Experiential Solidarity and University Protests: Why Syrian Students Mobilized on Campus

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ABSTRACT

Syrian students mobilized in an unprecedented fashion in the first two years of the 2011 revolution, despite extremely dangerous potential consequences levied by the National Union of Syrian Students and security forces. Since the Baath Party's rise to power in the 1950s, universities had been places where any hint of political activity would be suppressed as security agencies could freely arrest and patrol on campuses. Nevertheless, students withstood potentially very dangerous consequences and protested on campus together almost daily in the first two years of the Syrian Revolution, until higher education institutions faced such disruption from consequences of armed conflict that normal operations ceased. Why did they mobilize on campus, despite intense repression and threats of repression? Existing scholarship attributes high-risk protests on university campuses to the motivating role of identity, the significance and symbolism of locations themselves, and physical characteristics like clustered living and clear boundaries demarcating their property. This thesis conducts an analysis of student testimony in English or translated to English, provided on social media, in news articles, and from various non-governmental organizations to argue that experiential solidarity played a role in motivating campus protest. Building on definitions of political and social solidarity, I conceptualize a hybrid form I call experiential solidarity, and argue that it crucially facilitated collective action through four mechanisms (1) allowing participants to surmount fear of repression, (2) creating unique protests in the name of solidarity, (3) contributing to diffusion of protests across space, and (4) fostering confrontational behavior in protest out of an obligation to protect one another. My analysis demonstrates these mechanisms through a careful text analysis of testimonies that express motivations for participation, and bridges the fields of collective identity of social movements and mobilization and space.

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INTRODUCTION

Ahmed, a student at Damascus University, experienced the arrest and disappearance of his brother in early April of 2011 on campus at the hands of the National Union of Syrian Students, the ruling Baath Party's arm of surveillance and control on university campuses (Macleod and Flamand, 2011). After inquiring about his brother's disappearance over the phone, the union made clear to Ahmed that they would target him next if he did not relent in his search. Instead of obeying the pleas of his parents to return home or try to hide, Ahmed committed himself to protesting on campus: "I will not be quiet anymore. I will not be scared anymore" (Macleod and Flamand, 2011). This experience was not unique among college students in Syria after 2011. While universities were "slow to wake" at the outset of the revolution, protests by students on campus eventually came to constitute a key portion of resistance to the Assad regime more broadly. As protests proliferated on campus in 2012 and 2013, more than 35,000 students were arrested in addition to the many who were killed (Ziadeh, 2013). Many students saw close friends and colleagues killed or detained, yet protested anyway.

It was well-known pre-2011 that security apparatuses were hyper-present on Syrian university campuses, enforcing political control, surveillance, and repression through their National Union of Syrian Students (Dillabough et al., 2019, 7). In fact, Syrian authoritarianism "considered universities as branches of the ruling Ba'ath party" and "an extension of the hand of the security state" (Ziadeh, 2013). In addition to arrests and killings, security forces conducted raids, expelled students, shut down entire universities, and pursued brutal tactics of suppression. Yet, protests on campuses abounded after the outbreak of revolution in 2011. Students demonstrated on a nearly daily basis, across many public and private universities throughout the country ("The student movement in Syria," 2012).

Universities, while traditional sites of mobilization in other contexts, had little history as places of protest given that neither academic nor political freedom existed on university campuses before the conflict (Ward, 2014). Students organized strikes particularly in Aleppo and northern Syria during the years of instability in Syria in the 1950s, but were met with brutal repression (Alexander, 2011). Furthermore, Assad facilitated this enforcement of control by keeping the Ba'ath Party involved in every aspect of university life and ensuring security apparatuses were ubiquitous on campuses (Macleod and Flamand, 2011). The National Union of Syrian Students (NUSS), aligned with the Baath Party and security forces, aided in this control as well by informing on fellow students and controlling campus life. The conditions at universities were therefore not particularly amenable to mobilization given their close integration with Assad's government and the presence of security forces ready to squash political activity.

Why, despite the known surveillance, political control, and intense repression at universities in Syria, did students protest on campus? Existing scholarship from a variety of cases in these fields provides clues to answer this question through explanations such as identity affirmation, emotions, campus ecologies, symbolism, and desired levels of contention. These explanations fail to describe the Syrian case because they either depend on factors not present in this context or do not adequately account for the differences between the student and non-student populations participating in the revolution.

This study provides a new explanation of what drives on-campus protest mobilization in high-risk contexts. I argue that experiential solidarity, resulting from shared experiences of oppression and unity in challenging an unjust system, affected protest through four distinct mechanisms relating to participation, special protests, diffusion and confrontation. I demonstrate

this argument through qualitative analysis of protest testimony as provided by students who participated to understand why they decided to mobilize on campus.

