] taped them to Ping-Pong balls thrown into the street from high buildings. In one ingenious scheme, they wrote "freedom" on banknotes, but then banks refused to take notes with any markings on them. One day during my visit, dozens of people simply wore white and walked around a block in an upscale neighborhood. Several were arrested."*[315]

Given their near exclusive use in areas of regime control, these tactics appear to be instrumental in allowing oppositionists to gain a foothold in areas of weakness and challenge the regime's hold over public life. By creating situations in which citizens were confronted by the revolution, these tactics also appear to be a means by which to mobilize otherwise inactive Syrians. As the example provided from *The War Show* demonstrates, however, it seems unlikely that this tactic would facilitate increased immediate participation due to immediate risks, though we have no way of measuring its effectiveness in facilitating immediate or delayed mobilization.

In areas where large numbers of revolutionaries were able to congeal, sit-ins and occupations usually replaced such tactics – though they were often used in conjunction. In early May of 2011, this form of challenge gained importance as activists began calling for permanent sit-ins across the country in response to crackdowns in Dar'a and other early rising areas[316]. The

[315] Wendell Steavenson, "Roads to Freedom," The New Yorker, Aug. 22, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/3ad8v6z5.
[316] "Syria Protesters Call for Permanent Sit-ins amid Mass Arrests," Naharnet Newsdesk, May 3, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/mr4bkbsy.

occupation of Quwatli Square in Homs during April 2011 was one of the larger events of this type[317]. Yet, the event demonstrates how these forms of civil disobedience often failed to ensure the safety of participants despite their numerical advantage. As, with the protesters having been disarmed at checkpoints established by activists, the regime was free to shoot and arrest participants – an approach which it would continue to use toward such gatherings[318] [319].

Large demonstrations increasingly guarded by members of local armed groups[320] thus became a prominent tactic which balanced the benefits and risks of civil disobedience. Innovating further, protesters also began staging their demonstrations in the evening in late May of 2011 to take advantage of the darkness for security and draw more participants getting out of work and school[321]. Significant and regularized events were typically the basis for the organization of these large demonstrations, with funerals and Friday prayers being common rallying points[322].

Generally speaking, the aim of these non-violent tactics is to create a public show of disloyalty, articulate the shared demands of a people, and regularize such expressions. Yet, expanding on this basic premise, Syrian demonstrations and occupations also tended to include a unique feature which I believe was important in undermining the Syrian cult of personality: protest songs. Lisa Wedeen, describing the importance of the personality cult as a Syrian institution under Hafiz al-Assad, attributes it with the function of neutralizing oppositional

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[317] "Syria protests: Homs city sit-in 'dispersed by gunfire'," BBC, Apr. 19, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/42fp54rj.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Bassem Mroue, "Activists: Syrian troops fire on sit-ins," Seattle Times, Jan. 9, 2012, https://tinyurl.com/27b9rfbh.
[320] Leïla Vignal, *War Torn: The Unmaking of* Syria (London: Hurst Publishers, 2012), 33.
[321] Nada Bakri, "In New Tack, Syrians Protest at Night to Elude Forces," The New York Times, May 26, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/48hvpasu.
[322] Khaled Oweis, "Eleven killed as Syrian funeral becomes protest," Reuters, May 20, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/5ce5vkad.

interpretive frames and facilitating popular obeisance through self-conscious participation in the unreal spectacle. To this effect she argues:

> *"Asad's cult operates as a disciplinary device, generating a politics of public dissimulation in which citizens act as if they revere their leader. A politics of "as if," while it may appear irrational or foolish at first glance, actually proves politically effective. It produces guidelines for acceptable speech and behavior; it defines and generalizes a specific type of national membership; it occasions the enforcement of obedience; it induces complicity by creating practices in which citizens are themselves "accomplices," upholding the norms constitutive of Asad's domination; it isolates Syrians from one another; and it clutters public space with monotonous slogans and empty gestures, which tire the minds and bodies of producers and consumers alike."*[323]

Rhetorical and symbolic routines during Hafiz' era consisted of a wide variety of political de-constructions which operated on both obligation and expectation. Examples of this cited by Wedeen vary from mandatory student participation in 'spontaneous' demonstrations to shopkeepers plastering posters of the elder Assad in their places of work[324]. But such performances resulted from more than a simple fear of reprisal, they reflected the extent to which participation in the cult facilitated normal participation in public life.

What's more, participation reinforced the ideologically saturated/desaturated environment sought by the regime for those who participated as witnesses. Through this process the Syrian subject is pummeled with a narrative which elevates the president as an *other* through whom the

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[323] Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*, 6.
[324] Ibid, 6.

