

Macquarie University,  
Sydney, NSW

**Testing Tilly's Theory of Collective Violence Against the  
Syrian Conflict: A Model Framework?**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree  
of

**MASTERS OF RESEARCH**

In the  
Department of Security Studies and Criminology

by  
Rifaie Tammam  
BA

30<sup>th</sup> June 2016

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my martyred father, Mohammad Tammam, a victim of the state-sanctioned violence in Syria. Your comforting and encouraging words have always remained with me even after you were gone. You had always believed in me and have been a great role model to follow. I miss you, Dad!

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable support and contribution of my supervisor, Dr. Adam Lockyer. Without your guidance, patience and faith in me during the hard times, this thesis would not have been possible. I would like to thank Prof. John Simons and the CARA team for giving me this great opportunity to study at Macquarie University. I would like to thank Dr. Florence Chiew for her academic support with research writing. Special thanks are due to Albert Lim, Mo Haque, and Brendan for their mentoring and support.

I would like to thank my mom and sister for always being there for me and for encouraging me to undertake this research overseas. Without your love and support, I would not be where I am today. I would like to express my thanks to my colleagues, Ruth Tregale and Sonal Singh for their support, flexibility, and understanding during the last few months of completing my thesis, while working with them on a different project.

I would like to also thank my amazing friends for their questions, revisions, and comments on this thesis. I would specifically like to thank Delphine Rodrik, Nellika Little, Macey Stapleton, Yasar Fattoom, Rafif Jouejati, Jan Forrester, Mary Moyosore Taiwo, Deborah Amos, Charlotte Loris-Rodionoff, Rukiye Denizz, Alexander Fischer, and Esther Goldschlager. Your insightful feedback was invaluable to completing this thesis. I really appreciate your support and patience.

## Table of Contents

<b>Statement of Authorship.....</b>	<b>6</b>
-------------------------------------	----------

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>7</b>
----------------------	----------

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction: .....</b>	<b>8</b>
---------------------------------------	----------

<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review: .....</b>	<b>11</b>
--	-----------

Relational Analysis of Collective Violence

Types of Collective Violence: their processes and mechanisms

Politics and Violence: political actors and identities

Variations in Regimes and Interactions

Correspondence Between Regimes and Violence

Types of Collective Violence

- Violent Rituals
- Coordinated Destruction
- Opportunism
- Scattered Attacks
- Broken Negotiations

<b>Chapter 3: Syria Case Study: .....</b>	<b>28</b>
---	-----------

Setting the Scene: Syrian politics

Political Interactions Under the Assad Regime

Political Identities and Actors

Types of Violence in the Syrian Conflict

1. Broken Negotiations
2. Coordinated Destruction
3. Scattered attacks
4. Opportunism

5. Violent Rituals

**Chapter 4: Analysis: .....47**

Accounting for Variations in Salience and Coordination

Activation and Incorporation

Role of Technology and Media

External Support and Its Consequences

Limitations of Tilly's Theory

**Chapter 5: Conclusion..... 62**

**Works Cited..... 64**

## **Statement of Authorship**

I state that this thesis titled, “Testing Tilly’s Theory of Collective Violence Against the Syrian Conflict: A Model Framework?” is truly my original work. This work was done wholly during my candidature for the degree of Masters of Research at Macquarie University. Neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted for any other degree or at any other university. Other sources or materials consulted are clearly cited throughout the thesis and listed in the bibliography. Where I have quoted from the work of others, sources are always given. With the exception of these quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work.

30<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Rifaie Tammam

## **Abstract:**

This thesis explores the patterns of collective violence in the Syrian conflict through the lens of Charles Tilly's theory on the subject. Since its publication in 2003, Tilly's *The Politics of Collective Violence* has been one of the most influential works within the social sciences on violence and contentious politics. The thesis assesses the extent to which Tilly's conceptual framework explains the patterns of collective violence in Syria, highlighting both its continuing relevance as well as some of its limitations. This thesis argues that evidence from the Syrian conflict suggests that Tilly's framework does not adequately address the influence of external powers and the role of technology and social media. As such, this research aims to strengthen and update Tilly's framework by combining fresh insights on the pattern of collective violence from the Syrian conflict and other scholars of international relations.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Scholars, journalists, politicians and the general public alike have all struggled with conceptualising the current Syrian conflict. Leading scholars such as Mary Kaldor, have described it as a “new war” (Kaldor, 2013, p. 53), while Amnesty International has despairingly labelled it “the worst humanitarian crisis of our time” (International, 2015b). Others have maintained that events in Syria constitute not only a civil war but also a genocide, an opinion influenced by the systematic use of chemical weapons against civilians (Carey, 2013). The unprecedented levels of collective violence in the Syrian conflict (Nations, 2014) have presented a challenge for critical analysis. This thesis addresses this challenge by applying sociologist Charles Tilly’s theory of collective violence to the Syrian conflict and questions to what extent Tilly’s framework adequately accounts for the violent episodes evident in the conflict to date.

Tilly’s theory of collective violence is outlined in *The Politics of Collective Violence* and has been highly influential in political science. Tilly was “among the most distinguished of contemporary social scientists” (Calhoun, 2008), whose theory “offers an arsenal of testable hypotheses that have the capacity to render intelligible the actions of statesmen, terrorists, and road-ragers who turn to violence as a means of staking claims, asserting identity, or exacting retribution” (Zwerman, 2004). Tilly’s theory draws significantly on contentious politics and claim-making and poses central questions such as, what is the relationship between politics and violence, and what is the role of governments, political players and identities in explaining the variations of collective violent episodes?

This research also draws on research and insights from other scholars of international relations to account for the internationalisation of the Syrian conflict, as evidenced by the increasing number of countries that have become entangled in the conflict. Whenever possible, these conceptual and theoretical understandings of the conflict are applied to empirical evidence from scholarly sources. However, as the Syrian conflict is ongoing, and its violent stories are still unfolding, the research also includes newspaper articles, YouTube videos, activists’ accounts and my own personal observations as a reporter for the conflict while I was in Syria during the first two-and-a-half years of the Syrian conflict.

What *are* the prevailing patterns of violence in Syria, and what accounts for their variations and increasing magnitude? How new or unique are they when compared with other conflicts? Despite the increasingly complex and internationalised conflict in Syria, I argue



that the patterns of violence it has produced are not dissimilar to those found in other internal conflicts in recent history. Instead, technology and external support exercised a larger influence on these patterns and contributed to internationalising the conflict.

Despite the large number of domestic and foreign actors in the Syrian conflict, I identify five dominant types of collective violence based on Tilly's framework: broken negotiations, coordinated destruction, scattered attacks, opportunism and violent rituals. Broken negotiations and coordinated destruction are arguably the most prevalent types of collective violence in the Syrian conflict and are used by virtually all involved actors. It is for this reason that a significant portion of this research focuses on exploring and accounting for these types of violence and their variations, including demonstrations and lethal contests. Other types are almost exclusive to particular groups. For instance, violent rituals have been used among extremist groups such as "the Islamic State" (IS) as a way to consolidate the group's control through sowing fear in the areas under its control. On the other hand, data suggests that the mainstream opposition groups as well as the Assad government have rarely engaged in forms of violent rituals. I argue that the relative absence of violent rituals can be in part attributed to the harm it would render to these two actors' political standing in the eyes of the international community, on whose support these two actors desperate rely. IS, on the other hand, appears to have no regard for its position in the international community and employs violent rituals to broadcast its cruelty and spread fear among its internal and external enemies.

The findings of this paper conclude that Tilly's theory of collective violence continues to provide a useful theoretical framework to analyse the intricate dynamics of violent episodes in Syria through outlining the prevailing types of collective violence and accounting for variations, despite some slight differences. However, this research also suggests that the theory falls short of accounting for the role that technology, media and external support have played in these episodes and the conflict as a whole, which became increasingly internationalised as a consequence. This is hardly surprising, considering that the theory was written during a time when technology and social media did not play as much a revolutionary role in political dynamics and ensuing violent contention as it does in our time. This finding has significant implications for policy makers as it informs understanding of the current dominant patterns of collective violence and emphasises the role of technology and external support, which was deemphasised by Tilly, in the generation and escalation of violent episodes.

This thesis progresses as follows: the first chapter focuses primarily on introducing and analysing the various elements of Tilly's theory while contextualising it within the fields of contentious politics and collective violence. It examines some key concepts such as contentious politics, social processes and mechanisms, which are crucial to understanding Tilly's theory. The theory then details the five relevant types of collective violence that Tilly identifies, based on two variations: salience of damaging acts and coordination among the violent actors. Special attention is paid to the role that governments play in collective violence in most conflicts. The second chapter, the Syria Case, introduces the case study and tests Tilly's theory against the Syrian conflict. It sets the scene in Syria prior to the conflict through examining the political life under the Assad regime, and how it transitioned from a high-capacity undemocratic regime to a medium-low-capacity undemocratic regime, as it started losing control of the population and some areas with the outbreak of the Syrian uprising.

The thesis then identifies five common types of collective violence in the Syrian conflict, which are introduced approximately in the order in which they occurred: broken negotiations, coordinated destruction, scattered attacks, opportunism and violent rituals. Examples from the Syrian conflict are cited to demonstrate how each type of violence manifested itself in Syria. The third chapter analyses the data presented in the Syria Case chapter and compares it with Tilly's observations. It emphasises some elements of his theory such as salience, coordination and subvention. It also shows how the activation of existing boundaries and social stories and the creation of new connections among social sites by political entrepreneurs and violent specialists contributed to increasing the levels of salience and coordination in many instances of violent episodes in Syria. Finally, it seeks to demonstrate the theory's limitations in accounting for the role of technology, media, and external support in collective violence, and how these interlinked elements contributed to the internationalisation of the Syrian conflict.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Before delving into Charles Tilly's theory of collective violence, this section introduces some of the key concepts Tilly used in his theory. The difference between individual violence and collective violence will be outlined first, followed by Tilly's relational analysis. The relationship between politics and violence and the role of political actors and their identities will pave the way for understanding various interactions under different regime types before laying out in detail the five different types of collective violence according to Tilly: violent rituals, coordinated destruction, opportunism, scattered attacks, and broken negotiations.

### **Relational Analysis of Collective Violence**

According to the World Health Organisation's 2002 report on violence and health (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, & Zwi, 2002, p. 5), "Collective violence is the instrumental use of violence by people who identify themselves as members of a group against another group or set of individuals, in order to achieve political, economic or social objectives. It takes a variety of forms: armed conflicts within or between states; genocide, repression and other human rights abuses; terrorism; and organized violent crime." Tilly (2003, pp. 3-4) identifies three criteria to differentiate collective violence from individual violence. For an act of violence to be collective, it has to (a) include at least two people who (b) cause physical damage to people or things, and (c) there has to be some degree of coordination among the perpetrators of damage. Thus, according to this understanding, collective violence excludes individual acts of violence such as robbery or violent accidents. Other sociologists regard collective violence as a form of social control or "self-help by a group [...] which typically defines and responds to conduct as deviant" (de la Roche, 1996, p. 97).

Tilly's theory of collective violence is regarded as "a fairly straightforward application of the DOC [Dynamics of Contention] analytical program" (Hogan, 2004). In his theory, Tilly adopts the relational analysis, focusing on the social processes and mechanisms that generate various patterns of collective violence. This deviated from mainstream understanding of the time which could be classified into two groups: the behaviour school and the ideas school. The behaviour school of thought claimed that people's "motives, impulses, and opportunities" were the drivers of collective violence and argued that collective violence is

nothing but the sum of individual action. The idea school of thought, on the other hand, emphasised that “beliefs, concepts, rules, goals and values” play a role in individual and collective action (Tilly, 2003, p. 5).

Other scholars of violence offer a more holistic perspective relying on ideas, behaviour and social relations to account for the nature and trajectory of violence. For instance, Classic Marxists, with their focus on interests, saw violence as promoting and resulting from class interests (Tilly, 2003, p. 6), while others such as David Courtwright (2009) place more significance on ideas and behaviour than social relations. Although such compromises to combine different perspectives are widespread, a sharp divide exists amongst scholars of collective violence on the relationship between and emphasis on ideas, behaviours and social relations (Aya, *Revolutions, & Violence*, 1990). The relational school of thought places ideas and behaviours at a level of secondary significance, because for them, social interactions produce ideas, and opportunities function in the course of ongoing social interchanges among people (Tilly, 2003, pp. 5-6).

Tilly’s relational analysis was a departure from the traditional notion that violence was driven by “bad genes, poor child rearing, mental illness, personality traits, or individual motivation” (Deutscher, 2005, p. 236). Tilly was also highly commended for pushing the boundaries in exploring countless types of collective violence, for his critical analysis that established causality and insisting that all forms of violence amount to collective action. While he was duly criticised for not offering strategies to prevent violence (Deutscher, 2005, pp. 236-239), Tilly (2003, p. 9) points out that efforts to prevent or reduce violence should focus on changing and improving relationships among people and groups, rather than engaging in a war of ideas or attempting to constrain people’s impulses, as most scholars on violence usually recommend. A few analysts of collective violence such as Moore (1978) regard religions as playing a critical role in collective violence through promoting ideas that justify killing others. Tilly (2003, p. 8) makes no attempt to object to this notion. Rather, he chooses to highlight the social processes underlining the acquisition of ideas that promote violence and the actual participation in violent acts, as most people who justify violence theoretically do not necessarily engage in it.

## **Types of Collective Violence: their processes and mechanisms**

To understand why collective violence varies significantly in shape and form and continuously evolves from one form to another, Tilly presents two variations: “salience of short-run damage and extent of coordination among violent actors.” Salience can be defined by the degree of damage existing during interactions, while coordination entails having at least two people who coordinate among themselves during the interaction. Based on the two above-mentioned dimensions, Tilly identifies six types of collective violence: violent rituals, coordinated destruction, opportunism, brawls, scattered attacks, and broken negotiations (2003, pp. 13-16). Other scholars use different variations to categorise types of collective violence. Sociologist Roche (1996, p. 97), for instance, distinguishes types of collective violence based on their “system of liability (individual or collective) and degree of organisation (higher or lower).” Employing these two variations, Roche outlines four types of collective violence: terrorism, rioting, vigilantism, and lynching. The following pages demonstrate how Tilly’s six types of collective violence are more inclusive than Roche’s. For example, lynching is a form of violent rituals, while terrorism is a form of coordinated destruction according to Tilly (2003, p. 14). His classification of collective violent episodes will serve as a useful theoretical tool with which to produce a comprehensive overview of collective violence in the Syrian conflict.

Tilly’s types of collective violence have no precise boundaries, and in any given social interaction, there can be a rapid shift from one type to another. For example, a gang fight (violent rituals) can turn into a small-scale war (coordinated destruction). Tilly identifies these types based on the processes generating them, rather than the perpetrators’ motivations behind engaging in these types. Tilly’s emphasis on processes resembles observations made by other scholars such as Stathis N. Kalyvas (2006, p. 21), who argues that “many anthropologists, NGO activists, and journalists tend to perceive violence as an outcome rather than a process, often effectively “black-boxing” it.” Kalyvas notes that “the focus is on instances of violence rather than the complex, and often invisible, nonviolent actions and mechanisms that precede and follow them.”

Tilly argues that processes such as brokerage and boundary activation play a large role in collective violence, as they often “override previously existing social relations among participants” (Tilly, 2003, p. 17). Tilly argues that changes in the salience and the degree of coordination among participants in an interaction result in a different type of collective

violence. This highlights the strong correlation between the social environment and salience. For example, higher accessibility to violent means produces a collective violence, characterised by its high salience. Revolutions and wars are not classified as separate types of collective violence because Tilly tends to identify different phases or types of collective violence in wars or revolutions. Indeed, coordinated destruction, opportunism and broken negotiations are often found in many instances of interstate wars and civil wars. For example, the Rwandan conflict, like the Syrian conflict, ranged from coordinated destruction, in the form of genocide, to violent rituals and scattered attacks (Tilly, 2003, pp. 16-18).