My findings contribute to the field of social movements study more broadly and mobilization and space and mobilization and emotions literature more specifically by arguing that an emotion, experiential solidarity, can influence the decisions of protestors to withstand conditions in certain locations and also affect how protests in those locations occur. I coin the term experiential solidarity, a factor crucial to driving protest on campus, to build on existing scholarship on types of solidarity. I argue that it affected both space and the dynamics of the mobilization itself given that it was instrumental to the decision to protest at universities as well as an enabling factor in participation, protest organizing, diffusion, and confrontation. Furthermore, this contributes to understanding how activists make decisions to endure repression in certain high-risk spaces where conditions can be even more dangerous than other locations.

I organize the remainder of this thesis into three chapters. First, I provide a context chapter with a section on historical context on the state of Syria and its revolution, a concepts section detailing definitions crucial to my argument, and a review of literature that provides possible answers to my question. Second, I include a data and methods chapter that presents my data set, explains how I interpreted that data to make my argument, and displays my findings. Third, I analyze key pieces of that data to make the case for my contribution of experiential solidarity and argue its role in affecting protest via four causal mechanisms. Finally, I end with a conclusion that includes takeaways, implications, and discussions of generalizability.

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT

Historical Context

Bashar al-Assad came to power following the death of his father Hafez al-Assad, who had ruled Syria for three decades (Macfarquhar, 2000). Upon his accession to the presidency, Assad undertook the project of "modernizing authoritarianism" (Perthes, 2004). He pursued neoliberal reforms and some privatization, but in a way that benefited those well-connected to his regime through a type of crony capitalism (Hinnebusch, 2012, 99). He also inserted his own loyalists into positions of power in the army and security forces (99). After initial prospects of reform in 2000 dubbed the "Damascus Spring" that included the release of hundreds of political prisoners, the Assad regime began arresting political prisoners, journalists, and human rights activists (Houry, 2010). Simply "criticizing the president, starting a blog, or protesting government policies" could land a Syrian citizen in prison (Houry, 2010). The "mukhabarat," Syria's security agencies, engaged in torture and unwarranted, indefinite detention of citizens. Additionally, while Assad mentioned the possibility of expanding political freedom through elections and more political parties, he did little in that regard. Syria remained an authoritarian state in which power was concentrated in the hands of a repressive regime.

Despite marginal privatization pursued by Bashar, the Syrian economy remained highly controlled by the government ("Syria: Introduction," 2023). Higher education thus received extensive government support and funding through the Ministry of Higher Education before the outbreak of conflict in 2011 (Immerstein and Al-Shaikhly, 2016). Public higher education was free in the vast majority of cases and all students with a secondary school diploma were guaranteed admission to a public university given the right to education included in the Syrian constitution (Immerstein and Al-Shaikhly, 2016). While the Syrian state guaranteed access, they

also used their security apparatus to intervene in decision-making, admissions, and promotions at universities (Dillabough et al., 2019, 7). One strategy that the Baath Party used to retain such control on campuses came through the National Union of Syrian Student, or NUSS. Offering benefits such as better grades and access to university housing, NUSS membership required serving as an informant for the regime, monitoring campus events, gathering intelligence on students and professors, and eventually repressing protests and organizing counterprotests (Macleod and Flamand, 2011; Scholars at Risk, 2013). The union existed across the entire Syrian university network, and quickly suppressed any youth protest movement by targeting organizers, utilizing repression, and orchestrating union-led counter protests (Scholars at Risk, 2013). This contributed to the common feeling on Syrian university campuses that "even a whisper of politics could land you in jail" (Macleod and Flamand, 2011). Thus, the Syrian regime made higher education widely available to its population, but through universities that were well-known to be sites of dictatorial control.

Revolution came to Syria in the wake of the revolutions throughout the Middle East North Africa region, seeking to oust similarly repressive dictators. Hosni Mubarak had been ousted in Egypt and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia (Al-Anani, 2021; Fitouri, 2021). Additionally, facing economic struggles from Bashar Al-Assad's crony capitalist system and restrictions on political activity, ordinary Syrians had reached a point of exasperation in early 2011 (Laub, 2021). However, the memory of few protests that occurred being brutally suppressed and the squashing of the 1982 uprising of the Muslim Brotherhood in the city of Hama with shelling and "brute force" remained distant memories in their minds (Laub, 2021) (Yacoubian, 2021). In March of 2011, after successful protests in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, security forces alleged that a group of Syrian schoolchildren spray-painted the slogan "the people

want the fall of the regime" on a school wall in the city of Deraa (Laub, 2021). They were

arrested and tortured, prompting protests calling for their release (Yacoubian, 2021). While some

initially more modestly called for increased freedom and less corruption, a lack of real

concessions and heavy repression of protests by security forces caused the movement to soon

demand regime change (Laub, 2021). By the summer of 2011, hundreds of thousands of

protesters were taking to the streets daily to demand the resignation of Bashar al-Assad (Rodgers

et al., 2016). The regime's excessive repression and use of force often incited further

determination in the members of the movement (Rodgers et al., 2016).