Syrian must exist as such and to whom they must be held accountable. Such a position is not just rendered by the occasional poster or spectacle, but in harsh and blunt bombardments. The children's story book, for example, renders for the nation's youth the tale of a young orphan in the aftermath of the October War who writes to his deceased father in his diary, "the President, the leader will visit us and he will eat food with us. … Papa, I love you and I love Papa Hafiz."[325] Likewise, the whole nation is told, as it was on a radio broadcast in 1980 that, "In order to kill this revolution, they will have to kill the people, and this is impossible. They should know that Hafiz is no one, but one of you. Every citizen in this country is Hafiz al-Asad."[326]

Worse, this cult extended from Hafiz unto his family members, placing them in a position above the people, but still in a way which relied on Hafiz. The image of his mother Na'isa, for example, could be integrated into the cult as a means to elevate her while in doing so reaffirming Hafiz' role as both her son and guardian – a microcosmic mirror of his position as both a son and guardian of the Arab nation[327]. Likewise, when preparing Basil for power, Hafiz could both elevate his position and secure his succession by referring to himself by the kunya Abu Basil. In the same way, although he initially tried to distance himself from the cult – even arguing that his father had opposed it[328] - Bashar's power and position too flowed downward from his father. As one book describing Basil's death and its effects captioned a photo of Bashar, the new successor, his role was to "*continue* (my emphasis) the journey and perseverance of hope"[329].

Thus, I believe, it was an important disruption of the historical status quo when protesters began to verbally assault the cult of personality at protests and demonstrations. As Lisa Wedeen

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[325] Ibid, 53
[326] Ibid, 17.
[327] Ibid, 56-57.
[328] Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, 38-39.
[329] Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* , 61.

writes in *Ambiguities of Domination*, ideological transgression had been tolerated in some forms as a "safety valve"[330] for the pressure generated by unbelief. Yet rather than attacking the cult of personality directly, licensed transgressions tended to limit themselves to satirizing a shared condition of unbelief in *something* and the conditions which Syrians suffered[331]. These licensed transgressions, however, fell short of damaging the cult of personality as in institution and instead redirected ridicule to Syrians themselves who became the butt of a joke with no set-up.

In opposition to this trend, however, the revolutionaries of 2011 made a clear break with this formula. Their spectacles were voluntary, routinized not by expectation or obligation, but choice. Thus, in my mind, the protest songs attacking the cult of personality stand out as one of the revolution's most important features for the way they destroy the condition of shared belief and launch a direct attack on state power. Through these attacks, the joke's set up is given and the Syrian is replaced as an object of ridicule by the Assad family as a whole – their honor, importance, and omnipotence rendered to dust. More importantly, however, the transgression itself becomes a common language which can be replicated across time and space through the form of the song – endlessly reproduced through video and repeat performances.

[330] Ibid, 88.
[331] Ibid, 87-132.