Tilly defines mechanisms as small-scale causes. Instead of claiming that causes such as poverty, extremism, and competitions produce collective violence, Tilly seeks to pinpoint “recurrent small-scale mechanisms” (2003, p. 20). Mechanisms can be classified into three categories: environmental, cognitive and relational. Following the relational analysis, Tilly emphasises the importance of relational mechanisms such as boundary activation, brokerage and polarization in investigating the variations of collective violence. Boundary activation includes a change in the nature of the social interchange as more emphasis is placed on the “us-them” boundary and on the differences among people from different categories. Brokerage creates a more direct connection among two sites than before. Tilly differentiates mechanisms from processes, which he defines as “sequences of mechanisms that produce similar effects across a wide range of circumstance” (Tilly, 2003, p. 21).

Polarisation is an example of a process, whereby the social and political gap among people increases, as each side becomes more committed or extreme towards their group. Mechanisms such as brokerage and category formation come into play in the process of polarisation. Polarisation has the capacity to (a) pull groups of people to extremes, (b) increase the stakes of the competition and (c) make the us-them boundary more noticeable. For these reasons, polarisation is usually conducive to collective violence, Tilly argues (2003, pp. 20-22). The central role of polarisation in collective violence was also highlighted by other scholars who adopt purely sociological paradigms in their analysis of collective violence. Sociologist Roberta Senechal de la Roche contends that the level of polarisation influences “conflict structures,” which are in turn associated with collective violence (de la Roche, 1996). The Syria Case and Analysis chapters demonstrate how the process of polarisation has played a pivotal role in collective violent episodes in the Syrian conflict.

## **Politics and Violence: political actors and identities**

Tilly's theory on collective violence draws on previous research on contentious politics, which he defines as "discontinuous, public, collective claim-making in which one of the parties is a government" (Tilly, 2003, p. 26). Tilly regards a government with its agents as an independent actor as opposed to other actors such as the Syrian opposition in this case. He uses the term "regime" to refer to the interactions between the government, such as the Assad government in the Syrian conflict, and other actors, such as the Syrian opposition (Tilly, 2003, pp. 28-29). While Tilly's distinction between the terms might seem blurry, especially as the "government" and "regime" might be used interchangeably at times, the distinction proves to be useful in this research. If the emphasis is on the Syrian state as a system with its configuration of performances and interactions with other actors, I will use the term "regime," while I will use the term "government" to emphasise the role played by the Assad government and its agents as an independent actor.

In an earlier work co-authored with Sidney Tarrow, Tarrow and Tilly argue that "contentious politics involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or program" (Tilly, 2007, p. 4). Tilly suggests that collective violence is part of contentious politics because the involved parties keep making claims, which influence the other's interests and because of the important role that governments play, and the relationship they have with each side of the contention. Governments play a significant role in large-scale collective violence, as they get involved in the contention as "claimants, objects of claims, or stakeholders" (Tilly, 2003, p. 26). Tilly stresses the role that the overall political life often plays in various forms of collective violence and the intersection between violent and peaceful forms of political life (Tilly, 2003, pp. 28-30). This insight will be relevant in the Syrian case.

In theory, anyone can become involved in contentious claim making (contentious politics), but in practice, most actors are part of a larger organised network, with shared stories, and set rules governing the relationship among members of that group and with members from other groups. These networks usually go by other names such as Women's Rights or Workers United. These constitute political identities, which include the "us-them boundary," shared stories about those boundaries, and social relations within and across

the boundaries. These identities resemble the platform for claim making (Tilly, 2003, pp. 31-33).

By activating boundaries and social relations, brokering new connections between violent and non-violent actors, coordinating people's efforts into coercive campaigns, and representing these people through violent threats, political entrepreneurs greatly influence the shape and character of collective violence. Political entrepreneurs constitute important political actors, and their work generates systems of inequality through exploiting people's efforts and resources. Political entrepreneurs create or activate the us-them boundary between insiders and outsiders, eliminate competition inside their category, take advantage of the resources and utilise them to consolidate their control and further the network's claims (Tilly, 2003, pp. 34-35).

Specialists in violence are another key political actor type and often overlap with political entrepreneurs. Specialists in violence can be divided into two main types: governmental, such as police officers and soldiers; and non-governmental, such as gang leaders, thugs and mercenaries. Despite having control over coercive means, specialists of violence generally rely on intimidation and using these violent means to threaten their rivals with violence without actually engaging in it (Tilly, 2003, pp. 35-39). The critical role that specialists in violence play in conflicts can be exemplified by the involvement of Hezbollah fighters to support the Assad government, which has had a direct impact on the outcome of major battles with opposition groups, as the Syria Case chapter demonstrates.

## **Variations in Regimes and Interactions**

Tilly argues that governmental capacity and democracy have direct effects on the character of collective violence. Governmental capacity is the degree of control that government agents enjoy over a country's resources, people and actions. Democracy refers to the degree of protection that the population have from the government, equal rights within the governmental agents and the control that the population exercise over the country's resources. Government-sponsored collective violence increases when governmental capacity is high because governmental agents monitor the majority of claim-making interactions among the population, especially those involving specialists in violence (Tilly, 2003, pp. 41-44).



Under any political system, people engage in various forms of contentious claim making. The available set of performances for political actors in a given regime is called repertoire of contention. Repertoires serve as templates for political actors and help them to coordinate their efforts, expect the likely consequences of their actions and interpret the implications of general political events. Tilly states that “repertoires therefore provide templates for interaction, bases for collective memory, and switchpoints for collective struggle” (2003, p. 46). From a government’s perspective, interactions are classified into three categories: prescribed, tolerated and forbidden. Prescribed interactions include national customs such as singing the country’s anthem. Celebrating the victory of a national football team is an example of a tolerated interaction. Forbidden interactions are those actions which harm the government such as attacking governmental facilities or personnel. Based on capacity and democracy variations, Tilly identifies four types of regimes:

1. High-capacity undemocratic
2. Low-capacity undemocratic
3. High-capacity democratic
4. Low-capacity democratic

Tilly (2003, p. 47) discusses at length the variations of interactions in each of the four types. While insightful, the scope of this study will be limited to exploring the different interactions under high-capacity undemocratic and low-capacity undemocratic regimes, which the Syrian regime qualifies for, as the next chapters demonstrate. The table below (Tilly, 2003, pp. 47-53) shows the proportion of the various kinds of interactions within high-capacity undemocratic and low-capacity undemocratic regimes as well as some expectations.

<b>Types of Interaction</b>	<b>Low-capacity undemocratic regime: e.g. Somalia</b>	<b>High-capacity undemocratic regime: e.g. Iran</b>
<b>Tolerated</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a large array of performances due to the regime’s inability to monitor them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>few performances</li> <li>are used to the maximum</li> </ul>
<b>Prescribed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>concentrated control by regime</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>wide array of performances</li> </ul>

<b>Forbidden</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• severe public penalties for offences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• many if not most performances</li> </ul>
<b>Contentious</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mostly happen outside prescribed performances</li> <li>• also happen in the course of few tolerated and forbidden performances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• minimal due to repressive measures and surveillance by regime</li> <li>• mostly pushed to the forbidden territory</li> </ul>
<b>Expectations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• widespread and free use of violence by the government and its agents against offenders</li> <li>• violent means widely distributed among actors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• threats to use violence are widely used by governmental agents.</li> <li>• governmental agents are heavily involved in the occurring collective violence, which is exaggerated and widely broadcast.</li> </ul>

**Table 2.1: Types of Interactions in Two Regimes**

## **Correspondence Between Regimes and Violence**

Tilly draws some conclusions based on his division of regime types and proposes that an array of prescribed and tolerated performances in any given regime has a major effect on “loci of collective claim making” (Tilly, 2003, p. 50). He also states that most forms of collective violence originate from non-violent claim making. For example, some forbidden performances turn into collective violence in high-capacity undemocratic regimes because the government tolerates only a few performances, and that pushes people making contentious claims towards the forbidden performances, which might likely take a violent turn (Tilly, 2003, p. 50). The Syrian conflict, for instance, began as peaceful interactions (anti-government demonstrations) but became increasingly violent as the conflict dragged on.

The transition from these demonstrations to the full-scale conflict is discussed in full in the Syria Case chapter.

Tilly notes that salience surges when (a) uncertainty about the outcome rises, (b) the stakes increase, (c) violent specialists are the political actors involved and (d) during absence of third party, which holds stable relations with the involved actors. These conditions are influenced by the mechanisms of activation and suppression of various political identities, which are also influenced by the performances that a regime tolerates, prescribes and forbids. The extent of coordination among actors also rises as new connections are created, the outcome is determined by the government and distinct boundaries among categories become more widespread. Similarly, these conditions are strongly influenced by incorporation and separation (2003, p. 51). Tilly's observations make us realise that salience is closely associated with specialists in violence, while coordination has a strong link with political entrepreneurs.

Based on these conclusions, Tilly argues that low-capacity undemocratic regimes have the highest levels of violence. For example, if a high-capacity undemocratic regime suddenly loses capacity, violence is expected to rise as was the case in eastern Europe in the mid-80s (Tilly, 2003, p. 52). Tilly's observation that levels of violence rise in low-capacity regimes is not novel. Other scholars, such as Black and Loche, argue that when the rule of law is absent or weak, different means of social control, such as collective violence, emerge (Black, 1976; de la Roche, 1996, p. 105). In a high-capacity regime, violent specialists backed by the government inflict most of the damage because non-governmental specialists have less space to operate than in low-capacity regimes (Tilly, 2003, p. 75). The Syria Case illustrates both situations, as the Assad regime transitioned from a high-capacity regime to a low-capacity regime from the start of the conflict.

Tilly notes everyone has multiple identities, and each identity can turn into a boundary. An American person, for instance, can be a Democrat, student, Christian, white and a member of a certain cause or organization. When a certain boundary is activated, it selects one of these identities, which becomes more prominent than the other opposing ones. During the Rwandan genocide, the us-them boundary overrode the pre-existing relations among Rwandans and instigated huge waves of violence during that period. Thus, as the us-them boundary becomes more prominent, salience and coordination of interactions increase as a result (Tilly, 2003, p. 76).

## **Types of Collective Violence**

Now that the key conceptual framework of Tilly's theory has been outlined, the following pages will introduce and explain five types of collective violence relevant to the Syrian conflict. Although instances of brawls, a sixth type of collective violence, may also be found in the Syrian conflict, this research will not explore it. This is largely due to the lack of information about brawls within the Syrian conflict and the difficulties in gathering documentation about examples of brawls (since, as Tilly (2003, pp. 151-169) notes, there are rarely any remaining traces or signs). These factors make it extremely challenging to qualify a violent incident as a brawl.

### *Violent Rituals*

Tilly (2003, p. 14) theorises that violent rituals entail inflicting damage by a well-organised group through adhering to a specific set of rules for the purpose of becoming the prominent group in a social site. Public executions, gang rivalries, and lynching, among many others, fall into this type of collective violence. In violent rituals, certain mechanisms and processes are at work, activating boundaries, stories and social relations, and incorporating actors and social sites in a set of performances. These processes and mechanisms include boundary activation/deactivation, polarisation and competitive display, which are displays of power by participating actors in the same social site. Other processes include monitoring, containment, and certification/ decertification. Tilly defines monitoring as the "exercise of continuous surveillance over actions within a social site," and containment as the "placement of a relatively impermeable perimeter around an actor, set of actors, place, or other social site." Certification happens when external actors validate actors, their performances and their claims, while decertification occurs when these external actors withdraw such validation. Sporting teams can illustrate this as players who may be friends outside the field start competing against each other, with each showing their skills, while a referee closely monitors their interactions, maintaining order and penalising any illegitimate performance in the field (Tilly, 2003, pp. 84-85).

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, European state-sponsored agents lacked sufficient resources to monitor and control offenders. However, when they succeeded in catching one, the agents

used to stage well-organised shows of violent rituals, advertising their capacity and scaring any potential offenders. “Depending on the offense, they paraded offenders through streets in humiliating garbs with denigrating placards or symbols, exhibited them in stocks where spectators could pelt them and curse them, broke them on the wheel, hacked off their hands” (Tilly, 2003, p. 89). Extremist groups in Syria have carried out similar violent rituals against offenders as the following chapters demonstrate.

Violent rituals are known for their limited damaging acts (Tilly, 2003, p. 84). The main difference between coordinated destruction and violent rituals is that the latter offers an exception to the general correlation between high levels of violence and high degree of coordination and salience. Overall, violent rituals produce less damage than coordinated destruction despite the high levels of coordination among the perpetrators. Four additional aspects distinguish these two forms of collective violence from each other: stakes, perimeters, scripts, and distinction between participants and monitors. The stakes in violent rituals are more or less finite, and perimeters are well defined. The scripts are stricter and more detailed, and there is a clear distinction between participants on the one hand and monitors on the other. Coordinated destruction, on the other hand, enjoys variable stakes, shifting perimeters, negotiable scripts and blurred distinction between participants and monitors or spectators. Low-capacity regimes host a larger number of violent rituals than do high-capacity regimes, which are more equipped to monitor and control such rituals (Tilly, 2003, pp. 87-93). Following the declining capacity of the Syrian regime and the ensuing chaos, extremist groups in Syria have carried out similar violent rituals against offenders, as the Syria Case chapter demonstrates.

### *Coordinated Destruction*

Coordinated destruction refers to undertaking programs of damage by specialists in violence against people and/or objects. Interstate wars, genocide and politicide are a few examples of this type of collective violence. Coordinated destruction is characterised by its high levels of salience and coordination among violent actors. It happens as boundaries, stories and social relations are activated, and various political actors and social sites are incorporated, producing a high level of damage to both persons and objects. The newly activated identities override any previous social relations, which are not closely aligned with the new identities (Tilly, 2003, p. 103). Coordinated destruction can be classified into three major types:

1. Lethal contests: characterised by the use of coercive means by at least two violent specialists that engage in violence to prevent or limit any damage inflicted by each other. Interstate wars, civil wars, guerrilla all fall into this category.
2. Campaigns of annihilation: defined as the use of coercive means by a specialist of violence that has a superior capacity to inflict harm against another entity, which is not a specialist in violence. Examples include state-sponsored violence against a particular segment of society due to its political affiliation (politicide) or its ethnic background (genocide). The stakes of this type are high since it involves a fight for collective survival and establishing political dominance over a social site.
3. Conspiratorial terror: occurs when a number of organised actors use violence to inflict damage on a much more powerful entity by using secretive measures such as kidnapping, assassinations and bombings. Its significant effect on the national and international political levels demonstrates the vulnerability of the powerful target and “shakes routine politics.” These three types are based on the level of inequality among the involved actors. In most instances, the parties involved rarely reach equality, which is why the weaker actors usually make allies or avoid direct confrontations and use other tactics to make up for the lower capacity to inflict harm (Tilly, 2003, pp. 104-105). Several instances of lethal contests, campaigns of annihilations and conspiratorial terror are presented in the Syria Case chapter to illustrate how these types of coordinated destruction have manifested themselves in the Syria conflict.

Major trends in collective violence occurred in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as civil wars, guerrilla warfare, and other forms of internal struggles replaced the more conventional interstate wars according to Tilly. As a result, the political practice of subvention emerged. Subvention happens when a state supports another state's opposition as a means to increase its influence. Sudanese president Omar el-Bashir's support for the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda is an example of the practice of subvention (Tilly, 2003, pp. 105-108). The practice of subvention is considerably relevant in the Syrian conflict and is discussed in the following chapters. In coordinated destruction, at least one actor or set of actors are specialists of violence. The role of political entrepreneurs on both sides in a coordinated destruction episode is crucial, as they connect and represent fragmented groups and activate relevant boundaries and stories in order to initiate violence among the two parties (Tilly, 2003, p. 110).