Universities, historically sites of repression, were "slow to wake" at the start of the

revolution (Scholars at Risk, 2013). Initial protests against the regime on university campuses

were met with counter-protests by the NUSS, who also informed security forces of participants

in anti-regime activity resulting in arrests of many revolutionary activists. The NUSS worked

closely with security forces to strategically squash the growing revolution on campus. Protests

against Assad and in favor of freedom began to proliferate in the beginning of 2012 with the

leadership of the Union of Free Syrian Students, despite the NUSS's organized networks of

surveillance, control, and repression present there (Alijasem, 2021; Scholars at Risk, 2013; "The

student movement in Syria," 2012).

Students organized and communicated via social media, and shared videos of the

atrocities occurring across the country with each other. Specifically, Facebook was instrumental

to the facilitation of protest and other actions on university campuses (Rodineliussen, 2019).

Students reclaimed their own voices by avoiding state-controlled media and shared images and

videos with one another in various student-specific and not student-specific Facebook groups

that showcased what was occurring on the ground and encouraged more to join the revolution

(Rodinliussen, 2019). While students organized via other channels as well, Rodinliussen (2019) found that all students interviewed in his field work cited it as the primary method for organization. Protests on campus only grew as atrocities continued and students circulated images of them, but remained largely peaceful (Alijasem, 2021). Students from all religious sects participated, and often organized nearly daily demonstrations after classes or in dormitories for those who lived in them ("The student movement in Syria," 2012; Alijasem, 2021). They ranged from small-scale class protests to rallies of thousands of students (Macleod and Flamand, 2011; BBC, 2011).

Although students sought to remain peaceful, the regime responded extremely violently and with heavy repression. The first university protest occurred at Damascus University on April 11, 2011, less than a month after the school children ignited the uprising. Only a few hundred students participated in that first demonstration, and security forces killed one student (Zoepf, 2011). Just two days afterwards, protests spread to Aleppo University for the first time (Zoepf, 2011). Security forces arrested dozens of students, and the NUSS confronted those who demonstrated (Zoepf, 2011). Protests spread to public and private universities alike throughout Syria, and grew as security forces and the NUSS responded with repression (Alijasem, 2021). It soon became common for security platoons to show up on campus to facilitate pro-regime NUSS protests and suppress any opposition protests that could arise (Aljiasem, 2021). While the threat of repression deterred some hesitant students from joining, it also helped the student movement recruit more participants given that it showcased the revolution's narrative about regime violence (Alijasem, 2021). By the end of 2011, students organized nearly daily protests of anywhere from tens to hundreds to thousands of participants (General Union of Syrian Students, 2011). They

remained the largest and most frequent at major universities like Aleppo University and Damascus University, but nonetheless arose consistently at universities nationwide.

For student protests, security forces could be certain of location, and had a network of people in the NUSS that it could utilize for its own purposes. Protests that occurred in locations outside of university campuses could theoretically occur anywhere, with any cohort of people. While such locations as mosques after Friday prayers and town squares frequently hosted protests, university protests consistently occurred on campuses within an enclosed vicinity. Security forces provided NUSS members with "electrical shock devices, cables, and batons" to be used to repress protests and asked them to identify anti-regime activists; they eventually armed some students and forced others to join the security forces themselves and aid in arrests and torture of detainees (Alijasem, 2021). Not only students supportive of the regime joined, but anyone who wanted to gain access to more resources and a network became involved given that no other student organizations existed (Alijasem, 2021). Responding to this, students active in the revolution formed the Union of Free Syrian Students as a method of countering the NUSS. They used Facebook as well as other social media platforms to a lesser degree to coordinate between union chapters across different campuses (Rodineliussen, 2019; General Union of Syrian Students, n.d.). This new union also reported on protests, raids, arrests, and fatalities on campus. Protests increased in size as well as geographic scope, with many small universities establishing UFSS chapters (General Union of Syrian Students, n.d.).

University protests did not end on a specific date based on a singular impetus. A few factors contributed to their diminishing. First, security conducted raids of dormitories and shut campuses down, forcing students active in the revolution away from campus either returning home, being arrested or killed, or entering exile abroad. For example, on May 3, 2012, security

forces orchestrated a violent crackdown on protest that killed four students (MacFarquhar, 2012).