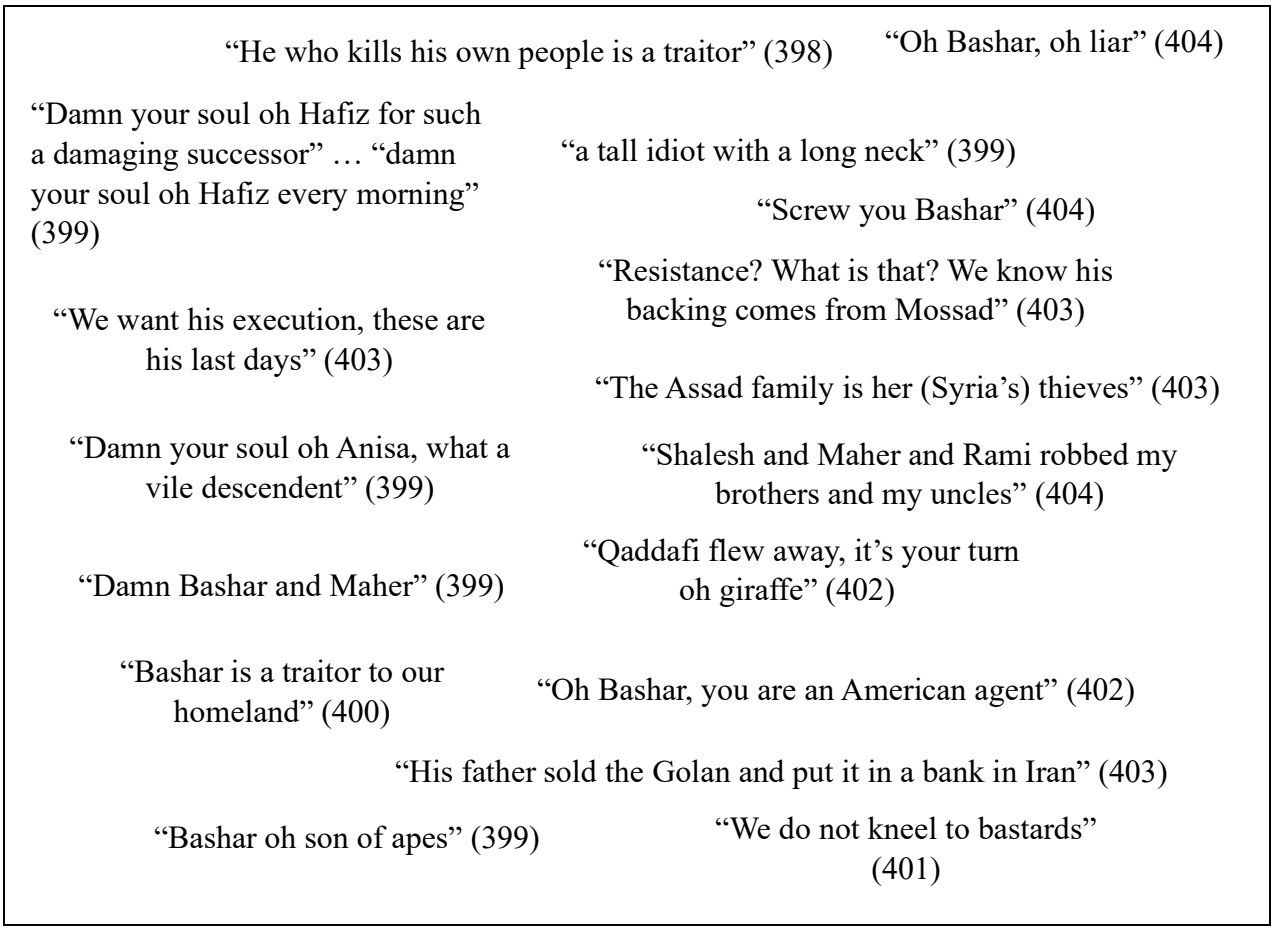

Figure 9 – Excerpts from Protest Songs

Reference for example, the cited video "Damn Your Soul, Hafiz," and you will find these repeat performances play out across a country in revolt. Notice, also, that these songs invite protesters to express agency in contributing to and celebrating the destruction of the cult of

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[332] Syria Rewind, "Shine, Damascus, shine 2012," Aug. 8, 2015, YouTube video, 2:32 to 2:41, https://tinyurl.com/yx6b55ht.
[333] Syria Rewind, "Damn Your Soul, Hafez #Assad #Syria - interactive يلعن روحك يا حافظ - تفاعُلي ," Aug. 25, 2015, YouTube video, https://tinyurl.com/58dhawdf.
[334] Syrian Chants, "Syria Needs Freedom by Qashoush 2011 [English subtitles]," Feb. 15, 2020, YouTube video, 1:50 to 1:58, https://tinyurl.com/4y3ehxbn.
[335] Syria Rewind, "Revolution Revolution (Homs 2011 حمص) ثورة ثورة," Jul. 19, 2015, YouTube video, 00:14 to 00:15, https://tinyurl.com/4sayn4yd.
[336] Delete the Elite, "Legendary Reaction to Bashar al-Assad's Speech in Idlib (14-1-2012)," Jun. 2, 2018, YouTube video, https://tinyurl.com/2w7y735r.
[337] Syrian Freedom, "Syrian Revolution Protest - "Your last Friday Bashar" [English Translation]," Apr. 16, 2012, YouTube video, https://tinyurl.com/55waeuwa.
[338] Ahmadahmad1945, "27 6 2011ابراهيم القاشوش ويلا ارحل يا بشار دقة عالية," Aug. 15, 2011, YouTube video, https://tinyurl.com/ms496s4h.

personality – with protesters at one point clapping along as a singer damns Hafiz and Anisa al-Assad to the tune of happy birthday[339]. Cumulatively, this process goes beyond articulating the revolution and protesters' goals – freedom, the fall of the regime, etc. – and establishes a fundamental hatred of the Assad family which denies them any position over the Syrian people or the opportunity to attempt reconciliation or negotiation.

Additionally, although music was the most prominent form of such ridicule, other artistic mediums were also used to challenge the regime's legitimacy and undermine the cult of personality. One prominent example was an online finger puppet show, referred to in English as "Top Goon: Diaries of a Little Dictator," produced in 2011 by collection of Syrian activists. Episodes typically operate by putting Bashar, referred to in the show as Beeshu, and a regime thug in an uncomfortable or satirical situation. The second episode, for instance, follows a childish and temperamental Bashar as he competes and loses in a game show called "Who Wants to Kill a Million"[340]. Through his loss the program casts him into the fray of previous failed contestants – including Hosni Mubarak and Moammar Qadhafi – while debasing him as a friendless, child-like figure with no understanding of reality. And again, we find that the joke is embedded in the context of suffering, its set-up is established through Bashar's own incompetence, with his predicted downfall comprising the punchline – a complete reversal of the licensed dissent discussed by Wedeen in *Ambiguities of Domination*.

Yet outside of art and demonstrations, other forms of non-violent and violent confrontation targeting the material underpinnings of the state also existed. Building on previous tactics, for example, strikes were used to both generate immediate economic impacts and

[339] Syria Rewind, "Damn Your Soul, Hafiz," 5:14 to 5:41.
[340] Massasit Mati, "Masasit Mati-Top Goon Episode 2 Who wants to kill a million?," Nov. 27, 2011, YouTube video, https://tinyurl.com/263srs7s.

mobilize participation in other civil disobedience activities[341]. The Dignity Strike, a general strike attempted in early December of 2011, was the largest of such events and sought to gradually mobilize private and public sector workers. Private sector participation was it's strong point, with LCCs and journalists estimating that 70 to 80% of Dar'a businesses and 70% of suburban Damascene businesses participated[342]. Success, however, was largely contained to peripheral areas in which the security services responded by breaking into closed stores[343].