## *Opportunism*

Opportunism can be defined as the pursuit of prohibited action by a group of people who take advantage of the lack of security or presence of oppression to commit acts of violence. Examples include kidnapping, hostage taking, and looting. Oppression, failed states, conflicts, and civil wars are all environments where opportunism flourishes, providing the conditions for actors to engage in various forms of opportunistic violence. Opportunism is distinguished from other types of collective violence in its high salience coupled with low levels of coordination. Thus, it relies heavily on the activation mechanism of existing boundaries and stories. Government-initiated opportunism happens when governmental agents engage in opportunistic violence, which would cause them punishment if they get caught by their superiors (Tilly, 2003, pp. 131-133). Low-capacity regimes, particularly undemocratic ones, suffer from a large array of opportunistic violence, as the opportunities increase for violent specialists to take advantage of the government's lack of control of resources and people, facilitating racketeering and profiting (Tilly, 2003, pp. 134-135).

Although civil war is a subdivision of coordinated destruction, opportunistic violence occurs within it and on the periphery, as individuals or groups take part in rape, plunder and other forms of opportunistic violence. Tilly cites Rwanda's conflict between 1990 and 1994 as a case in point, as forms of opportunistic violence such as rape, revenge and extortion occurred during this period. The conflict mainly involved a power struggle between the state-sponsored Hutu army forces and the revolutionary Tutsi forces. Tilly identifies a bundle of four mechanisms underlining opportunistic violence in Rwanda's opportunistic violence. Three of these mechanisms are relevant to opportunistic violence within the Syrian conflict:

1. "Activation of available us-them boundaries" promoted opportunism, as political entrepreneurs played a critical role in setting and activating boundaries that corresponded to the previously existing divide between the Tutsi and the Hutu.
2. "Response to weakened, distracted, or failed repression" facilitated opportunistic violence during the Rwandan conflict especially after the central coordination fell apart and bandits and other predators spread.
3. "Signalling spirals that communicate the current feasibility and effectiveness of generally risky practices and thereby alter the readiness of participants to face the risks

in question” as many Rwandans were forced to kill their relatives. It then spread into large-scale justified killing of the Tutsi people to protect the forbidden and newly-acquired resources seized by the Hutu people (2003, pp. 141-142).

### *Scattered Attacks*

Scattered attacks occur when a group of people resort to violence as a response to hardships and challenges in an overly peaceful and small-scale interchange, such as assaulting government officials, and inflicting damage to symbolic figures or things. Low levels of coordination and salience distinguish scattered attacks from other forms of collective violence (Tilly, 2003, pp. 171-172). There are three main types of scattered attacks:

1. Skirmishes: when two relatively equal parties interact in a non-violent fashion, but their interaction produces intermittent violence.
2. Shows of force: when one group enjoys a superior reservoir of violent means than the other group in a social setting and makes a point of using these means to assert its superiority.
3. Resistance: when the weaker group responds to the use and threats of violence by a more superior group with occasional damaging acts (Tilly, 2003, p. 171).

Other distinguishing features of scattered attacks include the stable social relationships among the participants, the relatively low stakes, the presence of third party monitors, and the frequent initiation of violence by non-violent specialists (Tilly, 2003, p. 172). While state repression generally reduces most kinds of claim making, including violent ones, mounting repression can sometimes backfire and produce a large wave of collective claim making (Tilly, 2003, pp. 173-174).

Because undemocratic regimes provide fewer avenues for political action, and the repressed population have less options, scattered attacks are concentrated in undemocratic regimes. Rapid changes in governmental capacity also contribute to the rising tides of scattered attacks as “increases in capacity often threaten group survival, as governments start intruding on previous areas of protected autonomy” (Tilly, 2003, p. 174). Sudden decreases in the state’s capacity expose the authorities as vulnerable to challenges and opposition that would have had no chance otherwise, Tilly notes (2003, p. 174). The variations of salience and coordination shift constantly, which affect the emergence or mutation of scattered



attacks. For example, if salience of damaging acts and coordination increase as a result of the intervention of political entrepreneurs or specialists in violence, scattered attacks mutate into coordinated destruction or opportunism. Conversely, Tilly (2003, p. 187) argues that if the intervention of political entrepreneurs and specialists in violence stops, broken negotiations and coordinated destruction shift towards scattered attacks.

### *Broken Negotiations*

Broken negotiations happen as “various forms of collective action generate resistance or rivalry to which one or more parties respond by actions that damage persons and/or objects.” Demonstrations, governmental repression and military coups fall into this category (Tilly, 2003, p. 16). What distinguishes this category is the dominance of threats of violence over the actual infliction of violence, which occasionally occurs as well. Tilly (2003, pp. 196-218) notes that broken negotiations are characterised by their high proportion of peaceful interactions, and that violence happens as a by-product. This sets it apart from coordinated destruction, in which violence occurs more frequently. It also differs from scattered attacks as broken negotiations require more coordination among the involved players. Thus, a significant surge in the salience of damaging acts changes broken negotiations into coordinated destruction. Similarly, broken negotiations mutate into scattered attacks if there is a sharp fall in the levels of coordination among the damage doers.

Tilly (2003, pp. 196-197) emphasises the importance of broken negotiations, as most forms of collective violence occur throughout non-violent interactions. Although democracies allow multiple forms of making claims such as petitioning, striking, and boycotting, these forms produce violence for three major reasons:

1. All regimes have governmental agents who are responsible for containing, monitoring and even repressing public claim making. With access to violent means, these agents sometimes use force against claimants who defy them through occupying public spaces or destroying properties. These agents inflict most damage to persons or properties in public violence.
2. Various forms of public claim making, such as protests against social inequality are mostly about serious issues that separate claimants from the government and its supporters, who usually react to these claims with the backing of governmental or nongovernmental entities.

3. Most of these claim making forms concern identity claims, which Tilly (2003, p. 197) defines as “the public assertion that a group of a constituency it represents is worthy, united, numerous, and committed (WUNC)” Demonstrations, public meetings and vigils demonstrate a group’s WUNC and send strong signals to other rival groups including the government, which feel challenged or threatened by that group and react to these claims, resulting in violence.

For the most part, contention in broken negotiations centres around issues that the contending parties compete for in a peaceful way. The common processes and mechanisms promoting broken negotiations are certification-decertification, polarisation, and brokerage (Tilly, 2003, pp. 196-198). Demonstrations are probably the most common form of broken negotiations and characterised by their members’ disciplined behaviour such as gathering, marching, and voicing a group’s collective will. Demonstrations are comprised of deliberate assembly in a public symbolic arena, demonstrating numbers and a stance verbally, in a printed format or other means. Demonstrations also show the group’s determination through disciplined behaviour in one location or moving to different locations in an organised manner. Tilly argues that demonstrations show WUNC, which are used to make two types of collective claims: (a) “existence claims that a certain political actor exists or has a right to exist [and] (b) program claims are that a political actor or set of actors supports a program” (2003, p. 201).

These two claims complement each other, but demonstrations differ in the degree of emphasis placed on either claim. Existence claims emphasise the group’s political identity and signal its strength as a major player in the political scene, while program claims show support or opposition towards another political player, entity or action. Demonstrations are “a means of drawing forbidden or divisive issues, demands, grievances, and actors into public politics,” Tilly observes (2003, p. 204). While prohibiting people to assemble and threats of arrests decrease the likelihood and the magnitude of demonstrations, the probability of violent clashes between some protesters and the police rises, Tilly observes (2003, p. 206).

Tilly’s conceptual framework, especially his model of political process, will be key for outlining and analysing various types of collective violence in the Syrian conflict. I will apply the framework to account for the use of some types of collective violence by certain actors rather than other types, and to explain the transition from one type of collective violence to another as a function of the regime type and its underlying mechanisms and processes. Other elements in Tilly’s theory such as the regime’s capacity and degree of democratisation, the

role of identities, political entrepreneurs and violent specialists are also important for the analysis of variations in collective violence in the Syrian conflict. However, external support given to governments faced by internal opposition and the role of technology and media are not considered in Tilly's theory. The next two chapters have drawn on insights from the discipline of international relations and other scholars to account for these factors.

## **Chapter 3: Syria Case Study**

This chapter introduces a case study on Syria and shows various elements of Tilly's theory manifested in the Syrian conflict. It employs Tilly's theoretical framework to analyse the different variables of collective violence. This chapter presents a structured overview of the political interactions and roles of the different domestic and international players that have become involved in Syria's contentious politics. The chapter is divided into four main sections: section one outlines Syrian politics before the Syrian uprising; section two examines the political interactions under the government of President Bashar Assad; section three moves to examine the various political identities and actors in the Syrian conflict; and section four introduces the five most common types of collective violence and illustrates each type with corresponding violent episodes from the Syrian conflict.

### **Setting the Scene: Syrian politics**

Until its independence in April 1946, what is now known as Syria was ruled by various countries and empires and was subjected to several types of collective violence, the last of which were the colonial French military campaigns against the capital Damascus between 1920 and 1945 (Polk, 2013). Between 1946 and 1970, Syria's politics were wrought with coups d'état and political turmoil amidst rising nationalism and the birth of the Baath Party. Hafez Assad, the party leader, came to power in 1970 following a military coup and placed a firm authoritarian grip on the country (Zahler, 2009). This is perhaps best shown by his actions in 1982 in addressing perceived threats by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Baath Party's main political enemy. The Syrian government imposed a month-long siege on the city of Hama, the Muslim Brotherhood's headquarters, and carried out a campaign of annihilation against both Muslim Brotherhood supporters and civilians. Amnesty International estimated that nearly 25,000 people were killed in this campaign (International, 2012).

Bashar Assad came to power following the death of his father in 2000 and has presided over Syria ever since. Despite the new president's initiating some reforms, Syria suffered from extreme poverty towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Social and economic challenges such as rising unemployment, increasing economic hardship, and stifled political life spread discontent among large sections of Syrian society.

The regimes of both Hafez and Bashar Assad were authoritarian in nature, as the Baath Party dominated domestic political life during their reigns, imprisoning or expelling any opposition to their rule. The two consecutive rulers had a firm grip on military forces, government resources and the population until early 2011, making them high-capacity undemocratic regimes.

Inspired and emboldened by the initially successful revolutions in other Arab countries like Tunisia and Egypt, thousands of Syrians took to the streets in 2011 to protest the dire economic situation and political corruption and to demand more freedom. Met by violence from the government security forces, the protesters' numbers grew dramatically and their demands expanded to include the overthrow of Bashar Assad. As the regime's crackdown on revolutionaries ramped up, members of the Syrian regular army began to defect to form the nucleus of the Free Syrian Army, which also included civilians who took up arms against the government forces. Dozens of armed opposition groups eventually formed; while they lacked a central military command, most of them coordinated their military efforts against the Assad government's forces nonetheless. As the armed resistance seized control of large swathes of the country, the Assad government lost control of major resources and the population in these areas, while still maintaining a relatively firm control over its military apparatus.

During this process, the Assad regime became a medium-low-capacity regime. According to Tilly's insights (2003, pp. 52-75), this environment can anticipate a rise in levels of violence especially by non-governmental specialists in violence, as the Assad government started losing capacity. This is exactly what happened, as violence increased in frequency and scale: the Assad government suffered from heavy losses by the armed opposition and lost control over the population and resources in parts of the country, including many cities in northern Syria (BBC, 2012).

### **Political Interactions Under the Assad Regime**

As a high-capacity undemocratic regime prior to 2011, the Assad regime banned most forms of claim-making. In 1973, the Baath Party amended the Syrian constitution, making it the only party permitted to lead the country. Despite changing this law in 2012, it had no effect on the ground, as the government and the armed opposition forces were at war

(Monitoring, 2012). Freedom of expression and the right of assembly were among the interactions prohibited by the Assad regimes as well. The Assad regime maintained a large set of prescribed performances, including singing the Baathist anthem in primary and high school, teaching Baathist ideology as a compulsory subject to all students at secondary school and universities, and a two-year compulsory military service for all males above 18 years of age. The few performances tolerated by the two Assad regimes were used to the maximum by the population. These tolerated performances included the right to worship and the right to own land and conduct business, as long as none of these performances threatened the interests of governmental officials and agents.

As is the case with other high-capacity undemocratic regimes, the Assad regime deployed threats of violence extensively and carried out these threats when necessary. Horrific stories of torture and rape of political prisoners in the government's jail cells were part of the natural upbringing of most Syrians during the Assad family's rule (Ungor, 2013). When small-scale brawls along sectarian lines took place, Syrian governmental agents intervened with deadly force and established security and restored order in a short period of time. These brawls and the government show of force used to be broadcast widely on the Syrian-state media and through word of mouth, reflecting Tilly's expectations of high-capacity undemocratic regimes (2003, p. 53).

Just before protests broke out in March 2011, government agents increased their surveillance of the population and reinforcements were added to the security branches in a show of force and a warning for any potential anti-government protests. These measures, however, did not prevent people from protesting. Government agents continued their violent threats, as they shot at peaceful protesters in the first months of the uprising. The prohibited performances remained in effect but were monitored and contained more forcefully by governmental security agents, especially freedom of expression and the right of assembly. However, most people felt empowered to discuss politics within small circles (Ungor, 2013). The range of tolerated performances slightly increased, as government agents were not able to monitor the entire population's political discussions. The regime was forced to ignore some previously prohibited performances as long as these discussions were not held openly and did not address Assad's position. For instance, people began to feel more comfortable speaking about the corruption of some governmental officials and agents but did not dare to speak about the corruption of Assad's inner circle.

When met with strong opposition from the people, and as the revolution became increasingly militarized, the Assad regime gradually lost its capacity to control citizens. Furthermore, the regime's set of prescribed, tolerated and forbidden performances changed depending on the geographical area and time. For instance, sieges were imposed in areas controlled by rebels, and shelling targeted residential areas as punishment for engaging in forbidden performances, including anti-government protests and ambushing governmental agents by the opposition's armed wing (Droz-Vincent, 2014, p. 51; Ungor, 2013). In other words, the Assad government was forced to turn a blind eye to forbidden performances due to its inability to prevent them but used indiscriminate shelling against the larger population as punishment. Other prescribed and tolerated performances were disregarded by the population in rebel-held areas, as the government lost the capacity to enforce them, such as military subscription and singing the Baathist anthem.

In government-controlled areas, by contrast, forbidden performances were strictly enforced, as government agents concentrated their resources on surveying the people in these areas, making it extremely difficult for people to stage protests or engage in any forbidden performances. Other prescribed performances were still observed by people in these areas. Surprisingly, the tolerated performances increased, as the regime changed the constitution prohibiting the formation of other parties alongside the National Progressive Front. For the first time in decades, two presidential candidates competed against Bashar Assad in the last presidential elections in 2012 (Fares, 2014). These measures did not carry any substance, however, as the two candidates were reportedly supporters of Assad and were just utilized to demonstrate free and democratic elections. Unsurprisingly, Assad won the election with 90% of the votes (Guardian, 2014). Other tolerated performances included more space given to people to discuss current political issues. The corruption of the security forces and some ministers, for instance, became widely discussed in regime-held areas. Insulting the president or supporting the revolution in any manner, however, remained forbidden performances.

## **Political Identities and Actors**

Under a one-party regime rule and due to stifled political life, ethnic and religious identities played an important role in the lives of the general population. The four main identities in the Syrian population are the ruling Alawites, an offshoot of the Shia Muslim sect (12%),

Sunni Muslims (74%), Christians (10%), Druze (3%), and a small minority of Ismailis (Bureau of Democracy, 2006; Reuters, 2012).