They also suspended classes for two weeks, and shut down all dormitories, removing the homes

of many students (MacFarquhar, 2012). Additionally, as international powers turned away from

supporting the protesters, the uprising evolved into an armed conflict that destroyed entire

buildings, towns, and cities (AlAhmad, 2016). Rival groups obtained control of different

campuses at varying times throughout the conflict. For example, Al-Furat University, located in

Raqqa, fell into the control of the Islamic State in 2014 (AlAhmad, 2016). ISIS imposed strict

regulations on how to teach and administer the university, and eventually closed it in 2015 to

utilize the buildings for other purposes (AlAhmad, 2016). Thus, university protests stopped

during 2013 due to a combination of forced closures of the universities themselves or the

dormitories students lived in, physical destruction of university campuses, and a civil war that

placed them under the control of new factions. These factors caused students to either flee

abroad, face arrest or death, or become involved in the armed conflict itself.

CONCEPTS

This paper will frequently mention the terms mobilization, repression, and solidarity. I

employ the term mobilization to refer to the general actions of contestation by Syrian students

and the goals of the Union of Free Syrian Students. I will utilize Oberschall's definition of

political mobilization, which states that it "is the process of organizing groups, social networks,

crowds, and social units for political goals" (2011, 1590). In this case, the political goals being

advanced were greater freedoms, regime change, and the release of detainees. He elaborates,

saying that challengers mobilize when existing political institutions cannot adequately address

the problem (1590). In the Syrian case, I reference mobilization to define what Syrian students

did to challenge the status quo at universities and organize to change what they saw as a failed

government. While mobilization often means protest in this context, I examine a variety of actions that come with it, such as strikes, sit-ins, prayers and funerals, and written expressions of contestation.

I use the term repression to characterize how security forces responded to student and generally Syrian mobilization with the aim of highlighting the high risk and consequences facing students when deciding to engage in political activity on campus. I define repression as the use of force, threats, and other reactionary, disciplinary consequences aimed at either deterring mobilization or punishing participants for mobilization. This commonly included beatings, stone throwing, tear gas, verbal abuse, threats of arrest and death, expulsion from university, and raiding of living areas. While the definition can include consequences like arrest or death, I distinguish between arrest, killing, and other forms of repression by specifically naming detainment and death when referring to these punishments.

Finally, the term experiential solidarity is central to my argument for why students protested on campus despite organized, heavy repression. I discuss the emergence and meaning of this term in detail at the outset of my empirical analysis. To summarize here, I coin the term experiential solidarity. This definition builds on Scholz's concepts of political solidarity and social solidarity to produce a hybrid between the two. It stems from shared experiences of oppression, similarity in identity, and the act of working together to challenge a system of injustice. Often expressed in familial terms, this experiential solidarity produced strong moral obligations to act on the solidarity itself. The term is the basis on which my argument builds.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarship on repression, social movements and space, and university mobilization provides possible answers to the puzzle of why, despite political control, surveillance, and

repression known to characterize Syrian universities, students protested on campus. Simon et al. (2008) examine the role of identity affirmation in protests. Building on previous scholarship that establishes the power of collective identification over political mobilization, they argue that this influence of collective identification comes from the "identity affirmation process" (2). Identity, they conclude after an experiment that treated two different groups based on certainty of identity, motivates one's action when insecure about possessing that identity. After treating experiment groups with strong or weak identity through supposed attendance at a fabricated protest, they find that protest can serve as a way of achieving certainty in one's identity as a member of the movement in question (5).

In the Syrian context, proclamations of identity arose in the larger revolutionary movement. For example, in Qamishli, protesters on May 24, 2012, carried a large banner that read, "I'm Sunni sect…I'm Druze sect…I'm Alawi…I am a Christian…I am Kurdish…I'm…I'm…I am a Syrian" (General Union of Syrian Students, 05/24/2012). This protest could be seen as a form of affirmation of the Syrian identity insofar as protesters emphasized their unity and shared identity as opposed to the sects that the regime had used to divide them. However, in looking specifically at Syrian students, it is unlikely that they would feel uncertain of their identities as supporters of the student revolutionary movement if they were enrolled in a university and had joined revolutionary activity. Perhaps affirming their identities as revolutionaries motivated participation in protest and other forms of collective action, but it does not explain why they would protest specifically on campus with their fellow students given that the student aspect of that identity could be determined by their enrollment in higher education. Students frequently situated themselves within the larger Syrian context, commonly chanting such slogans as "God, Syria, freedom only," suggesting that the student subgroup of the

larger group of revolutionary Syrians remained identified with one, general revolution movement (Macleod and Flamand, 2011).