Outside of the civilian sphere, the revolution also found success in facilitating defections and desertions from the Syrian military as it was countermobilized. Walid al-Qashami, a Republican Guard conscript deployed to suppress dissent in Harasta, is the first documented defector of the Syrian revolution, having announced his split in late April of 2011[344] [345]. In doing so, he seems to have established[346] a trend later popularized by Syrian Army Lt. Col. Hussein Harmoush in which defectors filmed themselves presenting their military identification and the reasons for their defection[347] [348]. These filmed defections both undermined regime legitimacy and provided a means to promote further defections while helping establish the bases for revolutionary institution building through local armed groups. Thus, as defectors fled the control

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[341] "Syria: 'Dignity strike' escalates, protests across the country," Menasolidaritynetwork, Jan. 6, 2012, https://tinyurl.com/yk3j3cea.
[342] Hugh Macleod, "Syria: Labor strikes take hold across the country," PRI, Dec. 29, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/yvtmys7z.
[343] "The dignity strike succeeded in small towns and spontaneous settlements on the peripheries of major cities but failed to mobilize its core target: professional classes in urban centers." …
Regime agents used force to end strikes in many of these areas, physically breaking into an looting some commercial establishments" Mazur, *Revolution in Syria: Identity, Networks, and Repression*, 202.
[344] Sohaib al-Zoabi, *Deraa Province: Conflict Dynamics and the Role of Civil Society* (London: Conflict Research Programme, 2020), 6.
[345] "Missing Persons: Walid Abd al-Kareem al-Qashami," Violations Documentation Center in Syria, accessed May 7, 2023, https://tinyurl.com/5ad5r9p3.
[346] After attempts to determine otherwise, I could not find documentation of similar videos made previous to al-Qashami's.
[347] "La vidéo du soldat déserteur : info ou intox?," France24, May 2, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/2k37zx58.

[348] Freedomforeveryone20, "Syrian Soldier Hussein Harmoush announces split from Army 09/06/2011 Eng. Subs," Jun. 10, 2011, YouTube video, https://tinyurl.com/3m4rcyv6.

of the army and joined in violent resistance, they chipped away at the regime's ability to project force. At first, armed groups' capabilities were quite limited, and their activity typically comprised raids, ambushes, and IED attacks. Yet, by November of 2011 they staged their first major assault on a military intelligence complex on the outskirts of Damascus near Harasta[349]. By January of 2012 local armed groups would even take near complete control of the town of Zabadani, a mere 20 miles outside of Damascus[350].

The final notable, major means of contention employed during the uprising were appeals made by protesters, defectors, local protest organizations, and the otherwise uncontentious SNC for the international community to withdraw recognition for the regime and support protesters. One of the more frequent requests leveled by the revolutionary camp was for the creation of a no-fly zone over Syria, safe havens, and humanitarian corridors for those fleeing conflict [351] [352]. Unfortunately, however, none of these would come to fruition, although the regime's reputation on the international stage suffered. As a result of failures in this realm, armed conflict became predominant after the third UNSC veto of government sanctions [353] [354].

Comparison

The differences in contention between the Damascus Spring and Syrian Revolution are numerous, yet if we distill we seem to find that:

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[349] "Syrian army defectors hit intel complex: activists," Reuters, Nov. 15, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/3jmfc6zh.
[350] Ian Black, "Syria: 20 miles from Damascus, an oasis of fragile freedom," The Guardian, Jan. 17, 2012, https://tinyurl.com/4rvp5mzw.
[351] "SNC Calls for the Establishment of a Safe Zone in Syria," Syrian National Council, accessed Ma 5, 2023, https://tinyurl.com/mkszpad7.
[352] Zenko, "More Syrians Are Calling for a No-Fly Zone—Should We Take it Seriously?,"
[353] Hinnebusch and Saouli, *The War for Syria: Regional and International Dimensions of the Syrian Uprising*, 131.
[354] Department of Public Information, "Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Syria That Would Have Threatened Sanctions, Due to Negative Votes of China, Russian Federation," United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, Jul. 19, 2012, https://tinyurl.com/4m7vafnh.

1) Damascus Spring activists failed to meaningfully break with state authority, as revolutionary activists did by rejecting it and undermining its exercise;
2) Damascus Spring activists failed to 'go to the people,' expecting the people to come to them, as opposed to the revolutionaries, who publicized their activity;
3) Damascus Spring activists attacked the state as a whole and on a conceptual level, whereas revolutionaries targeted individual pillars of the state; and
4) Damascus Spring activists relied on individuals alone, rather than masses or organizations, to accomplish their ends.

Each of these is a tragedy, but combined they become a crisis which calls into question how Damascus Spring activists expected to meet their ends in the first place. In failing to meaningfully break with state authority, for instance, spaces which were originally subversive were woven into the fabric of regime legitimacy. This kind of approach, particularly given civil society forums' semi-legal status and the ease with which they were suppressed, seems to burden activists with the obligations and limitations of institutionalized mobilization without any benefits. That is to say, activists were expected to show respect for and compliance with the rules of the regime without having any tangible gain in power and influence to show for it.