During the Syrian uprising, the Syrian population became divided mainly along one political line, in terms of their stance towards the Syrian uprising. Syrians were labelled as either pro-regime or pro-revolution, and this label sometimes meant the difference between life and death. Political entrepreneurs, especially political dissidents in exile, also played a large role in defining the new identities and the narratives attached to them and in drawing the lines separating the boundaries among these identities. Within the new pro-Assad versus. pro-revolution division (Sands, 2012), people greatly differed on the extent of their support of Assad or the opposition, depending on the person's ideology, ethnicity, and religious background. The Analysis chapter discusses how the Assad government has played on religious and sectarian divisions to support its narrative of the conflict. It also examines how external actors have exercised major influence on these identities and on the conflict in Syria as a whole, through providing financial, diplomatic, military, and humanitarian support to both sides of the conflict.

The main actors in the Syrian conflict today, five years after the uprising began, are the Assad government, the opposition, Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN), the "Islamic State" (IS) and the People's Protection Units (YPG). Despite its loose label, the term "opposition" is used in this research to include civilian and armed Syrian revolutionaries. In spite of the tactical and ideological differences among them, their ultimate goal of toppling the Assad government unites Syrian revolutionaries. The civilian opposition is made up of the Syrian National Coalition of Opposition Forces (SOC), the main opposition bloc representing the Syrian opposition, local and provincial councils in rebel-held areas, the Local Coordination Committees, other socio-political and religious grassroots organisations and average citizens. The armed opposition groups include the mainstream Free Syrian Army groups and more conservative Islamic groups, such as Ahrar al-Sham and Jaish al-Islam (Deeply, 2016).

JAN was formed in February 2012. It is best known for its strategic suicide attacks on governmental institutions, well-trained fighters and successful military tactics. It adopts the extremist ideology of al-Qaeda and pledges its allegiance to al-Qaeda commander Ayman al-Zawahiri. JAN's political objective is to not only overthrow the Assad government but also establish an Islamic State in Syria (Al Jazeera English, 2015; University, 2015). The Islamic State (IS), also called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS or ISIL), is an al-Qaeda-inspired



militant organisation that was formed around 2002 and was a major actor against the American occupation in Iraq. It later declined in prominence until 2011, when it became increasingly involved in the Syrian conflict. It was not until 2013 that the organisation adopted the name the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and drew additional recruits in a split from JAN. The group aims at establishing and expanding an Islamic caliphate (University, 2016). The People's Protection Units (YPG) is the armed wing of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), one of the major Kurdish opposition actors in Syria. It was founded in 2003. It is argued that it seeks to be part of a large independent Kurdish state, while others argue that it seeks to create a Kurdish federal state within the boundaries of Syria (M. Ali, 2016).

## **Types of Collective Violence in the Syrian Conflict**

As previously noted, violence accompanied the uprising from its early days, when Assad's governmental agents opened fire on peaceful protesters in the city of Daraa. As governmental agents used more violence in the hope of quelling the uprising, the revolution turned increasingly militarised, as the military deserters increased and more civilians took up arms first to defend themselves and then to drive away governmental agents from their cities (Ungor, 2013). External powers intervened, supporting either side of the conflict, adding another layer of complexity to the Syrian conflict. Since 2011, Syria has experienced various types of collective violence by several players and with varying degrees of damage. Although Tilly introduced broken negotiations as the last type of collective violence in his theory due to the dominance of non-violent interactions and the generally low levels of damage when compared with other types of collective violence, broken negotiations are introduced first in this thesis for several reasons:

First, the relationship between violent and nonviolent interactions is worthy of examination, as overall political life plays a vital role in the form and character of collective violent episodes (Tilly, 2003, pp. 27-29). Thus, understanding the dynamics of non-violent contention in the Syrian politics will allow us to know more about when and how non-violent interactions turn violent. Second, introducing broken negotiations at first will help us understand not only the context of Syria's contentious politics, but also how the Syrian non-violent social movement became increasingly militarised. It will further demonstrate how violence came to dominate the interactions between the Assad government and opposition groups from both sides, when violence originated only from the side of the Assad

government in the beginning. Coordinated destruction, with its high levels of salience and coordination, is introduced next, as lethal contests and campaigns of annihilation dominated the second phase of the Syrian conflict. Scattered attacks are then outlined, followed by opportunism, which occurred during and on the edges of the conflict. Last comes violent rituals, which appeared in the later stages of the conflict, as other foreign players emerged on the Syrian political scene and deployed various forms of violent rituals to consolidate their control.

## **1. Broken Negotiations**

Based on Tilly's observations (2003, pp. 47-53), as a high-capacity undemocratic regime in the first few months of the Syrian uprising, we should expect the Assad regime to forbid many performances and tolerate few. We should also anticipate a minimal range of contentious politics due to the regime's repressive measures and constant surveillance of the collective claim making, pushing most contentious claim making into the forbidden area. Tilly (2003, p. 206) also claims that while threats of arrests and repression usually reduce the likelihood of demonstrations, violent clashes between the protesters and the police become more likely. Until April 2011, Syria had been under emergency law for nearly 50 years. In his *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, Professor David W. Lesch a prominent scholar of Syrian politics, describes what this law entailed:

The emergency- or martial- law refers to Decree No. 51, implemented on 9 March 1963, one day after the Baath party assumed power in a coup. It declared a 'state of emergency' that was ostensibly designed to thwart the perceived military threat from Israel; but of course, it was then used to stifle and arbitrarily eliminate internal challenges to the regime. The law allowed the government to make pre-emptive arrests, override constitutional and penal code statutes, and suspend habeas corpus. It barred those arrested from filing court complaints or having a lawyer present during interrogation. In the wake of the emergency law, Supreme State Security Courts (SSSCs) were established; those could arbitrarily try and sentence those detained and arrested on the ground of protecting the state (D. W. Lesch, 2013, p. 71).

As Lesch describes, the emergency law was used to justify a large range of forbidden performances under different pretexts. Despite lifting the emergency law in April 2011 under pressure from demonstrators, the Syrian government's security forces continued their arbitrary arrests of political dissidents. Hours after the bill was passed to lift the law for example, the Syrian government's notorious Political Security Division arrested Mahmoud Issa, a prominent opposition figure (Jazeera, 2011). Along with lifting the

emergency law came a new law prohibiting demonstrations without permission from the government (B. NEWS, 2011). In effect, this meant that public demonstrations were still banned. The government's security apparatus also continued its military crackdown on demonstrators by firing at them, killing more than ten people and detaining several more one day after the Syrian president pledged to lift the emergency law (Bahrapour, 2011).

In Tilly's view (2003, p. 196), broken negotiations are characterised by their high levels of coordination among the players, low levels of salience, and the dominance of peaceful interactions, which occasionally result in violence as a by-product. By examining the demonstrations in Syria in the first few months of the Syrian uprising, it becomes clear that the situation is much more complex than that. Although high levels of coordination appeared in later months of organising protests, the early anti-government demonstrations were small, lacked coordination (Gerges, 2015, p. 131) and appeared to be more spontaneous and reactive to the government's repressive measures. Besides, violence was also much more frequent than Tilly predicted in these demonstrations. While many pro-government demonstrations were also reported, some critics of the Assad government argue that they were staged by the government's agents (Net, 2012; SANA, 2012). There is no evidence suggesting that violence occurred during these pro-government demonstrations.

Daraa, the birthplace of the Syrian uprising (D. W. Lesch, 2013, p. 55), is the ideal place to begin analysing the anti-government demonstration movement. Inspired by Arab spring slogans they saw on TV, a group of school boys drew anti-government slogans on their school walls; in response, security forces arrested and tortured nearly 15 school boys from large tribal families. When some 200 people protested and demanded the release of the boys, the regime's security forces shot at them. As more people joined in, the security forces again fired on protesters, killing at least three people on 18 March 2011. In response, angry protesters, who demanded more political freedom and lifting the emergency law, burnt some offices belonging to the Baath Party.

The regime attempted to negotiate with the city's community leaders by promising to bring those who opened fire on protesters to justice and to release the children. Although children were later released, their bodies bore marks of torture, which further infuriated the angry protesters and community leaders. The size and frequency of demonstrations continued to increase, with thousands of people flooding the streets of Daraa. Security forces stormed a

local mosque that was the springboard for protesters and killed five people. Funeral processions held for the casualties turned into protests against the regime and these “funeral protests” left victims too, initiating a vicious pattern that fuelled widespread protests across the city that spread across the whole country, including some Kurdish cities. The government responded by cutting taxes and raising salaries, while the protesters emphasised their demands of regaining their dignity in the protest the following day, which left 15 people dead from the fire of security forces. Then angry protesters brought down the statue of former Syrian president Hafez Assad, and pictures of the current Syrian president were torn. The increasing number of casualties in Daraa precipitated protests across the country, leading to more casualties at the hands of security forces and increasing demands by protesters who now demanded the overthrow of the president (Gerges, 2015, pp. 131-132; Macleod, 2011; Revolution, 2016; Sterling, 2012).

Even as the regime’s security forces frequently used violence, leaving hundreds of people dead, injured, or arrested, peaceful interactions remained widespread throughout these demonstrations, particularly in the early weeks. Negotiations between the government and its representatives, concessions that were made, and the response from protesters whether in their slogans or through their attacks on the government’s symbolic objects amount to a conversation or an intense interaction. As the government-sponsored violence against protesters increased in scale, intensity and frequency, systematic campaigns of annihilation against opposition-leaning areas, in the form of discriminate and indiscriminate mortar, tank and aerial shelling, began to dominate. Nonetheless, broken negotiations have continued to prevail until today, as protests are still staged in some areas across the country (Loveluck, 2016) despite the dominance of other forms of collective violence, namely coordinated destruction.

The demonstrators had a list of demands (program claims), but their demonstrations were mainly focused on existence claims. For the first time, Syrians felt that their voices should be heard—that they could make a difference and should be taken seriously. Through the demonstrations, the opposition sent a message to the Assad government they were worthy, united, numerous and committed (WUNC), especially as the demonstrations grew larger and became more organised. This was shown by the news coverage of the early anti-government protests in 2011: “For the first time Friday, organized groups coordinated a list of demands, including an end to torture and violence, the release of political prisoners, and setting a date for a presidential election,” NPR reported (Amos, 2011). However, unlike

Tilly's prediction, the Assad government's threats of arrests and prohibitions of assembly increased the magnitude of demonstrations, seeming to strengthen the resolve of protesters to continue until demands were met. Further, the government's use of violence against the protesters increased the frequency of demonstrations. Distinguished journalist Deborah Amos, who has extensively covered the Middle East, reported:

The bloodshed so far has only served to invigorate protesters whose demands have snowballed from modest reforms to the downfall of the 40-year Assad family dynasty. Each Friday, growing numbers of people in multiple cities have taken to the streets despite the near certainty that they would come under swift attack from security forces and shadowy pro-government gunmen known as "shabiha" (Amos, 2011).

It is worth noting that the task of containing, monitoring, and repressing the protesters was not only assigned to police forces, as Tilly observed (2003, p. 204) but also to the government's security and military forces. In his "Mass Violence in Syria: A Preliminary Analysis," Ungor states that the Syrian government's apparatus of violence is made up of a dozen institutions, including the regular army, the Political Security, the Military Security, among many others. "The army's Fourth Armored Brigade is under the command of Bashar's younger brother Maher al-Assad. This tightly knit mobile brigade has been responsible for many arrests and executions since March 2011," he writes. Another major force in the regime's violent apparatus is the Shabiha, "a group of irregular paramilitaries dressed in civilian gear and linked organically to the regime. [...] From the first days of the Syrian crisis, their crimes were well-documented in YouTube clips, leaks, confessions, defections, and interrogations" (Ungor, 2013, p. 7). This may seem to contradict Tilly's observation; however, Assad's government reliance on its military and security apparatus to quell the uprising should be understood in the light of the opposition posing a "serious political threat" resembling that which police forces pose when they organise as protesters, leading some regimes to take "exceptional measures including the calling in of regular troops" (Tilly, 2003, p. 206).

JAN, IS and other military groups have also engaged in repression of civilians in areas under their control. In March 2016, activists released video footage showing JAN-affiliated fighters disrupting anti-government protests in Maarrat Numan in the province of Idleb. The protesters were reportedly attacked and threatened by JAN's fighters (Dearden, 2016). In Raqqa, an IS-held city, civilians also suffer from repression by IS according to Torbjorn Soltvedt, a political analyst covering the Middle East. "In Raqqa, we've seen the Islamic State enforce religious seminars for pharmacists — they have to attend in order to be allowed to

carry on operating their businesses,” Soltvedt told Public Radio International (PRI), a global media company in a radio interview (Weinberger, 2015). Finally, Jaish al-Islam, an opposition military group, reportedly holds an authoritarian grip on Eastern Ghouta in the Damascus Suburbs, where it severely punishes its dissidents, locking them in its infamous Tawba prison (al-Dimashqi, 2016).

## **2. Coordinated Destruction**

In contrast with the low-salience broken negotiations, high levels of salience and coordination characterise coordinated destruction. The processes of activation and incorporation of boundaries, stories and social sites underline many instances of coordinated destruction in Tilly’s view (2003, p. 103). The role of political entrepreneurs and violent specialists is critical for these processes. As the Assad government-sanctioned violence against protesters and civilians increased, and as more military officers and soldiers defected from the government’s regular army, the idea of using violence against the government’s violent apparatus began to appeal more to the opposition. In the words of David Lesch (2013, p. 165): “The opposition became more desperate as the government crackdown intensified. As the situation on the ground deteriorated, the previously largely peaceful demonstrations increasingly became dotted with armed elements that sought to protect themselves and their families and to take the fight to the regime forces.” At first, the use of violence by the opposition at this stage amounted to no more than scattered attacks against the security forces but later mutated into coordinated destruction, as both salience and coordination among the opposition actors increased.

Tilly (2003, p. 107) states that as internal struggles have replaced conventional warfare since the second half of the 20th century, the practice of subvention became increasingly prevalent. As introduced in the previous chapter, subvention happens when a state supports another state’s opposition to increase its influence. This can be seen in the Syrian conflict, as the Syrian opposition received financial, military, and diplomatic support as well as humanitarian aid from Turkey, some Gulf States and Western governments. These countries continue to play a key role in facilitating the flow of arms and money to opposition groups. For instance, the US launched a training program for certain opposition factions in Jordan and Turkey in 2013 (Stuster, 2013). Saudi Arabia and Qatar have reportedly channelled billions of dollars to various opposition groups (Gerges, 2015, p. 144).

The Assad government has also received substantial and more consistent support from its traditional allies, Iran and Russia, in the form of intelligence, logistical support and advanced weaponry. Russia's sales in arms to the Assad government nearly reached USD 1 billion in 2011 (Milani, 2013, pp. 79-93; Soloman, 2012). Russia and Iran have also provided financial support to the Assad government, which now relies almost entirely on financial loans in order to function. The Syrian government borrowed billions of dollars as loans from Iran in 2013 and 2014 (Eye, 2015). The external support for different sides in the Syrian conflict is not only limited to financial and military support but also extends to diplomatic support. International actors have exercised their diplomatic influence at international conventions such as the UN Security Council. Indeed, throughout 2011 and 2012, several countries pulled their ambassadors from Syria and expelled Syrian government diplomats (Telegraph, 2012).