Jasper (2014) offers a different explanation of why people may withstand repression and protest anyways. He argues that the mobilizing and demobilizing effects of the constant streams of emotion present in social movements are central to affecting participation. He notes that anger is central to the mobilization process and to sustaining protest so long as emotions meet certain conditions. Namely, shame must be transformed into pride to produce indignation, shocks must cause activating anger, and anger must be directed at someone to blame and also take on a moral basis. In Syria, many of these conditions appear to have been met. A statement from the Union of Free Syrian students following raids at the university in Homs and in the Baba Amr neighborhood depicts this. They declare their longevity and intention to continue demonstrations suggesting pride, reject and decry the "bleeding and crying" caused by the "rotten" regime to place anger on a specific entity, and question the rights and laws that the regime thinks they have to carry out such atrocities, suggesting a moral basis of anger (General Union of Syrian Students, 02/10/2012).

Perhaps these emotional mechanisms of shocks transforming into pointed anger and shame producing indignation sustained action through the constant repression, arrests, and murders levied by regime security forces. However, these emotional mechanisms do not account for what motivated students to focus specifically on shocks and shame produced on campus. Students not only saw repression of their peers on campus, but also saw family members, loved ones, and other community members repressed, detained, and killed outside of the university context. Why did universities specifically produce these mechanisms within the student bodies of various universities? If Jasper's mechanisms above do indeed explain why students protested on

campus despite repression, it still remains insufficient in explaining what characteristics of universities or the students attending them produced these mechanisms and caused them to protest specifically on campus.

Zhao (1998) studies very similar questions of why and how students mobilized in the context of the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests in Beijing, China in 1989. He argues that the spatial distributions on university campuses foster close-knit social networks that create a collective action environment and encourage ecology-dependent strategies of mobilization. Campus ecologies allowed dissident ideas to spread beforehand, caused students to connect and organize in dorm-based networks, and created spatial awareness. These factors enabled students to plan successful demonstrations and sustain high rates of participation. Additionally, both the segregation of universities from police and the rest of the city as well as the concentration of universities within a specific area in the city fostered the growth of protests.

While this analysis presents a plethora of structural and spatial factors enabling the Tiananmen Square mobilization, it relies on certain characteristics of Chinese universities in Beijing that do not apply to Syrian universities. First, the vast majority of students in the Chinese universities resided on campus in dorms, while many Syrian university students reside at home and attend universities located in their home towns or regions (Dillabough et al., 2019, 8). This weakens the applicability of the strength of dorm-based networks of planning and communication discussed by Zhao (1998). Second, the universities in Beijing are located in a distinct sector of the city, which Zhao argues caused both competition between universities protesting and the combination of protests as protests departed from individual campuses (1495). Syrian universities were spread throughout the country. While certain universities are large with distinct faculties that could act as universities within universities, smaller ones isolated from

others still sustained long-term mobilization. Third, Zhao argues that the walls and gates enclosing universities meant that police had to plan and receive permission to enter campuses (1495). In Syria, universities were regarded as extensions of the security state, and ensured the National University of Syrian Students worked in close collaboration with security forces in all aspects of campus life. Thus, the differing spatial characteristics of universities in Syria do not create the same dynamics of mobilization Zhao discusses.

Literature on social movements and space also addresses why participants in protests choose the locations they do. Schwedler (2012), in her analysis of protest in the city of Amman in Jordan, finds that the certain locations and associations with them can create symbolic power that encourage protest or are amenable to mobilization more generally. She argues that the "spatial restructuring" of West Amman with its widened roads to increase visibility to a diverse citizenry and its various symbols of foreign investment and international capital made protest both effective and attractive to those challenging those ideals. The space also had a distinct degree of contention.

While the question motivating my research does not relate to the choice of a sector of a city like Schwedler's research focuses on, the idea that space can contain symbolic power in protest can apply. Perhaps students mobilized on campus because of the symbolic power of youth-led protest and to expose the violation of intellectual freedom at a location where knowledge remains the guiding principle of operation. The fact that students sought to increase contention when UN monitors arrived at universities in 2012 supports this theory, as the image of university students being arrested and killed put forth a strong symbol to the world (Rubin and Bose, 2022). Universities definitely could possess symbolic power as sites of knowledge-building and youth opportunity. However, symbolic power can also be found in many locations

throughout Syria. A protest held at a primary or secondary education institution, outside of a security headquarters, or at a religious institution can possess similar symbolism. It remains unclear what factors specific to universities motivated students to protest there in spite of heavy repression.