The advantage of breaking with the regime, as the Syrian Revolution showed, is that it opened space for not just challenging the state but deconstructing it and building alternative institutions. Yes, this induces risks but within these free spaces activists also found ways to build on their achievements and expand their freedom of maneuver. Furthermore, by embedding such a model within a context of obedience, the Damascus Spring seems to have robbed itself of aspiration. Notice, for example, that although the Statement of the 1,000 raises lofty demands, it uses through a medium which, although contentious, addresses rather than undermines the state.

Building on this failure, and moving to the second point, we find that although the activists of the Damascus Spring have the nominal aspiration to govern, they have no such aspiration to appeal to Syrians. In establishing their forums, the activists of the Damascus Spring – at least as far as the literature suggests – also established the limit of their efforts to connect with Syrians, expecting them to take the first step. Of course, Riad Seif did announce his "Social Peace Party,"[355] but beyond a few statements and a planned party we see few indications that Damascus Spring activists sought to *appeal* to Syrians. Instead, their appeals addressed the halls of power which they requested the right to walk within.

The revolutionaries of 2011, on the other hand, developed several ways to bypass the mediation of the state and force a dilemma unto Syrians: join us or oppose us, now, or later. Of course, one might argue that many of the means available to the revolutionaries of 2011 were not available to the activists of the Damascus Spring. Yet we know that the activists of 2011 had a plethora of individualized and small-group subversive tactics which could be used in regime strongholds. The argument that these were developed through an evolutionary and referential process of tactical development also seems to fall flat inasmuch as Damascus Spring activists drew on the collapse of the Eastern Bloc.

Extending this point on tactics further as a means to explain the implications of our third point, we also come to understand that the Damascus Spring's tactics were not simply weak, but unfocused. Whereas the activists of 2011 developed a wide repertoire with a variety of immediate material and ideological implications for the regime, the Damascus Spring relied on a narrow repertoire which merely challenge the efficacy and legitimacy of the Ba'athist state as a

[355] "Syria's MP Saif Still in Damascus, to Announce his Party Wednesday," Albawaba.

whole. In no way, given our review, can it be said that the tactics employed by the Damascus Spring actively deconstructed – even through speech – key institutions of the state. Activists could, as we know, lodge an argument that the Ba'athist period led to a variety of deteriorations[356], but in doing so they simply challenged the concept of Ba'athism as flawed. Even Bashar, however, was willing to acknowledge the need for Ba'athism to adapt to modern conditions[357], undercutting this position's exclusivity. Revolutionaries in 2011, on the other hand, launched regular and targeted attacks on key institutions of the state which undermined its power in the immediate and non-immediate terms.

Lastly, as we know, the tactics of the Damascus Spring relied exclusively on individual action – a speech here or a signature there. In doing so they seem to have, as evidenced by the targeted arrests of key figures[358], burdened their activists with a maximum level of risk. Whereas the tactics of the Syrian Revolution tapped into the risk-reducing features of ambiguity, strength in numbers, and collective defense, the activists of the Damascus Spring were left to themselves. We can only speculate, but this kind of condition seems to be one which, if we refer to the collective action problem – or in this case, the action problem – has a depressive effect on activity. For, while acknowledging that the individual is often irrational, our methodological and theoretical framework still allows that they are calculating. Given that this is the case, and that the Damascus Spring made no offerings and provided no benefits to its activists, a lack of risk reduction would seemingly make the bargain of action unappealing. In this vein we can also speculate that, insofar as individuals have an interest in their loved ones, friends, acquaintances,

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[356] See Appendix spring for copy of the Statement of the 1,000.
[357] "The capacity of the party depends on its capacity to adjust to today's reality in Syria and to developments in the various areas of life of the state." Eyal Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 71.
[358] Mamoun al-Homsi, Riad Seif, Riyad al-Turk, Kamal al-Labwani, Walid al-Bunni, 'Aref Dalila, Habib Saleh, Hassan Sadoun, Habib Isa, and Fawaz Tello. Hinnebusch and Zintl, *Syria from Reform to Revolt*, 94.

community, etc., as well as their reputation with these groups, coordinated actions can provide an incentive to participate simply by virtue of their nature.

As a whole then, we seem to be able to establish that despite having the means and opportunity to expand their repertoire and obtain some of the comparative advantages of the revolutionary repertoire, Damascus Spring activists chose not to. Why? Perhaps naiveté, perhaps fear, perhaps a stubborn attachment to outdated tactics. But in the end, it makes no difference, all that remains is to take our conclusions and ask once more, What made the Damascus Spring so vulnerable to suppression and why was it unable to develop a larger following?

Holistic Analysis and Conclusions

By comparing the Damascus Spring and Syrian revolution through the lens of the political process model we have been able to reach four key conclusions regarding the Damascus Spring's fragility and failure to expand:

1. The activists of the Damascus Spring, while exposed to increased political opportunity, operated the context of regime consolidation. Unlike 2011, the regime was still able to sustain its strategy of rule and enjoy the associated benefits of induced obeisance and loyalty.
2. The activists of the Damascus Spring, while building from previous dissident networks and political parties, failed to pursue an organized strategy of mobilization. Instead, the movement neglected even the networks of its own activists;
3. The activists of the Damascus Spring failed to develop strong prognostic and motivational frames, and limited their ability to engage in discursive, strategic, or contentious framing processes by failing to organize their supporters. This drastically limited their ability to expand their appeal or to direct supporters toward any specific goal aside from support; and

4. The activists of the Damascus Spring relied on limited and individualized forms of contention which burdened lone activists with unmitigated risk. Additionally, because of their limited repertoire, the activists of the Damascus Spring surrendered initiative to the regime and reinforced their position of weakness. Moreover, even in their statements confrontation of the state was unfocused and failed to deconstruct institutions of the state materially or ideologically.