In the same vein, during the fourth "Friends of the Syrian People" conference held in 2012, more than 100 countries officially recognised the Syrian National Coalition of Opposition Forces (SOC), the main opposition body representing large segments of the opposition at the time, as the "legitimate representative of the Syrian people." These nations also called on the Syrian president to resign (Jazeera, 2012). On the other hand, Russia and China have remained strong supporters of the Assad government. In July of the same year, they blocked another U.N. Security Council resolution aimed to place sanctions on the Assad government if it did not stop its military crackdown on civilians. That was the third time that their "veto power" was used to protect their Syrian ally (Nichols, 2012). The most recent Russian and Chinese veto was cast in May 2014, when more than sixty nations supported a Western-drafted resolution aiming to refer the Syrian conflict to the International Criminal Court (BBC, 2014; Whitman, 2015). The analysis chapter in this thesis discusses the impact that the external support has had on the variations of collective violence in the Syrian conflict.

Three major types of coordinated destruction can be traced in the Syrian conflict. Instances of lethal contests loom large and involve multiple fronts and actors. The deadly clashes between the Syrian government forces and the opposition forces are probably the most widespread type of lethal contests in the Syrian context. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program, which provides a database of armed conflicts globally and the number of fatalities, states in its 2014 report:

Among high profile battles, the early March fighting over the town of al-Raqqah in the north deserves a special mention since it was the first provincial capital lost by the government to the rebels. During subsequent months the fortunes of war changed, however, something that

became palpably clear with the fall of strategically located al-Qusayr to government troops, heavily assisted by Hezbollah (Themnér & Wallensteen, 2014).

Confrontations between IS and People's Protection Units (YPG) also took the form of lethal contests. The open conflict between YPG forces and IS led to the expulsion of IS from Ras al-Ayn in north-eastern Syria at the hands of YPG, which was also expelled from several areas in Raqqa and Aleppo by IS (Al-Tamimi, 2014). Other examples include constant confrontations between JAN and the Syrian government forces (University, 2015) and intermittent clashes between YPG and some opposition groups (MacDonald, 2015b) in late April 2016 (Agency, 2016). Recent battles between IS and the Syrian government forces were reported in March 2016, culminating in the recapture of Palmyra city by government forces (Barrington, 2016). JAN has also engaged in deadly clashes with some opposition groups. For example, in October 2014, JAN clashed with the Syrian Revolutionary Front, a Western-backed rebel group, which was defeated as result of these clashes (AFP, 2015; al-Ka'ka, 2015).

Campaigns of annihilation by the Syrian government armed forces in residential opposition-held areas have been the main cause of civilian casualties and destruction. The Syrian Network for Human Rights estimates the number of victims killed by regime forces since March 2011 at 183,827 people. The majority of these casualties were killed by mortar, tank and aerial shelling (SNHR, 2016). According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 341 civilians, including 66 children and 50 women, were killed due to shelling, torture and sniper fire by the Syrian government forces and its Russian ally in the month of March 2016 alone (SOHR, 2016). The overall casualties of the Syrian conflict have reached 250,000 people, according to the United Nations (Council, 2015) or as high as 470,000 people, according to the Syrian Centre for Policy Research (Research, 2016). According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program 2014 report:

Since 2012, the government has made use of air strikes to target locations controlled by the rebels. A notable example of such air campaigns could be seen in Aleppo in the latter half of December 2013, when bombs resulted in great numbers of victims. One of the most well-known events of the year was the chemical attack on suburban Damascus on 21 August. (Themnér & Wallensteen, 2014, p. 544).

Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2013) accused the Assad government of carrying out chemical weapons attacks in August 2013. The Assad government's forces and the state-sponsored "Shabiha" were also implicit in carrying out countless number of massacres against Sunni communities (Ungor, 2013, p. 22). Using sources from eye witness accounts, media outlets



and human rights NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, Ugur Ungor, a scholar of genocide and mass violence, summaries the Houla massacre as one of the most horrific massacres during the Syrian conflict:

On 25 May 2012, news of a large massacre in the small town of Houla, 25 kilometers northwest of Homs, trickled into the world. Most sources, including a United Nations Commission of Inquiry report and extensive interviews with eyewitnesses, converged around the narrative that Shabbiha militias killed a total of 108 civilians, including 34 women and 49 children. Again, the massacre was carried out quite systematically: Shabbiha from two neighboring Alawi villages entered Houla, spread out, raided houses and stabbed or shot the victims execution-style in the head (Ungor, 2013, p. 15).

The above-mentioned violent episodes can be regarded as instances of politicide because these government-sanctioned campaigns of annihilation targeted a particular segment of Syrian society due to its pro-opposition affiliation. YPG also reportedly engaged in a mild form of campaigns of annihilation in northern Syria when they displaced civilians and demolished their homes. Amnesty International states in one of its reports: “Civilians living in areas of northern Syria under the de facto control of the Autonomous Administration led by the Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Democratic Union Party, PYD, political party of the YPG) are being subjected to serious abuses that include forced displacement and home demolitions” (International, 2015c). IS has also engaged in ethnic cleansing and genocide against Christians and other minorities in Syria (Guardian, 2016).

JAN’s suicide bombing of Syrian governmental agents is a case of conspiratorial terror in the Syrian conflict. A research website run by Stanford University designed to map militant organisations globally documented at least six suicide bombings by JAN against Syrian governmental agents between January 2012 and May 2014. The Australian National Security meanwhile reported 17 attacks by JAN between January 2012 and February 2013, nine of which were suicide attacks. More than 390 people were killed in these attacks and many more were wounded (Security, 2013; University, 2015). IS has been responsible for several suicide attacks in Syria as well. In May 2016, IS claimed responsibility for simultaneous bomb attacks targeting the Assad government’s strongholds in Jableh and Tartus, claiming the lives of more than 140 people (A. News, 2016).

### **3. Scattered Attacks**

Tilly (2003, pp. 171-174) observes that scattered attacks are concentrated in undemocratic regimes, as people have fewer options to make claims and resort to violence as a response

to hardships and challenges in an overly peaceful and small-scale interchange. He also states that these attacks are characterised by low levels of coordination and salience and usually rise if the state suddenly loses its capacity. The Syrian case demonstrates these two points. As the Syrian government mounted its repression against the protesters and started losing control over large sections of the population and some of its resources, a number of military deserters and civilians, realising the government's vulnerable position, carried out attacks against governmental officials, especially security agents, who were renowned for their brutal treatment towards protesters. The government's increasing repression was met with an increasing number of similar scattered attacks, especially after the opposition's armed resistance (the Free Syrian Army) formed in July 2011 (Landis, 2011). However, these small-scale scattered attacks did not occur in an overly peaceful interchange as Tilly (2003, p. 171) predicted, since violence began to become prevalent at this stage of the Syrian conflict.

Additionally, Tilly (2003, p. 187) argues that increasing salience and coordination alter scattered attacks to coordinated destruction or opportunism, and indeed, as coordination among the armed opposition wing increased, and as more officials deserted the Syrian army forces, these attacks not only increased but also took on a more organised character. In other words, they shifted towards coordinated destruction and opportunism in early 2012. Most of the scattered attacks occurred in the first few months of the Syrian uprising, when the Free Syrian Army did not have enough military capacity for direct confrontations with the government's forces. These attacks took the shape of hit-and-runs, mainly through ambushing security agents and regime-sponsored violent specialists, also called Shabiha (Hafez, 2011). According to Tilly (2003, p. 172), we should anticipate scattered attacks to have stable social relationships among the participants, relatively low stakes, third party monitors, and to be frequently initiated by non-violent specialists. However, the armed opposition's scattered attacks deviate from this pattern, as they display unstable relations among the actors, who have high stakes in the outcomes of these attacks, absence of third party monitors, and the initiation of violence by violent specialists.

Two varieties of scattered attacks identified in Tilly's theory can be found in the Syrian conflict. Skirmishes and shows of force can be seen in inter-rebel interactions. In the Damascus Suburbs, Jaish al-Islam, a conservative Islamic faction that reportedly controls Eastern Ghouta (Yell, 2015), competes with other smaller rebel groups for area dominance. While the rivalry usually appears in nonviolent interactions through exchanging accusations, scattered attacks in the form of shows of power and skirmishes occasionally happen in the

course of their interactions. In May 2015, Middle East Eye, an online news website, reported that Jaish al-Islam's "military prowess was displayed in full glory last week with a video released showing graduates from JAI's military academy accompanying parades of soldiers, armoured vehicles and rockets" (MacDonald, 2015a).

While the military parade served to demonstrate the group's military capabilities to its main enemy, the Assad government, it also served to broadcast its superior reservoir of violent means to other competing factions in the area and assert its superiority. Skirmishes occurred between Jaish al-Islam and other competing rebel factions, as the two sides raided each other's headquarters amid exchanging accusations of inciting tension. As tension rose, these skirmishes changed into direct confrontations, or lethal contests, between the two sides, leaving nearly a dozen people dead (MacDonald, 2016). In other words, the scattered attacks mutated into a form of coordinated destruction, characterised by high levels of damage and coordination. Scattered attacks also occurred between JAN and Ahrar al-Sham, one of the main Islamic opposition groups. These attacks took the forms of raids and arrest campaigns members of opposite group throughout 2015 (A. S. Ali, 2015). Scattered attacks can also be traced on the edges of the lethal contests among YPG, IS and opposition groups mentioned in the coordinated destruction section. However, the lack of sufficient data on the nature and scale of these scattered attacks makes it challenging to observe the transition from scattered attacks to lethal contests, which appear to be much more widespread.

#### **4. Opportunism**

Tilly (2003, pp. 131-142) notes that opportunistic violence, characterized by low coordination and high salience, flourishes in oppressive regimes and during conflicts, which explains why it is common in low-capacity undemocratic regimes, as they offer opportunities for actors to take advantage of the population and resources in the absence of the rule of law. While conflicts and civil wars mainly involve struggles for control of the government, opportunistic violence occurs throughout these struggles. The Syrian conflict is not an exception to Tilly's observation, as various types of opportunism, such as looting, kidnapping and ransom taking have made frequent appearances in the Syrian arena across the country and by various actors.

Looting of Syrian archaeological sites is possibly the most common type of opportunism in the Syrian conflict. According to research published in *Near Eastern Archaeology*, approximately 1,300 historical sites have been looted in Syria since March 2011. The study indicates that many armed actors were responsible for the looting. Regime and IS-held areas witnessed most instances of severe and intensive looting, while small-scale and minor looting was documented in opposition and YPG-held areas. The study also shows that most of the looting (nearly 26%) took place in opposition and YPG-held areas. Associate professor Jesse Casana (2015) states:

The close association of military occupation by Syrian regime forces with extreme looting at sites like Apamea, Ebla, and elsewhere in western Syria leaves little doubt that military forces are either directly involved in looting or at least complicit in enabling it to occur. Even if these looting episodes are not formally sanctioned by the Syrian regime, they continue to occur at an alarming rate throughout this region in particular, suggesting that at best, officials turn a blind eye to the illicit looting undertaken by field commanders.

Kidnapping and hostage-taking are the second most common forms of opportunism in the Syrian conflict with JAN and IS taking the lead in most instances. JAN kidnapped and held hostage several humanitarian aid workers, journalists, opposition fighters, UN peacekeepers, and even nuns. The kidnappings were mostly conducted for financial and political reasons. In January 2016, two Italian humanitarian workers were freed after being reportedly kidnapped by JAN in July 2014. Although the Italian government refused to comment on the details of the negotiations, and whether any ransom was paid, one source claims that USD 12 million was paid in exchange for releasing the Italian hostages (Kirchgaessner, 2015). In August 2014, JAN and IS kidnapped 35 Lebanese policemen and soldiers in the aftermath of the clashes in the bordering town of Aarsal. Four hostages were executed, and JAN later released 16 of the hostages as part of a swap with the Lebanese government, whereby 13 prisoners including five women were released in exchange. The swap also entailed facilitating aid and offering medical help to wounded people in the bordering town of Aarsal (Al Jazeera English, 2015).

Some opposition groups also engaged in a number of kidnappings. According to Peter N. Bouckaert, the emergencies director at Human Rights Watch, the Northern Storm group, an opposition faction based in northern Syria, was complicit in kidnapping some Lebanese Shia in 2012 (Leigh, 2013). Additionally, Amnesty International accused the Assad government of engaging in “systematic enforced disappearances amounting to crimes against humanity, through an insidious black market in which family members desperate to find out the fates

of their disappeared relatives are ruthlessly exploited for cash” (International, 2015a). In the Analysis chapter, the mechanisms generating the instances of looting, kidnappings and hostage taking mentioned above are presented and discussed.

## **5. Violent Rituals**

Characterised by their extreme levels of coordination and low levels of damage, violent rituals prevail in low-capacity regimes that lack the capacity to monitor or contain them (Tilly, 2003, p. 92). Violent rituals entail inflicting damage by a well-organised group by adhering to a specific set of rules for the purpose of becoming the prominent group in a social site (Tilly, 2003, p. 14). With the declining capacity of the Syrian regime, two powerful foreign extremist groups emerged: Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN) and the so-called “Islamic State” (IS). The groups employed various types of violent rituals such as lynching, public executions and stoning as a means of gaining dominance in the areas where they operate. These two groups exemplify this type of collective violence more than the Assad government and other groups.

This does not mean, however, that other actors did not engage in violent rituals. YouTube videos and several news agencies reported that YPG forces in northern Syria paraded fifty bodies of opposition fighters following clashes with them in April 2016 (Agency, 2016; Monitor, 2016). Jaish al-Islam, a prominent opposition group in Damascus Suburbs, also showcased dozens of prisoners from the Alawite community, President Assad’s sect, in cages and used them as human shields to deter the government’s attacks in November 2015 according to a video posted by Al Jazeera News (Jazeera, 2015). However, these instances of violent rituals by opposition groups and the YPG forces do not appear widespread, while data suggests that JAN and IS seem to rely on violent rituals more systemically. Both JAN and IS appear to lack the capacity to continually monitor the population in their areas. Thus, violent rituals are used to assert their powers, scare any potential offenders and restore order.

Enjoying a strong presence in some towns in Idleb (University, 2015), JAN uses public executions as a way to establish order and punish public offenders. Several activists and opposition groups have reported JAN’s abuses of civilians, including the Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently website (Raqqawi, 2015) and Jabhat [al-]Nusra Violations (Violations,

2016). IS also uses stoning and public executions and other forms of violent rituals in areas under their control. In July 2014, the first two instances of stoning are believed to have taken place in Raqqa in northern Syria, where two females were stoned to death by IS-affiliated fighters after being accused of committing adultery. The Associated Press describes the second stoning:

A cleric read the verdict before the truck came and dumped a large pile of stones near the municipal garden. Jihadi fighters then brought in the woman, clad head to toe in black, and put her in a small hole in the ground. When residents gathered, the fighters told them to carry out the sentence: Stoning to death for the alleged adulteress. None in the crowd stepped forward, said a witness to the event in a northern Syrian city. So the jihadi fighters, mostly foreign extremists, did it themselves, pelting Faddah Ahmad with stones until her body was dragged away. Abu Ibrahim Raqqawi, the activist who witnessed Ahmad's stoning, said locals were angry to see foreign fighters impose their will on the community. "People were shocked and couldn't understand what was going on. Many were disturbed by the idea that Saudis and Tunisians were issuing (such) orders," he said in an interview via Skype. Ahmad, he said, appeared unconscious, and he had overheard that she was earlier taken to a hospital where she was given anaesthesia. The stoning took place after dark, he said, at about 11pm. He could not see blood on the body because of the black clothes she was wearing (UK/AP, 2014).

In February 2015, following his plane crash and capture in IS-held areas in December 2014, IS released a video of the Jordanian pilot they have taken prisoner being burned to death in a cage. IS followed a detailed script in burning the Jordanian pilot and utilized advanced technology to deliver a Hollywood-like horror video with an impact:

Al Kasasbeh, who has a black eye in the video, presents a detailed picture of the Arab and Western air forces deployed against ISIS and the munitions they use, with interspersed pictures of burned babies and men being dug out from under rubble. Then he is paraded in front of uniformed men wearing balaclavas and carrying Kalashnikovs. He is put into a cage amid the wreckage of buildings presumably bombed by coalition planes. His orange prisoner suite is wet with some substance. He is set ablaze. The camera stays on him until his blackened flesh begins to melt away from his face and he falls over. Then a backhoe dumps earth on top of the cage and rolls over it. A burned hand is shown protruding from beneath shattered concrete (Dickey, 2015).