Schwedler (2022) provides another answer to the puzzle of why students protested on campus by arguing that protesters' choice of location can be determined by the favored level of contention of participants. Those who favor less contention through nonviolence would choose traditional spaces, and those who seek to produce a more visible and dramatic means of claims-making may protest in nontraditional spaces (202, 206). Traditional spaces refer to sites where collective action had previously been tolerated, while nontraditional spaces would signify locations where contestation had never occurred. Syrian students protesting on campus generally favored nonviolence in the early years of the revolution, and still chose to protest at a completely unconventional protest location ("Attack on Syria university," 2012). Universities had seen collective action in the years preceding Hafez Al-Assad's rule, but largely remained quiet due to political control and repression afterwards. A university thus constituted a nontraditional space. The literature does not address why students chose this nontraditional space with grave consequences accompanying action at the location when they sought to create a peaceful movement. Schwedler also claims that in the Jordanian context, sites that were off-limits locations of mobilization often were abandoned for protest (212). In the Syrian context, nearly every site was off-limits, especially universities, and revolutionaries did not abandon them. The theory thus may not apply to an environment where the regime so strictly and consistently suppressed political activity, regardless of cause or location.

Finally, Maia and De Sordi (2022) look at the role of social solidarity in sustaining a long-term political project in the context of street protests against fascism in Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic. While various social groups united to express dissent towards particular politicians and policy proposals, the movement rapidly cooled off after the first months of the pandemic. Seeking to explain why the ramp up of the movement occurred, they credit social solidarity as the reason. They claim that the solidarity resulted from "cleavages" that the various crises Brazil had exacerbated and exposed in recent years (30). These cleavages caused social solidarity to develop among heterogeneous groups like workers as they challenged specific policies and politicians. It remained too weak as of yet among the fragmented progressive groups of workers who were active in street protests to produce a more sustained, long-term movement.

Social solidarity definitely existed among Syrian students, based on their biographical similarities and shared experiences of oppression on university campuses. A biographical similarity refers to a shared characteristic based on a biographical characteristic like age or stage of life. Perhaps, their solidarity had developed further than the fragmented progressive groups discussed by Maia and De Sordi, and thus the movement was sustained unlike the Brazilian street protests. It seems that this social solidarity could also apply, however, to the Syrian population more broadly as opposed to students specifically. Those who became active in the revolution possessed social solidarity from shared experiences of oppression. As that oppression heightened at the start of the revolution, the solidarity could have only increased and sustained further action. Therefore, the question remains as to why university campuses specifically saw sustained student protest for as long as they did, if social solidarity was motivating the entire movement.

Thus, existing answers from scholarship on identity, emotions, university ecology, social movements and space, and solidarity do not explain why students protested specifically on campus in the face of coordinated, heavy repression. While some of the explanations apply to the Syrian revolution generally, they do not answer the puzzle of why students often mobilized separately on campuses in the face of heavy repression. These campus protests were unique due to the potential for repression there, the fact that the student movement was part of the larger Syrian revolution, and because many students do not reside on campus. To explain the Syrian case and why students specifically protested on campus, therefore, we must examine student testimonies and interviews from the Syrian case itself.

CHAPTER 2: DATA AND METHODS

DATA

  To answer the question of why students protested on campus in spite of coordinated and heavy repression, I examined testimonies from participating students and how they presented their own motivations and decisions to participate in collective action. By coordinated and heavy repression, I mean that the repression was both organized by preexisting institutions and was very intense. I identified motivations and patterns of behavior through various primary and secondary sources that contain or reference direct statements and narratives from participants.

  My most frequently utilized source of testimony explaining how and why students mobilized was the Union of Free Syrian Students Facebook page that reported on daily protests as well as detailed repression and provided participant testimony.[1] I cite it as the General Union of Syrian Students Facebook page, because it was renamed to that title in 2017 from the title of the Union of Free Syrian Students, for unknown reasons. Student leaders created this source at Homs University in November of 2011 with both Arabic language and English language versions. It posted updates and reports from protests at every university throughout Syria from its inception in 2011 through 2016. However, the majority of reports, testimonies, and descriptions of campus protests fall in 2012. In 2012, the union posted roughly daily reports, totaling around 300 posts. From 2013 through 2016, posts gradually decreased in frequency and showcased specific martyrs or images of the revolution as opposed to reports of daily activities across campuses. This matches trends of when campus protests were at their height, before dormitories were closed, universities faced shutdowns, and the country descended into an armed conflict between different groups vying for territory.

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[1] https://www.facebook.com/GUSS.ENGL

Social media sites such as Facebook are appropriate for investigating motivations and decisions regarding protest participation because of the way they allow participants to nearly instantly and freely express ideas and emotions. Jost et al. (2018), after conducting random samples of tweets throughout various protests in Spain, the United States, and Turkey, conclude that social media "[transmits] emotional and motivational messages both in support and in opposition to protest activity" such as "emphasizing moral indignation [and] social identification" (111). In the Syrian case, Facebook became the main tool through which students coordinated and organized activism (Rodinelieussen, 2019). Given the prominence of Facebook in student protest, the Union of Free Syrian Students Facebook page can convey motivations for protesting how they did. Many posts did indeed highlight emotional and motivational messages.