Individually, each of these points speak volumes about the limitations and failures of the Damascus Spring. But when we put them together we can understand why a movement with national aspirations championed by leading intellectuals disappeared without a trace of public backlash while small protests in a peripheral Syrian town later grew into a revolution. The Damascus Spring would never have become an event like the Syrian Revolution, a fact made painfully clear by the difference in their respective political environments. But lying at the core of the Damascus Spring's fragility and marginality, I would argue, is the fact that activists' frames failed to break from the regime or make arguments which tangibly undermined it while neglecting locally specific frames which proved instrumental in 2011.

I would place the significance of this failure even above the limitations of its mobilizing structures and repertoires of contention insofar as each depends on the ability of an SMO to recruit and mobilize through ideas. Even had the Damascus Spring been organized around the tightly controlled Leninist model typical of revolutionary organizing, for example, we can recognize that the irreplaceability of its members would have rendered it extremely fragile. Likewise, had its activists employed more impactful and innovative tactics the risks inherent to non-institutional contention would have gradually depleted their ranks.

Good framing solves for these problems – both fragility and appeal – by linking the ideational content of contentious mobilization to existing discourses at individual, communal,

and national levels. As a result, it breathes life into movements and allows them to overcome setbacks by sustaining the relevance of social movements in the face of suppression. Thus, while the Damascus Spring may never have become the Syrian Revolution, better interpretive framing would have reduced its marginality and reduced the effectiveness of the Khaddam directed regime crackdown of 2001.

In reaching these conclusions I believe I have accomplished my goal of partially filling the gap in the literature on the Damascus Spring by making better use of available information. Whereas previous accounts relayed developments as they took place, I believe a comparative analysis has succeeded in allowing for the extrapolation of the key lessons necessary to evaluate the Damascus Spring's failures, fragility, and lack of public support. I believe that the application of SMT proved extremely valuable to this end insofar as it met my expectations for structuring and bridging different sections of this research.

In the future, I believe that this descriptive research could be further enhanced through the application of network analysis to civil society forums in order to determine their key brokers and the nodes which linked them together. I believe that this would be particularly useful in deepening our understanding of organizational practices during the Damascus Spring while also providing extremely valuable data on the identities of key activists. If this information could be gathered and used in accordance with research ethics, likely following extensive interviews, this could prove useful in sketching opposition continuities between 2000 and 2011 while identifying key mechanisms of change. This is, however, a project for another paper. And as far as this one is concerned; I believe that my conclusions successfully identified the specific and general causes of the Damascus Spring's fragility and marginalization. There is still work to be done, as always, but I believe I have pushed past the shallower fact finding of previous works.

Appendix

The Statement of the 99[359] [360]

Published on September 27, 2000

Democracy and human rights today constitute a common humanitarian language, gathering and uniting peoples' hopes for a better future. And even if some major countries use these to promote their policies and interests, interaction among peoples need not result in domination and political dictation. It was allowed to our people in the past, and it will be allowed to them in the future, to be influenced by the experiences of others, and at the same time add their own input, thereby developing their distinctiveness with openness.

Syria today enters the twenty-first century in urgent need of its citizens to join forces to face the challenges posed by peace, modernization, and opening up to the outside world. And for this, our people are invited more than ever to participate in the construction of Syria's present and future.

From this objective need, and in order to secure our national unity, believing that the future of our country cannot be dictated, being citizens in a republican system where everybody has the right to freedom of opinion and of expression, we, the undersigned, call upon the authorities to accede to the following demands:

- An end to the state of emergency and martial law in effect in Syria since 1963;
- Amnesty for all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience as well as those pursued because of their political ideas, and allowing the return of all deportees and exiled citizens;
- The establishment of a state of law; the granting of public freedoms; the recognition of

[359] Drawn from George, *Syria: Neither Bread nor Freedom*, 178-181.
[360] Drawn from Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire*, 203-206

political and intellectual pluralism, freedom of assembly, the press, and expression; and

- The liberation of public life from the laws, constraints, and forms of censorship imposed on it, such that citizens would be allowed to express their various interests within a framework of social harmony, peaceful competition, and an institutional structure that would enable all to participate in the country's development and prosperity.

No reform, be it economic, administrative, or legal, will achieve security and stability in the country unless fully accomplished by the desired political reform, which alone can steer our country toward safe shores.

The Statement of the 1,000[361] [362]
Published on January 9, 2001

Syria needs today, more than ever before, an objective reflection to draw lessons from previous decades and to shape its future, following the deterioration of its social, political, economic, and cultural conditions, and in response to the challenges of globalization, economic integration, and the the Arab-Israeli conflict that our people and nation must confront and whose dangers they must repel.