The use of technology in violent rituals by IS as well as the examples of various violent episodes presented in the Syria Case are analysed in the Analysis chapter. Although these episodes do not include all types of collective violence committed by actors in the Syrian arena, they reflect common types of collective violence in the Syrian conflict. In the following analysis chapter, I will employ Tilly's framework to account for variations of collective violence to assess the relevance and limitations of Tilly's theory in the Syrian conflict.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

Some types of collective violence are more common than others in the Syrian conflict. This is a function of not only the social settings in which they occur but also the engaged actors and the external influences exercised on these actors. A close examination of collective violent episodes in Syria reveals systematic actor-based patterns of collective violence, whereby some actors rely heavily on specific types of collective violence over others. Based on the data presented in the Syria case, the table below demonstrates these actor-based patterns of collective violence in the Syrian conflict.

<b>Types of Collective Violence</b>	<b>The Assad Government</b>	<b>IS</b>	<b>JAN</b>	<b>The Opposition</b>	<b>YPG</b>
<b>Coordinated Destruction (lethal contests)</b>	√	√	√	√	√
<b>Coordinated Destruction (campaigns of annihilation)</b>	√	√	No evidence	No evidence	√
<b>Coordinated Destruction (conspiratorial terror)</b>	No evidence	√	√	No evidence	No evidence
<b>Broken Negotiations (repression)</b>	√	√	√	√	No evidence
<b>Broken Negotiations (demonstrations)</b>	√ (pro government)	No evidence	No evidence	√	√
<b>Violent Rituals</b>	No evidence	√	√	√	√
<b>Opportunism (looting)</b>	√ extensive	√ extensive	No evidence	√ medium	√ medium

<b>Opportunism (kidnapping)</b>	√	√	√	√	No evidence
<b>Scattered Attacks</b>	No evidence	√	√	√	√

**Table 4.1: Actor-based patterns of collective violence in the Syrian conflict**

## **Accounting for Variations in Salience and Coordination**

The table above demonstrates that most actors in the Syrian conflict engaged in two forms of collective violence: (a) lethal contests, a form of coordinated destruction and (b) demonstrations, a form of broken negotiations. The dominance of these two forms should alert us to their significance and possible correlation. For this reason, the scope of the analysis chapter is focused primarily on investigating the dominance of these forms over other forms and the transition from one form to another, while also briefly touching on other types wherever relevant as well.

Available data suggests that violent rituals have been mostly used by JAN and IS. The stoning episode presented in the case study demonstrates that IS fighters followed an elaborate script when carrying out the death sentence. First, the victim was given anaesthesia, then residents were asked to attend the stoning, which was planned at night. Following that, the verdict was read, and the stones were gathered. Next, the woman was brought and put in a small hole, and audience were asked to throw stones at the victim, but they hesitated, so the IS fighters carried out the stoning. Perimeters were also well-defined, as the location of the stoning was chosen carefully near a public park, and the hole was dug where the victim was put. There was also a clear distinction between the spectators (residents) and the victim. There was no collateral damage to either objects or people. The presence of IS fighters ensured that the sentence was carried out and contained. They were both the monitors and the containers of the incident. By carrying out the stoning, IS activated the us-them boundary by separating those who committed adultery from those who did not. The process of decertification was also at work, as many international and Syrian bodies condemned these acts by IS (UK/AP, 2014). The extensive use of violent rituals by IS and JAN is discussed in the external support section in the following pages.



Kidnappings flourished in the Syrian conflict and were used primarily by the Syrian government against its political dissidents and their relatives, as well as by IS and JAN, which have mainly kidnapped foreign journalists and aid workers. The case study presented two cases, where JAN engaged in the kidnappings of Italian aid workers alone and several Lebanese governmental officials in collaboration with IS. These two examples illustrate that forbidden activities became effective and rewarding, which undoubtedly encouraged JAN and IS to deploy them. To use Tilly's term, the mechanism of "signalling spirals that communicated the feasibility and effectiveness of generally risky practices" facilitated these instances of opportunistic violence (2003, p. 142). The kidnappings were also used as a financial and political leverage on international actors to release prisoners and facilitate the flow of aid. The Assad government and IS are the main perpetrators of campaigns of annihilation against civilians, although evidence suggests that YPG forces also engaged in ethnic cleansing against Arabs and Turkmen in northern Syria. The scope of this research, however, will limit itself to discussing the systematic use of campaigns of annihilation by the Assad government due to their large scale, high frequency and heavy casualties.

The Syria Case demonstrated how looting of archaeological sites has been one of the most common types of opportunistic violence in the Syrian conflict. Data suggests that the Assad government and IS share the use of extensive looting, whereas the opposition and YPG forces share the use of medium looting. Of the four mechanisms identified in Tilly's account for opportunistic violence, we can trace two relevant mechanisms in the looting instances presented in the case study.

First, "response to weakened, distracted or failed repression" (Tilly, 2003, p. 132) promoted looting, as the Assad government started losing control of large areas of the country. The data suggests that opportunistic intensive looting was not only carried out by non-governmental actors but also by the Assad governmental agents. Tilly (2003, pp. 131-133) suggests that government-initiated opportunism happens when governmental agents engage in opportunistic violence which would lead to their punishment were they caught by their superiors. The data presented in the Syria Case chapter, however, demonstrates that the intensive looting was more systematic and arguably state-sanctioned and will not likely cause punishment to the governmental perpetrators if they are caught. The second mechanism is the spirals that signalled to people that dangerous actions have become feasible and effective, encouraging some to accept the risky consequences of these actions. The data also confirms that small-scale subsistence looting was documented in opposition-

held and Kurdish YPG areas, driven by necessity, available opportunities and the feasibility of being involved (College, 2015).

These patterns reveal that with the outbreak of the uprising, Syrian government agents have inflicted most of the damage on people and objects. However, as the conflict dragged on, and the Assad regime transitioned from a high-capacity to a medium-low-capacity regime, other non-governmental violent specialists became increasingly engaged in several collective violent episodes, reflecting Tilly's observations (2003, pp. 52-75). When it comes to choice of violence from the available violent repertoire, IS and JAN share striking similarities: both groups have engaged in repression, violent rituals, kidnappings, conspiratorial terror, lethal contests and scattered attacks. The opposition and YPG forces also share the engagement of medium looting, violent rituals, demonstrations, lethal contests and scattered attacks, while they seem to have avoided engaging in conspiratorial terror. Finally, the Assad government and IS both engaged in repression, kidnappings, campaigns of annihilation, extensive looting and lethal contests.

As the Syria Case demonstrates, peaceful claim-making prevailed in the first few months of the Syrian uprising social movement despite the Assad government's repressive measures against the opposition. There was a gradual shift from demonstrations, characterised by the dominance of peaceful interactions and low-medium levels of violence, to a full-scale high-intensity conflict with various forms of collective violence employed by multiple actors. To account for the transition from the overly nonviolent interactions to violent interactions and variations in forms of collective violence, I will employ Tilly's two variations of salience and coordination. Changes in the salience of damaging acts and coordination among violent actors are analysed by examining the processes of activation and incorporation and the use of technology and social media by various actors. Lastly, external support and its consequences are discussed in detail, followed by a discussion of some of the limitations of Tilly's framework in accounting for patterns of collective violence in the Syrian conflict.

## **Activation and Incorporation**

Demonstrations from the opposition and repression from the Assad government dominated Syria's contentious politics in the first few months of the Syrian conflict. Both demonstrations and repression are types of broken negotiations, which require high levels

of coordination. Coordination among the opposition actors increased as local anti-government community and religious leaders as well as political dissidents in exile activated existing relevant identities and social stories, particularly the all-powerful “us-them” boundary emphasised by Tilly (2003, pp. 10-11). Some political entrepreneurs activated the Shia-Sunni boundary, emphasising that the Assad government is mainly composed of Alawite-affiliated officials and violent specialists. Others, however, activated the pro-government versus. pro-Assad boundary, as it encompasses larger sections of Syrian society that are not Sunni but opposed to Assad nonetheless. Despite the apparent contradiction in these activated boundaries, they demonstrate the lack of “a common purpose and a collective identity” among the Syrian opposition (Gerges, 2015, p. 148) and both contributed to making the us-them boundary more salient.

Coordination and salience also increased, as the same political entrepreneurs created new and more direct connections among social sites and people in the same category, people who were not directly connected previously. By extension, they also constructed new boundaries that corresponded to the newly activated relevant boundaries mentioned above. The new connections were not only among anti-government civilians but also, and more importantly, between civilians and military deserters. The work of political entrepreneurs in activating existing boundaries and stories (activation) and creating new boundaries and connections among social sites (incorporation) contributed to widening the chasm between the two categories.

This led to polarisation which “generally promotes collective violence because it makes the us-them boundary more salient, hollows out the uncommitted middle, intensifies conflict across the boundary, raises the stakes of winning or losing and enhances opportunities for leaders to initiate action against their enemies” (Tilly, 2003, p. 22). Thus, the processes of activation and incorporation by political entrepreneurs and violent specialists contributed to increasing the levels of salience and coordination. This partially account for the transition from the opposition’s reliance on peaceful interactions (demonstrations) to violent confrontations (lethal contests) in the Syrian conflict. Opportunities offered by external support and facilitated by the use of social media and technology have also played a role in this transition, as the next sections argue.

On the Assad government’s side, the same processes appeared at work when the government forces cracked down on protesters. The Assad government “held a strong grip

on the nationalist narrative” (Gerges, 2015) and exploited the “Alawi identity” by feeding into the “Alawite insecurity and exacerbat[ing] their fear. This fear, coupled with the knowledge that the victimized Sunnis will most certainly be vindictive should Assad lose power, generates a powerful violent impulse” (Ungor, 2013, p. 21). The government also played on sectarian divisions to gain loyalty among other minorities, taking advantage of their fears of having less religious freedom if the regime fell (D. Lesch & Haas, 2012). Thus, the Assad government built the us-them boundary around the story of Arab nationalist identity and the religious minorities’ fears of the Sunni-dominated opposition (Hinnebusch, 2012, p. 107). Although never admitted publicly, the government also fostered the Shia-Sunni narrative by committing massacres against the Sunni communities (Ungor, 2013, p. 22).

As a governmental institution, the Assad government enjoyed high levels of coordination among its governmental agents, many of whom had access to the government’s reservoir of violent means. Lastly, the state-run media outlets were used to further broadcast the government’s narrative and reinforce relevant identities and stories. The following sections elaborate on the effects of media and external support on the coordination and salience of violent episodes, especially the dominating forms of demonstrations and lethal contests.

The Assad government engaged in small-scale campaigns of annihilation through bombarding restive areas as a collective punishment for protesting from the early weeks of the Syrian uprising. The opposition’s use of violent means to thwart the government’s repression gave the Assad government the ideal pretext to step up its military campaigns against opposition-held areas, resulting in a large number of civilian casualties. The same processes underlying the government’s use of lethal contests appear at work in its reliance on campaigns of annihilation, but their intensity and frequency seem to increase as a result of the Assad government’s interaction with other actors, especially as the opposition turned increasingly to violence from 2012 onwards.

For example, the frequency of the Assad government’s air strikes began to increase in mid-2012, peaking in February 2014, in which 1055 civilians were killed (Karen Yourish, 2015). A close examination of a Vice News timeline covering major events in Syria between March 2011 and March 2015 reveals that the Assad government’s escalation of campaigns of annihilation in residential rebel-held areas appears to coincide with intensified fighting with opposition groups that have become increasingly embroiled in lethal contests with the

Assad government's forces at that stage of the conflict (Beck, 2015). Finally, Tilly (2003, p. 104) observes that the stakes of campaigns of annihilation are high because they involve a fight for collective survival and establishing political dominance over a social site. Indeed, the stakes were significantly high for the Assad government and its army, as they became increasingly implicated in violence against the opposition (Hinnebusch, 2012, p. 110).

## **Role of Technology and Media**

When Tilly developed his theory of collective violence in 2003, the use of social media via mobile phones and the Internet did not have the notable impact on collective violence as it does now. However, in the Syrian context, technology, especially the use of mobile phones, the Internet and social media outlets have helped the opposition bypass many forbidden performances and expand its available reservoir of peaceful and violent claim making. For example, the Internet and mobile phones allowed opposition activists to organise demonstrations and evade some of the government's arrest campaigns through enhanced communication, which enabled them to warn each other of arrest raids. These channels also helped to create connections among the protests' organisers despite the government's sieges of restive areas. Through the use of mobile phones and Internet, anti-government activists broadcast their demonstrations and shed light on the government's repression and campaigns of annihilation against the opposition (Ahmad & Hamasaeed, 2015, p. 39).

The footage and images taken by anti-government activists were not only shared on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter but also broadcast on famous Arabic-speaking TV channels such as Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya and Orients News, among many others. Thus, mass media played a similar role in spreading the images of demonstrations to wider Syrian audience, triggering nationwide protests (Ungor, 2013, p. 6). The Internet has also facilitated the work of political entrepreneurs and violent specialists in creating connections, activating relevant boundaries and seeking support from external actors via Skype, Facebook and other social media platforms. According to new research that examined the relationship between violence and the use of media and Internet in the Syrian conflict:

For opposition groups, the Internet allows fast and cheap communication and coordination that is harder to manipulate than more traditional, centralized media types such as the radio or newspapers. Apart from coordination, rebels in Libya and Syria have also been found to use their smartphones' location-based services to accurately locate military targets and calibrate their weapons [...] [which is why the Assad government] actively expanded its virtual

presence, from employing an Electronic Army of hackers to using an array of spying software against its entire population (Gohdes, 2015).

Reporting from the war-torn city of Aleppo in 2012, conflict journalist Scott Peterson's interviews with opposition fighters supported the extent and stressed the centrality of social media to fighters:

Every fighter seems to have at least one mobile phone, used to speak with families, Skype girlfriends, and even advise Syrian soldiers how to defect to the opposition. Some note the difference a generation can make to the fate of their challenge against the government – and providing video evidence of atrocities and war crimes that are corroding the legitimacy of the regime (Peterson, 2012).

The use of technology and manipulation of social and mass media have also had an indirect effect on the salience of damaging acts. It contributed to widening the social gap between the opposing categories in the Syrian conflict, as each category relied on their own sources of information about what was happening in the country. Assad government's supporters relied on the state-sponsored or pro-government TV channels and social media platforms, which presented only the government's side of the story. Supporters of the opposition, on the other hand, received their news from anti-government news sources, as they mistrusted the government-affiliated media sources. This can be showcased by conflicting accounts of public reaction to a speech given by Bashar Assad in 2012. Following the speech, SANA, an online state-affiliated news agency, described Syrians' reactions to the presidential speech:

Since yesterday morning, mass crowds have been flooding the country squares to support President Bashar Assad's speech and building a modern Syria, to emphasise national unity and reject foreign intervention in Syria's internal affairs, while stressing their resolve to continue working towards the desired Syria that President Assad portrayed in his speech (SANA, 2012).

Meanwhile, Al Arabiya Net, an online Gulf-funded news website, interviewed a prominent Syrian opposition figure, who described the pro-government demonstrations as "previously planned" and claimed that the demonstrators were in fact members of the Assad government's security forces disguised as civilians. He added: "The Syrian President appeared scared and said two sentences and disappeared to divert attention from the dire situation that Syria is undergoing" (Net, 2012). The National, another online news website, quoted a strong supporter of Assad, who liked the speech, saying: "The president is a good man and a clever man, the army is strong, there is nothing for us to fear" (Sands, 2012). Thus, the stark difference between the two narratives pulled each category to extremes and contributed to the already fragmented and increasingly polarised Syria. Finally, the Syria Case chapter has demonstrated how IS utilised advanced technology to broadcast its violent

rituals and spread fear among its opponents as a psychological war weapon. The use of sophisticated sound and visual effects, the cinematography and the sadistic narration were used to shock and spread terror among the group's internal and external enemies.