To examine why students protested on campus in spite of coordinated and heavy repression, I went through the entirety of their posts from 2011 through 2013, given that higher education ceased normal operations after that time, and downloaded every post that described reasoning for protest or contained direct testimony from student participants themselves. I read through individual posts in chronological order and identified posts to include in my analysis by downloading those that contained descriptions of what specific protests were for or why individual students decided to attend. I labeled the posts I downloaded using a YYYYMMDD title format to order them chronologically in NVivo.

In addition to Facebook posts, I gathered testimonies from civil society organizations that collected narratives and essays from students after their participation. I utilized Syria Untold, an organization led by journalists and academics that aims to elevate voices from the Syrian peaceful movement. They collected many testimonies that explained the motivations of students and other constituencies alike, and thus are a useful source in understanding why students

protested on campus despite coordinated and intense repression. I also examined various

international news sources that interviewed students on the ground in 2012 and 2013, like *Al*

Jazeera and *The New York Times*. While often shorter or divided throughout the article, these

testimonies nevertheless provided direct quotes that often addressed students' reason for

participating in the action being reported on.

Finally, I used a few blogs written by students or that interacted with participating

students to produce their work. Whether Syria Freedom Forever or Scholars at Risk, these

platforms provided students and those supporting them to freely articulate their goals and what

was occurring in real time. Both the civil society organizations collecting testimony and the blog

posts like these present the possibility of social desirability bias, meaning that students could

have claimed more lofty or noble goals or motivations than they actually had. It is difficult to

avoid this aspect, so I simply conducted my analysis acknowledging that possibility while also

including some academic and journalistic sources that were not written by participants

themselves. I gathered as many sources as I could find through various searches of both library

databases and search engines like Google, and went through their archives to find any testimony

relevant to my question. I also did keyword searches within various of these platforms using

words and phrases like "student protest" and "university protest." In the end, I consulted ten civil

society organization websites, five blogs, and fourteen newspapers. These were all of the

platforms I could find using Google, the library database, and other search engines.

These data sources present some limitations and weaknesses. First, testimony gathered

through social media posts, interviews, oral histories, and essays cannot be guaranteed to convey

the facts on the ground completely accurately, given the absence of fact checking. Social

desirability bias can also cause participants to claim more lofty or morally superior motivations

so as to make themselves appear noble. However, much of the testimony gathered in real time utilizes aliases and cannot be identified with a real person, so perhaps participants had less reason to paint pictures that constructed them as more righteous or heroic than they may have actually been.

Second, my data collection does not present a representative sample of the motivations of all students participating in protests on university campuses in Syria from 2011 through 2013. The vast majority of student participants did not publish testimonies online and thus their perspectives may not be present in my data set. The sample of student testimonies I include in my data set may be skewed towards leaders of the student movement, or those wishing to push a certain narrative. While this concern is valid, I also analyze what protesters chanted, the banners that students carried during action, and any other forms of group messaging to understand motivations for protesting on campus. These all convey group motivations as opposed to individual motivations and would not skew towards certain individuals or types of individuals. It is difficult to know demographic details of the students providing testimony, as many posts were anonymous, utilized aliases, or did not go into much background about the participant. However, the Union of Free Syrian Students and their social media also collected data from across the country and universities of much different characters. They contain a wide variety of personal testimonies as well as statements reflecting stated goals of the entire nationwide group. Given that I conducted an extensive sweep of many platforms to collect as much testimony as is available and the Union's use of diverse perspectives, it is still sufficient to answer the question.

Third, the time of the formation of the Union of Free Syrian Students and the size of universities slightly skew data towards certain times and locations. The Union of Free Syrian Students did not form until September of 2011, and did not start reporting on action and

providing testimony until January of 2012. It did so frequently and thoroughly for most of the

year, and slowly turned into a page dedicated to showcasing moments from non-student protest

as well as commemorating students who died in the revolution by early 2013. As such, the

Facebook page does not report on all campus protests and neglects 2011 activity and protests

from 2013 and on. However, this mostly matches trends in campus protest. Before the union's

formation, there were fewer protests given repression and organizational difficulties (Ziadeh,

2013). Students held the first campus protest on April 11, 2011 (Zoepf, 2011). For months

afterwards, no large student protest movements existed, as a result of the strength of the NUSS in

organizing pro-regime activity and informing on those planning protests against the regime

(Ziadeh, 2013). Daily protests emerged at the end of January of 2012 (Ziadeh, 2013). See Table

1 below for a breakdown of my data by date. Many of the Facebook posts, especially in 2012,

contained multiple testimonies from different students within them.