Arising from a sincere faith in our country, in our people, and in their creative capacities and vitality, and, keen to interact positively with all serious initiatives for reform, it is vital today to establish a comprehensive dialogue between all citizens and all social classes and political forces, intellectuals and producers and creative people, in order to encourage the development of civil society – a society based on individual freedom, human rights, and citizenship; and the establishment of a state of justice and rights, a state for all its people, without favor or exception,

[361] Drawn from George, *Syria: Neither Bread nor Freedom*, 182-188.
[362] Drawn from Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire*, 207-212.

in which all can take pride. Our country today needs the efforts of all our citizens to revive civil society, whose weakness, and attempts to weaken it over the last decades, deprived the country's development and construction process of crucial national capacities that were unable to participate in it actively and positively.

Ambiguity surrounding the meaning of civil society, resulting from multiple democratic experiments in ancient and modern history, negates neither its existence in our country nor its halting progression into a modern society which produced a vibrant culture, a free press, associations, political parties, trade unions, constitutional legitimacy, and a peaceful transfer of power. These made Syria one of the least backward – if not the most advanced – of Arab countries.

This path enhanced our society's national cohesion until the sudden arrival of that interruption based on 'revolutionary legitimacy' rather than constitutional legitimacy. Marginalizing civil society involved disregarding the state, the individual, and his position, painting the state with one party, one color, and one opinion. It involved creating a state for one part of a society, a part which did not acknowledge its particularity but portrayed itself as representing the people and as 'leading the state and society.' Citizenship was reduced to the narrow concept of belonging to one party and to personal loyalty. This part of society considered the rest of the population as a mere herd. The wealth of the state and of its institutions, the country's resources and those of the institutions of civil society, became like feudal estates that were distributed to followers and loyalists. Patronage replaced law; gifts and favors replaced rights; and personal interests replaced the general interest. Society was desecrated, its wealth plundered, and its destiny commandeered by those who became symbols of oppression. Every citizen became a suspect, if not actually considered guilty, to be apprehended at will. The regime

treated people not only as a neglected mass, subject to its will, but also as a minor, incompetent and under suspicion. The government went so far as to accuse people of treason whenever they took the smallest initiative to express their opinion or demand their rights. It should be mentioned that marginalizing civil society led to marginalizing the state itself, undermining the organic relationship between them, as neither exists without the other. Civil society constitutes the very substance of the modern state, while the state is civil society's political expression. Together, they constitute the democratic system of government.

Our society, with its national revolutions against colonialism and its political movement against oppression, which revealed its patriotic and nationalist spirit, eager for liberation and progress; which has been patient and has given many martyrs and sacrifices for freedom and justice, is still capable of rebuilding its social and political life; of rebuilding its economy and culture according to the requirements of modernity and development. It is still capable of joining the march of scientific and technological progress and can overcome the relationship and structures that produce tyranny and that are intimately linked to the imperialism and national fragmentation that were their cause.

The consequences of coups against political democracy in the name of socialism are now plain. With the collapse of the Soviet model and its East European and Third World extensions, the impossibility of building socialism or establishing social democracy without political democracy became obvious. The Soviet experience also demonstrated the fragility of a state that does not draw its legitimacy from civil society, and of an authority that does not draw its legitimacy from the people. Equally plain is the inadequacy of viewing the people as mere subjects of 'revolutionary will,' and of denying the social, cultural, and political diversity of a society and the different interests of each of its component parts. The Soviet experience

underlined the consequences of denying that rule of law – as a judicial expression of public order and of the essence of the state itself, as well as expression of all that is common between all citizens and social groups – which is a historic compromise between all those interests and diverse groups that should be the basis for genuine national unity.

It is this historic compromise which creates constitutions and laws that are in line with the development of society, which itself is affected by the pace of global development. Constitutions are therefore usually modified, changed, and improved according to the needs of that development. The concept of civil society in the world to which we belong – geographically at least – that was revived in the 1970s, represented, and still represents, the reality of social existence, the latter being defined by the transition of mankind from nature to society, that is, to human construction and civil politics, to use the expression of Ibn Khaldun. From this concept arose an array of concepts leading to a 'social covenant' as opposed to the 'divine right' claimed by dictators, kings, and emperors. The development of this social covenant is nothing more than the political counterpart to the triumph of reason which placed the human being at the center of human knowledge. Modern societies and modern thinking gave rise to the modern civil state that guarantees freedom of belief and religious practice and unrestrained thought – all within the framework of acknowledging, in practice, a freedom defined by law, conditioned by responsibility, and crowned by creative initiative, love of knowledge, and working with and for the wider group.

For all these reasons there is a great need today to revive societal and social institutions free of domination by the executive authority and by the security apparatus, which usurped full powers. These institutions should also be free of all traditional forms and social ties, relationships and structures, such as those of tribalism and sectarianism, in order to re-establish

politics in society as its primary free, conscious, and constructive activity, and to achieve the crucial balance between society and state, coordinating their activities and thus achieving liberty, equality, and justice. National unity is thus bolstered, as is the dignity and sovereignty of the state. The rule of law becomes the final arbiter for all.