## **External Support and Its Consequences**

The Syria Case chapter has indicated how the practice of subvention was manifested in the Syrian conflict, as regional and international states have provided various types of support to the Syrian opposition. While subvention constitutes an important element in understanding Syria's contentious politics, it does not account for the external support the Assad government has received from its allies, particularly Iran and Russia, which has had a major influence on the balance of power among the contending parties. As discussed in the Syria Case chapter, the support the Assad government received was more consistent and substantial than that received by the opposition. Analysing the external support that the government and the opposition received will be key in analysing the dynamics of contention because it affects the actors' use of the available types of collective violence.

Enjoying a strategic location in the Middle East, where several international powers compete for influence, Syria has gradually turned into the battlefield for a proxy war between two primary camps over the past five years: Iran, China, and Russia, on one side, compete with the US, Europe, Turkey and Gulf states, giving the Syrian conflict an international dimension. However, external influence was not solely due to international interests in Syria but also came as a consequence of calls by both the Assad government and the opposition for support. On several occasions, the Syrian opposition called for the international community to take military action against the Assad government in the form of targeted military strikes and establishing a no-fly zone in the north of Syria (Hashemi & Postel, 2013, p. 232), where the opposition made substantial territorial gains. The Assad government, on the other hand, called for support from its Iranian and Russian allies (Manal, 2015).

External support for the Assad government and the opposition has had significant ramifications, as it has expanded their peaceful and violent resources, enabling them to sustain and/or vary their military tactics. However, it has also restricted their choices of the available violent repertoire. Relying on external support has undermined the ability of Syrian

actors to determine the outcome of violent and nonviolent contention. It also led to an ideological transformation among large segments of the Syrian population and fed into the prominent us-them boundary. Lastly, external support increased the stakes of international actors in the outcome and contributed to the internationalisation of the Syrian conflict.

The external diplomatic, financial and military support to the armed opposition groups led to an expansion of their resources, which exceeded the resources they previously had (Hironaka, 2005, p. 142). In his paper on the impact of foreign intervention on the dynamics of internal conflicts, Adam Lockyer (2011, p. 2340) argues:

Exogenous resources can markedly increase a recipient's military capabilities and improve its survivability. [...] Further, although exogenous support may also come from an international diaspora, a neighbouring insurgent actor, or a humanitarian organisation, rarely will these inputs match those supplied by foreign states. As such, foreign states are, by far, the most significant source of exogenous resources.

Indeed, the financial and military support increased the armed opposition's reservoir of violent means and acted as "signalling spirals that communicated [their] feasibility and effectiveness" to its members (Tilly, 2003, p. 142). This encouraged the opposition to rely more on the violent means, which were perceived to have a more direct impact on the ground than the peaceful means. The expansion of resources also allowed the opposition groups to vary their military tactics with the Assad government's forces. The Gulf countries' financial and military assistance allowed the armed opposition groups not only to halt government forces' attacks but to also launch offensive attacks and engage them in lethal contests.

The effect of external funding to the opposition can often be seen when a large supply of weapons or money is channelled to the armed opposition groups. For example, the arrival of anti-tank missiles to the armed opposition in October 2015 made a difference during its lethal contests with the Assad government's forces, according to a governmental military official (Perry, 2015). Similarly, Iranian and Russian financial, logistical and military support to the Assad government allowed it to continue its military campaign against the opposition despite suffering heavy economic losses, which left the economy practically dysfunctional (Eye, 2015).

Another example is the involvement of Hezbollah forces during the battles of Qusayr City that helped the Assad government recapture the city and push away opposition forces, as



data in the Syria Case chapter has indicated. Hence, the varying degree of external support also explains the fluctuating dynamics of contention on the ground, exemplified by shifting areas of control among various groups in the Syrian conflict. This also accounts for why opposition forces sometimes avoid direct confrontations (lethal contests) with the Assad government's forces (Droz-Vincent, 2014, p. 51) when external support decreases, which pushes the armed opposition groups to adopt hit-and-run tactics (scattered attacks) to suit their modest military capability.

Paradoxically, while external support has expanded and sustained the involved actors' resources, the reliance on external support has also limited their available choices in the violent repertoire. The data in the case study suggests that opposition groups, YPG forces and the Assad government rarely engaged in violent rituals such as lynching and stoning as opposed to IS and JAN, which have relied on them as means to consolidate control and spread fear. Although the Assad government and opposition groups are both capable of engaging in violent rituals, they have decided to avoid them generally, as engaging in these violent rituals would harm their relationship with international sponsors, whose position for supporting either side would be questioned were they to support actors that engage in barbaric violent rituals.

Moreover, the Assad government's rhetoric is based on fighting "terrorists" (SANA, 2015), so the government cannot resort to the types of violent means used by extremists groups like JAN and IS to fight its opposition. IS and JAN, on the other hand, seem to have no regard to their standing in the international community. As al-Qaeda-inspired groups, their military tactics rely on engaging in violent episodes that broadcast their cruelty as a way of intimidating enemies. With one exception presented in the Case Study chapter, opposition groups have generally avoided engaging in violent rituals, as these rituals contradict their ideology, values and political aim of overthrowing the Assad government. Engaging in such acts will be counterproductive to the opposition's long-term goals and harm its political aspirations.

In the absence of any sustainable alternatives for support, the opposition was forced to rely on assistance from external parties. The opposition also argued that seeking external support from external actors was justified and necessary since the Assad government also relied on external support from its allies to crush the opposition. However, this came at a high cost, as the outcome of even small-scale violent episodes was no longer entirely

determined by domestic players' strategies and capabilities. Gani, a scholar of international relations in the Middle East, argue that "the militarisation of Syria's contentious politics – and in turn dependence on international support – complicated and intensified the crisis, to the extent that contentious agency shifted away from the grass-roots social movement to external political actors and military leaders" (Gerges, 2015, p. 148).

External support has put the domestic actors at the mercy of external players who increase or decrease support as it serves their best interests. This is particularly true of lethal contests, which require a large arsenal of military resources and consistent flow of financial and military support. The armed opposition groups, which almost entirely rely on external funding to conduct attacks or hold back the Assad forces' attacks, suffered more from this than the Assad government. Due to its position as a state, the Assad government had established diplomatic connections, as opposed to other non-state actors, which had to develop the same kind of connections to receive support (Rosenau, 1964, pp. 14-15). Furthermore, the Assad government already had a superior reservoir of military means, access to the country's resources, a larger contentious repertoire to fall on (Gerges, 2015, p. 148) and more consistent support from its allies. The support given to the opposition groups from the Gulf states and other entities has remained intermittent and has not equalled the support given to the Assad government.

Moreover, the opposition's newly available violent means contributed to an ideological transformation among large sections of the opposition, which largely believed that the struggle against the Assad government should remain peaceful and not fall into the government's trap of taking up arms against it, which would lead to more deadly force by the government forces. However, the government's mounting repression coupled with the newly available violent means made the opposition more susceptible to the use of violence against the government forces. It has been argued that the Assad government's excessive use of violence against protesters pushed the opposition to take up arms. The opposition's turning to violence benefited the Assad government, which utilised this to support its original claims of fighting insurgents, when it was in fact using violence against unarmed protesters in the first few months of the Syrian uprising (Droz-Vincent, 2014, p. 51). According to the International Crisis Group Middle East Report that was published in 2012 (Harling, 2012, p. 3), the government's repression against the opposition and large segments of the Syrian population to force them to submit "pushed them toward armed resistance; the protest movement's militarisation was a logical by-product of heightened repression."

Thus, the opposition's resource expansion offered an appealing and deceptively simple solution to the political aspirations of the opposition: violence must be met with violence. Journalist Nir Rosen, who has extensively covered the Syrian conflict, depicts this transformation among some Syrian opposition members in summer 2011:

As I spent more time in Syria, I could see a clear theme developing in the discourse of the opposition: A call for an organised armed response to the government crackdown, mainly from the opposition within Syria. Demonstrators had hoped the holy month of Ramadan would be the turning point in their revolution, but as it came to an end - six months into the Syrian uprising - many realised the regime was too powerful to be overthrown peacefully (Rosen, 2011).

Furthermore, the external financial and military support to the Sunni-dominated opposition (D. W. Lesch, 2013, p. 174) mainly came from Sunni-dominated Gulf states, especially Qatar and Saudi Arabia. This stands in sharp contrast with the Iranian support, a Shia-dominated state, to the Assad government, which is often called a "minority-based government" (Ungor, 2013, p. 6) or "an Alawi regime" (Hinnebusch, 2002, p. 69). This brought the Shia-Sunni narrative to the forefront of violent and non-violent contention between the Assad government and the opposition, making the us-them boundary more prominent and popular among the constituencies of each category. Gradually, the Shia-Sunni boundary overrode the previously peaceful and stable relations among the Syrian population who came from diverse religious backgrounds. The Shia-Sunni boundary also became more prominent than the pro-revolution versus. pro-Assad boundary, as the latter's influence gradually receded. The Assad government's persecutions of the Sunni-dominated population, especially in Alawite-dominated areas (Beaumont, 2013) contributed to making the Shia-Sunni divide more salient.

External support, especially the military one, has also raised the stakes of the conflict's outcome not only for the domestic contending parties but also for several foreign actors (Gerges, 2015, p. 143), including the United States, Russia, Iran, the Gulf states and Turkey. Professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford, Louise Fawcett (2013) argues that "who wins in Syria is going to make a critical difference to both the regional and international balance of power. The defeat of Assad will empower Arab Sunnis, currently headed up by the Arab Gulf states. The survival of Assad will help to empower Iranians and their regional allies. [...] Either outcome in turn will both facilitate or complicate the positions of United States (and) Russia."

Thus, the high stakes of international actors in Syria along with the above-mentioned processes have contributed to the internationalisation and further complication of the Syrian conflict. The spillover from the Syrian conflict has not only reached neighbouring countries but also affected the entire international community. With continuing external support to the contending parties, lethal contests and campaigns of annihilation are likely to continue dominating the Syrian scene. On the effects of foreign intervention on the duration of civil wars, Hironaka (2005, p. 143) writes: "Wars of infinite resources tend to persist. With continuous stream of resources, both sides can continue fighting indefinitely." Reaching a solution for the ongoing crisis not only requires the Assad government and the opposition to sit at the negotiating table but also demands that their international sponsors approve of the negotiations' objectives and terms.

### **Limitations of Tilly's Theory**

While insightful in drawing the lines between different types of collective violence and accounting for their variations, Tilly's theory heavily relies on the social processes generating collective violence and the correlation between regime type and patterns of violence without giving the same degree of attention to the increasingly international dimension of internal conflicts. Some analysts argue that Tilly's proposition that there is an unmistakable correlation between the type of regime and types of violence is not entirely valid and contend that "international power imbalances, imperial ambition, and ideological difference are at least as significant in shaping collective violence as regime "capacity" and "democracy" (Robinson, 2004). The us-them boundary, for instance, was regarded by Tilly as a key recurrent process in collective violence, but he does not show the role played by religious and sectarian divisions, along with their corresponding external support, in constructing this boundary and accentuating its salience.

While Tilly points to the increasingly common practice of subvention and how external support to another state's opposition shapes internal conflicts, the external support given to governments when faced with internal challenges is largely overlooked by his theory. Understanding how external support from competing actors influences internal conflicts is key to understanding the initiation, salience and prevalence of patterns of collective violence. Tilly's theoretical framework, while vital, does not account for all the choices made by actors when it comes to their resources and relationship with their opponents and

external sponsors and engagement with other actors. This is where insights from the international relations discipline can be useful in helping us understand the relationship between domestic and international actors, and how that shapes the use of specific types of collective violence over others. Rather than contradicting Tilly's findings, this research rests on Tilly's theory and has attempted to benefit from insights from other disciplines to suit the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of the Syrian conflict.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

This research has examined the prominent patterns of collective violence in the Syrian conflict by employing Tilly's theoretical framework on violence. It identified five main types of collective violence as demonstrated by the Syrian conflict. First, broken negotiations manifested themselves in the opposition's demonstrations in the first few months of the Syrian uprising and in the Assad government's repression to quell it. As the salience and coordination increased, broken negotiations mutated to coordinated destruction, with lethal contests as the most dominant form. Opportunism and scattered attacks were briefly outlined and analysed next, with a special focus on opportunistic looting of historical sites and kidnappings by various groups for economic and political reasons. Violent rituals were introduced last, with IS and JAN as the prime actors because this type of violence is in accordance with their ideology, strategy and political aims.

While Tilly's theory proved to be a reliable framework for examining the patterns of collective violence in Syria, I argue that the influence of social media, mass media, technology and external support are key elements missing in Tilly's theory. The use of social media and technology by opposition groups has expanded their contentious repertoire and enabled them to facilitate the activation of existing boundaries and incorporation of new boundaries and connections among social sites. This has contributed to increasing the levels of salience and coordination. Technology has also been used by IS to broadcast its violent rituals and spread fear among its opponents. The external support that the opposition received has also expanded its peaceful and violent contentious repertoire. It signalled to the opposition the effectiveness of using violent means to make political claims, which encouraged many civilians in the opposition to take up arms against the Assad government's forces.

The external influence in Syria came, as both the opposition and the government called for support from their allies and due to Syria's strategic location for many competing regional and international powers. Despite the huge disparity between the amount of support each side received, foreign intervention in Syria in the form of diplomatic, military and financial support, has had dire consequences for the Syrian conflict. While expanding their stockpile of violent means, it has also undermined Syrian actors' abilities to determine the outcome of violent interactions. This is particularly true of opposition groups, which rely heavily on external support from Gulf and Western states to halt the government forces' attacks and

launch their own offences. Any increase or decrease of support to armed opposition groups has had a direct effect on the battlefield.

The Syrian revolution, a social movement that began with popular protests calling for political freedom and dignity, became increasingly militarized after the opposition turned to violence in self-defence to assert its political aims and to stop the Assad government's violent apparatus. The dynamics of contention have also changed as external powers have exercised their influence in Syria through their support to contending parties. This further complicated the conflict, widened the gap between opposing actors and led to the internationalisation of the conflict, reducing the chances of reaching a political settlement in the foreseeable future. The research has raised a number of questions about the fate of the Syrian conflict: Will the tide of collective violence in Syria continue rising? And what will it take for the international actors embroiled in the Syrian crisis to find a resolution that ends the violence? Although the waves of collective violence in Syria show no sign of abating, some argue that Syria will gradually emerge stronger and wiser after the war stops, having learnt vital lessons from its bitter experience with war and violence.