Only in civil society can a comprehensive national dialogue, characterized by freedom of expression and speech and respect for diverse opinions be conducted, in order to encourage mass participation for the benefit of all the people. No social or political group has the right to decide by itself where the country's national interests lie, and what means should be pursued to achieve those interests. All groups – including the present ruling power – must make their opinions, ideas, and programs known to the people for discussion and dialogue. No dialogue is possible without freedom of opinion and expression, free political parties and trade unions, a free press, free social organization and a legislature that genuinely and effectively represents the people.

No reform is possible without a comprehensive national dialogue, because dialogue always produces new facts that are relevant to all. The logic of dialogue negates that of holding a monopoly on truth, patriotism, or anything else. That is why we are calling for the adoption of the principle of dialogue, constructive criticism, and peaceful development to resolve all disagreements through compromise and understanding. This is one of the most important characteristics and advantages of civil society.

The vitality of civil society is strikingly manifested in the establishment of voluntary, independent, non-governmental organizations based on democratic choice, whose objective is the establishment of justice and the rule of law that ensures civil rights and protects general liberties. That is why we believe that in defending civil society we defend the state and the authority holding power in the state.

For economic reforms and anti-corruption measures to succeed, they must be preceded and accompanied by a comprehensive package of political and constitutional reforms. Otherwise, these reforms will not achieve their objectives. The economic and anti-corruption reform process therefore must develop into a permanent legal mechanism that stimulates public participation and encourages a continuous monitoring of state institutions as well as the private sector. All this should be done in an atmosphere of transparency that offers all social groups and forces and political parties the opportunity to participate effectively in the process of planning, preparation, implementation, and correction. It will also enable them to identify mistakes, waste, and consumption promptly, as well as enable the judicial system and supervisory bodies to call miscreants to account. Partial and selective measures will not lead to reform.

Our philosophy and practice consider that:

- Human beings are aims unto themselves;
- Freedom, dignity, welfare, and happiness and the purpose of development and progress;
- National unity and the general interest are yardsticks for all policies and practices; and
- All citizens are equal before the law, since inequality always creates those who are privileged and those who are deprived of all rights, thus sowing the seeds of discrimination and disunity and degrading social relations to sub-political levels.

The foundations of our political philosophy and practice are that:

- The correct practice of politics is that based on patriotic, national, and human interest rather than on private interests;
- National achievements are attributable to the people, not to individuals;
- Social groups and political parties are defined by the entire national social entity; and

- The people are the source of all powers.

We therefore believe that political reform is the necessary and only way out of the current state of stagnation and decline, and the only way of extricating the general administration from its chronic torpor. We believe, furthermore, that the following must be implemented urgently as necessary preludes to political reform:

1. Abrogation of the Emergency Law now in force. Martial law regulations, emergency courts, and all similar measures must be cancelled forthwith, and all injustices they caused over the years remediated. Political prisoners must be released, and the situation of those deprived of civil and labor rights by special courts and laws must be rectified. Exiles must be allowed to return;
2. Political freedoms – especially freedom of opinion and expression – must be allowed. Civil and political life must be overseen by democratic legislation regulating the activities of political parties, associations, and non-governmental organizations – especially the trade unions, which, through their conversion into state institutions, have lost partly or entirely the very reasons for their establishment;
3. Reinstatement of the publications ensuring freedom of the press that was annulled by the State of Emergency;
4. Enactment of a democratic election law to regulate elections at all levels in a way that ensures all segments of society are represented fairly, and the electoral process should be subjected to supervision of an independent judiciary. The parliament elected as a result of this process will be a genuine legislative and supervisory institution, truly representing the will of the people, acting as the highest authoritative reference for all and symbolizing the people's membership in the country and their positive participation in deciding how it is governed.

The wholeness of the state is never expressed more clearly than by the legislative institution and by the independence and integrity of the judiciary;

5. Independence and integrity of the judiciary with laws applied equally to rulers and ruled;
6. Ensuring that citizens are accorded their full economic rights, most of which are stated in the Constitution. The most important of their constitutionally granted rights are (i) a fair share of national wealth and income; (ii) suitable employment and a life of dignity; and (iii) protecting the right of future generations of their fair share of the country's wealth and to a clean environment. Economic and social development are senseless if there are not aimed at erasing injustice, humanizing conditions of work and life, and countering unemployment and poverty;
7. Insisting that the parties affiliated to the National Progressive Front truly represent the most vibrant forces in Syrian society; that they themselves today fill the vacuum of politics; and that the country needs nothing more than the reinvigoration of the NPF will serve only to perpetuate further the social and economic stagnation and political paralysis. It is imperative to review the relationship of the NPF with the government, to consider the concept of 'the leading party in society and the state,' and to review any other concept that excludes the people from political life; and
8. Abolition of legal discrimination against women.

Stemming from a desire to participate constructively in the process of social development and reform, we call for the establishment of committees for reviewing civil society in all sectors of Syrian life as a continuation and development of the concept of 'friends of civil society.' From a sense of national responsibility and independence, we hope that these committees will play their part in overcoming the negativity and demoralization and emerge from the stagnation that

doubles our backwardness in relation to the pace of international development. Through these committees, we hope to take the step to a free, independent, and democratic society that takes part in laying the foundations for a renaissance that will ensure a better future for the Arab nation.

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