## Works Cited

- AFP. (2015). JAN Controls Jabal al-Zawiya in Idleb after Crushing the Syrian Revolutionary Front Retrieved from <http://www.alriyadh.com/990469>
- Agency, A. (2016). PYD parades bodies of FSA fighters in Syria's Afrin. Retrieved from <http://aa.com.tr/en/todays-headlines/pyd-parades-bodies-of-fsa-fighters-in-syrias-afrin-/563405>
- Ahmad, A. R., & Hamasaeed, N. H. H. H. (2015). The Role of Social Media in the 'Syrian Uprising'. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 4(2), 39.
- al-Dimashqi, Y. (2016). Iron Rule: Jaish al-Islam in Eastern Ghouta. Retrieved from <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2016/03/22/iron-rule-jaish-al-islam-in-eastern-ghouta>
- al-Ka'ka, A. (2015). Jabhat al-Nusra in Idleb Suburbs... Approval, Rejections and Reservations Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/oVLRya>
- Al-Tamimi, A. J. (2014). The Dawn of the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham. *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, 16, 5.
- Ali, A. S. (2015). Jabhat al-Nusra slammed for not severing ties with al-Qaeda. Retrieved from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2015/03/syria-daraa-jabhat-al-nusra-ties-al-qaeda-isis.html>
- Ali, M. (2016). Major Kurdish Factions. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2015/07/major-kurdish-factions-150728150924667.html>
- Amos, D. (2011, 22 April 2011). Syria 'Great Friday' Protest Turns Bloody. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2011/04/22/135628118/syrian-forces-protesters-face-off-on-great-friday>
- Aya, R., Revolutions, R., & Violence, C. (1990). Studies on Concept. *Theory and Method, Amsterdam*.
- Bahrampour, T. (2011). 13 killed as protests continue despite Assad's pledges to lift Syria's emergency rule. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/syria-protests-continue-despite-presidents-promises-to-lift-emergency-laws/2011/04/17/AFw0fMuD\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/syria-protests-continue-despite-presidents-promises-to-lift-emergency-laws/2011/04/17/AFw0fMuD_story.html)
- Barrington, L. (2016). Syrian forces pursue campaign against Islamic State after retaking Palmyra. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKCNOWU0SB>
- BBC. (2012). Syria army shells Homs and northern towns in Idlib. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-17176943>
- BBC. (2014). Russia and China veto UN move to refer Syria to ICC. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27514256>
- Beaumont, P. (2013). Syria: massacres of Sunni families reported in Assad's heartland. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/04/syrian-sunni-families-die-in-assads-heartland>
- Beck, J. (2015). Syria After Four Years: Timeline of a Conflict. Retrieved from <https://news.vice.com/article/syria-after-four-years-timeline-of-a-conflict>
- Black, D. (1976). *The behavior of law*: Academic Press.
- Bureau of Democracy, H. R. a. L. (2006). Syria: International Religious Freedom Report 2006. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2006/71432.htm>
- Calhoun, C. (2008). *Welcoming Remarks*. Paper presented at the A Celebration of the Life and Works of Charles Tilly. <http://www.ssrc.org/hirschman/content/2008/texts/Calhoun.pdf>



- Carey, C. (2013). Syria's Civil War Has Become a Genocide. Retrieved from <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2013/09/16/syrias-civil-war-has-become-genocide>
- Casana, J. (2015). Satellite Imagery-Based Analysis of Archaeological Looting in Syria. *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 78(3), 142-152.
- College, D. (2015). Study shows ISIS is not the only culprit in war-related looting in Syria. Retrieved from <http://phys.org/news/2015-10-isis-culprit-war-related-looting-syria.html>
- Council, S. (2015). Alarmed by Continuing Syria Crisis, Security Council Affirms Its Support for Special Envoy's Approach in Moving Political Solution Forward. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12008.doc.htm>
- Courtwright, D. T. (2009). *Violent land: Single men and social disorder from the frontier to the inner city*: Harvard University Press.
- de la Roche, R. S. (1996). *Collective violence as social control*. Paper presented at the Sociological Forum.
- Dearden, L. (2016). Syrian pro-democracy protesters attacked by Jabhat al-Nusra rebels as they return to streets during ceasefire Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syrian-pro-democracy-protesters-attacked-by-jabhat-al-nusra-rebels-as-they-return-to-streets-during-a6925976.html>
- Deeply, S. (2016). The Opposition. Retrieved from <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/background/the-opposition>
- Deutscher, I. (2005). Charles Tilly, The Politics of Collective Violence. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 30(2), 236-241.
- Dickey, C. (2015). Barbarians Burn Pilot Alive: ISIS Will Never Release A Living Prisoner. Retrieved from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/02/03/isis-burns-jordanian-pilot-alive.html>
- Droz-Vincent, P. (2014). " State of Barbary"(Take Two): From the Arab Spring to the Return of Violence in Syria. *The Middle East Journal*, 68(1), 33-58.
- English, A. J. (2015). Lebanese army and al-Nusra Front conduct prisoner swap. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/lebanese-hostages-released-prisoner-swap-151201072408599.html>
- English, A. J. (2015). Nusra Leader: Our Mission Is to Defeat Syrian Regime. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/nusra-front-golani-assad-syria-hezbollah-isil-150528044857528.html%3E>
- Eye, M. E. (2015). Syria's Assad depending on Iran financial aid. Retrieved from <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syrias-assad-depending-iran-financial-aid-392275455>
- Fares, Q. (2014). Syria in Crisis Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=55541>
- (2013). *From the Arab Spring to the Syrian War: Regional, international and humanitarian impact* [Retrieved from <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/arab-spring-syrian-war-regional-international-and-humanitarian-impact>
- Gerges, F. A. (2015). Contentious politics in the Middle East: popular resistance and marginalised activism beyond the Arab uprisings.
- Gohdes, A. (2015). When Internet access becomes a weapon. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/02/24/internet-access-as-a-weapon/>

- Guardian, T. (2014). Bashar al-Assad wins re-election in Syria as uprising against him rages on. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/04/bashar-al-assad-wins-reelection-in-landslide-victory>
- Guardian, T. (2016). John Kerry: Isis is committing genocide in Syria and Iraq. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/17/john-kerry-isis-genocide-syria-iraq>
- Hafez, S. (2011). Syrian Opposition Call for No-Fly Zone. Retrieved from <http://www.turkishweekly.net/2011/10/08/news/syrian-opposition-call-for-no-fly-zone/>
- Harling, P. (2012). Syria's Mutating Conflict: International Crisis Group Middle East Report.
- Hashemi, N., & Postel, D. (2013). *The Syria Dilemma*: MIT Press.
- Hinnebusch, R. (2002). *Syria: revolution from above*: Routledge.
- Hinnebusch, R. (2012). Syria: from 'authoritarian upgrading' to revolution? *International Affairs*, 88(1), 95-113.
- Hironaka, A. (2005). Neverending wars: Weak states, the international community, and the perpetuation of civil war: Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hogan, R. (2004). Charles Tilly Takes Three Giant Steps from Structure Toward Process: Mechanisms for Deconstructing Political Process: JSTOR.
- HRW. (2013). Attacks on Ghouta. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/09/10/attacks-ghouta/analysis-alleged-use-chemical-weapons-syria>
- International, A. (2012, 28 February 2012). Syria: 30 years on, Hama survivors recount the horror. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2012/02/syria-years-hama-survivors-recount-horror/>
- International, A. (2015a). Syria: State profits from crimes against humanity as policy of enforced disappearances drives black market. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/11/syria-state-profits-from-crimes-against-humanity-as-policy-of-enforced-disappearances-drives-black-market/>
- International, A. (2015b). Syria: The worst humanitarian crisis of our time. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org.nz/syria-worst-humanitarian-crisis-our-time>
- International, A. (2015c). "We Had Nowhere to Go" - Forced Displacement and Demolition in Northern Syria Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/2503/2015/en/>
- Jazeera, A. (2011). Syria to lift decades-old emergency law. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/04/2011419135036463804.html>
- Jazeera, A. (2012). 'Friends of Syria' recognise opposition. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/201212124541767116.html>
- Jazeera, A. (2015). Syrian rebels use caged captives as 'human shields'. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/syrian-rebels-caged-captives-human-shields-151102203114417.html>
- Kaldor, M. (2013). *New and old wars: Organised violence in a global era*: John Wiley & Sons.
- Kalyvas, S. N. (2006). The logic of violence in civil war.
- Karen Yourish, K. K. R. L. a. D. W. (2015). Death in Syria Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/09/14/world/middleeast/syria-war-deaths.html? r=0>

- Kirchgaessner, S. (2015). Two Italian aid workers freed in Syria after multimillion-dollar ransom paid. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/15/two-italian-aid-workers-freed-syria>
- Krug, E. G., Mercy, J. A., Dahlberg, L. L., & Zwi, A. B. (2002). The world report on violence and health. *The Lancet*, 360(9339), 1083-1088.
- Landis, J. (2011). Syria Comment: Free Syrian Army Founded by Seven Officers to Fight the Syrian Army. Retrieved from <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/free-syrian-army-established-to-fight-the-syrian-army/>
- Leigh, K. (2013). In Syria, Kidnapping Becomes a 'Big-Money Business'. Retrieved from <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2013/06/06/in-syria-kidnapping-becomes-a-big-money-business/>
- Lesch, D., & Haas, M. (2012). *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East*: Westview Press.
- Lesch, D. W. (2013). *Syria: The fall of the house of Assad*: Yale University Press.
- Lockyer, A. (2011). Foreign intervention and warfare in civil wars. *Review of International Studies*, 37(05), 2337-2364.
- Loveluck, L. (2016). Hundreds across Syria protest against Assad for the first time in years. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/12183779/Hundreds-across-Syria-protest-against-Assad-for-the-first-time-in-years.html>
- MacDonald, A. (2015a). Rise of Jaish al-Islam marks a turn in Syria conflict. Retrieved from <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/jaish-al-islam-piece-918366283>
- MacDonald, A. (2015b). YPG, allies clash with Syrian opposition groups in Aleppo. Retrieved from <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/ypg-and-allies-clashes-syrian-opposition-groups-aleppo-633986086>
- MacDonald, A. (2016). Rebel in-fighting leaves 12 dead in East Ghouta region of Damascus. Retrieved from <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/rebel-fighting-leaves-least-12-dead-east-ghouta-region-damascus-1108257963>
- Macleod, H. (2011). Syria: How it all began. Retrieved from <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/middle-east/110423/syria-assad-protests-daraa>
- Manal. (2015). Syria's ambassador to Russia urges all countries to join Syria and Russia against terrorism. Retrieved from <http://sana.sy/en/?p=56454>
- Milani, M. (2013). Why Tehran Won't Abandon Assad (ism). *The Washington Quarterly*, 36(4), 79-93.
- Monitor, M. E. (2016). US condemns PYD parade of corpses of FSA fighters. Retrieved from <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20160430-us-condemns-pyd-parade-of-corpses-of-fsa-fighters/>
- Monitoring, B. (2012). Profile: Syria's ruling Baath Party. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18582755>
- Moore, B. (1978). *Injustice: The social bases of obedience and revolt*: ME Sharpe White Plains, NY.
- Nations, U. (2014). Impunity, unprecedented violence, denial of aid hallmarks of Syria conflict – UN rights panel. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48070>
- Net, A. A. (2012). Assad Shouts in Omaween Square "Forward". Retrieved from <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/11/187705.html>

- News, A. (2016). Islamic State claims responsibility for multiple bomb attacks in Syrian cities. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-23/islamic-state-claims-responsibility-bomb-attacks-syria/7439032>
- NEWS, B. (2011). Syria protests: Assad to lift state of emergency. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-13134322>
- Nichols, M. (2012). Russia, China veto U.N. Security Council resolution on Syria. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-un-idUSBRE86I0UD20120719>
- Perry, T. (2015). Syrian army source: rebels make heavy use of TOW missiles. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-arms-idUSKBN0TE1KJ20151125>
- Peterson, S. (2012). Syria's iPhone insurgency makes for smarter rebellion. Retrieved from <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2012/0801/Syria-s-iPhone-insurgency-makes-for-smarter-rebellion>
- Polk, W. R. (2013). Understanding Syria: From Pre-Civil War to Post-Assad. *The Atlantic*, 10.
- Raqqawi, A. I. (2015). Video : Jabht-AL Nusra Executed A Women accused her of committing adultery in Idleib 20/01/2015. Retrieved from <http://www.raqqa-sl.co/en/?p=327>
- Research, S. C. f. P. (2016). Confronting Fragmentation. Retrieved from <http://scpr-syria.org/publications/policy-reports/confronting-fragmentation/>
- Reuters. (2012). Syria's Alawites, a secretive and persecuted sect. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-alawites-sect-idUSTRE80U1HK20120131>
- Revolution, T. C. M. o. t. S. (2016). Al-Qamishli. Retrieved from [http://www.creativememory.org/?page\\_id=104934](http://www.creativememory.org/?page_id=104934)
- Robinson, G. (2004). The politics of collective violence *Am. Hist. Rev.* (Vol. 109, pp. 474-475).
- Rosen, N. (2011). Syria: The Revolution Will Be Weaponised." Aljazeera English. September 23, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/09/2011923115735281764.html>
- Rosenau, J. N. (1964). *International aspects of civil strife*: Princeton University Press.
- SANA. (2012). President Assad Surprises Crowds in Omaween Sqaure Retrieved from <http://sana.sy/?p=3221>
- SANA. (2015). Syria President Al-Assad Interview: We Must Protect our Country against Terrorists "Supported by Regional Powers and the West". Retrieved from <http://www.globalresearch.ca/president-al-assad-interview-we-must-protect-our-country-against-terrorists-supported-by-regional-powers-and-the-west/5493095>
- Sands, P. (2012). Syria polarised by Bashar Al Assad's defiance. Retrieved from <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/syria-polarised-by-bashar-al-assads-defiance>
- Security, T. A. N. (2013). Jabhat al-Nusra. Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/0wxa17>
- SNHR. (2016, 15 April 2016). Death Toll Retrieved from <http://sn4hr.org/#prettyPhoto>
- SOHR. (2016). 588 civilian citizens including 214 child and citizen women killed in March 2016. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/OrrCGP>
- Soloman, T. G. a. E. (2012). Russia boosts arms sales to Syria despite world pressure. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-russia-arms-idUSTRE81K13420120221>
- Sterling, J. (2012). Daraa: The spark that lit the Syrian flame. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/03/01/world/meast/syria-crisis-beginnings/>
- Stuster, J. D. (2013). Syrian Spillover. Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/04/syrian-spillover/>

- Telegraph, T. (2012). Syrian diplomats around the world expelled Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9297399/Syrian-diplomats-around-the-world-expelled.html>
- Themnér, L., & Wallensteen, P. (2014). Armed conflicts, 1946–2013. *Journal of Peace Research*, 51(4), 541-554.
- Tilly, C. (2003). *The Politics of Collective Violence*: Cambridge University Press.
- Tilly, C. (2007). *Contentious politics / Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow*. Boulder: Boulder : Paradigm Publishers.
- UK/AP, H. P. (2014). Women Stoned To Death By ISIS Fighters In Syria For Adultery. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/08/09/women-stoned-to-death\\_n\\_5664759.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/08/09/women-stoned-to-death_n_5664759.html)
- Ungor, U. (2013). Mass Violence in Syria: A Preliminary Analysis. *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 3.
- University, S. (2015). Jabhat al-Nusra. Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/ya8RVy>
- University, S. (2016). The Islamic State. Retrieved from <https://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/1>
- Violations, J. (2016). <https://www.facebook.com/JAN.Violations/?fref=photo>. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/JAN.Violations/?fref=photo>
- Weinberger, K. M. J. (2015). Life under ISIS rule is worse than we ever imagined, and some fighters and citizens have had enough. Retrieved from <http://www.pri.org/stories/2015-02-21/life-under-isis-rule-worse-we-ever-imagined-and-some-fighters-and-citizens-have>
- Whitman, E. (2015). Russia UN Vetoes On Syria, Ukraine Undermining United Nations Security Council, US Warns. Retrieved from <http://www.ibtimes.com/russia-un-vetoes-syria-ukraine-undermining-united-nations-security-council-us-warns-2110080>
- Yell, R. (2015). The Rebel Commander of Damascus. Retrieved from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/12/15/the-rebel-commander-of-damascus.html>
- Zahler, K. A. (2009). *The Assads' Syria*: Twenty-First Century Books.
- Zwerman, G. (2004). The Politics of Collective Violence. In G. Zwerman & C. Tilly (Eds.), (Vol. 109, pp. 1235-1236).