Table 1

Evidence by date
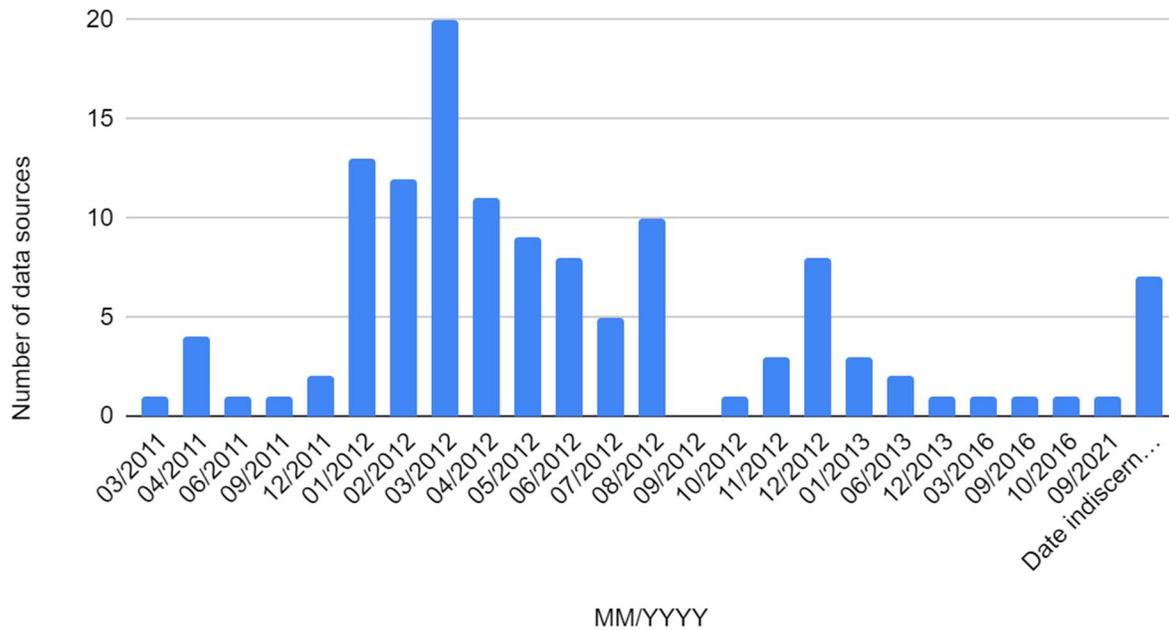
Fourth, most testimonies focus on Aleppo University, and much of my supporting evidence comes from testimonies from students there. Seventeen of the examples I employ to make my argument in my analysis section come from there, and nearly all of the 300 posts I examined referenced occurrences at the university. This should not present an issue given that there still are still many other universities included in my dataset that support my argument, even if they appear less frequently than testimonies from Aleppo University. Also, Aleppo University was the site of unprecedented mobilization that was large in scale, so much so that the Union of Free Syrian Students often referred to it as "Revolution University" (General Union of Syrian Students, n.d.). The university had few Alawites in leadership; Alawites constituted a key part of the regime's support base (Alijasem, 2021). Students staged demonstrations there daily in 2012, despite the majority of the city not seeing the same level of uprising activity at that time ("Syrian

students 'killed at Aleppo protest,'" 2012). Therefore, the fact that testimonies frequently arise from there does not represent a problematic skew.

Fifth, there exists a possibility that perceptions of one's motivations for participating in the protests may change when providing testimony or documenting one's experience years after the events. Due to this potential inconsistency, I will also identify testimonies I analyze that were not provided during the revolution itself with the year it was collected and take that into account in my analysis. However, this will only be necessary for a very small amount of testimonies. For the testimonies that were collected years after the events, I note their delay in my analysis. I also do not use these examples alone to make a claim and only include them when other testimonies collected in real time similarly support the point I am making. The Union of Free Syrian Students Facebook page collected and posted testimonies in real time, as did many news sources and civil society organizations, so the majority of my evidence does not present this problem.

Finally, there may be bias in some primary sources given that participants state their motivations themselves, but by balancing these with secondary sources, the bias can be minimized. Secondary sources often reported on group level demands, chants, or motivations generally for any given protest and thus possess less possibility of this individual bias when stating one's motivations. Furthermore, this data may not contain motivations for every single protest held on campuses during the Syrian revolution. The Union of Free Syrian Students Facebook page does present testimonies and reports from various campuses, however Facebook still may only present perspectives of students who had access to the Internet or students who chose to be active on social media. Again, this underscores the importance of journalism pieces and secondary sources that contain explanations of group-level motivations for particular protests as expressed in their chants and multiple individual interviews.

Given that Facebook, civil society organizations, news, and think tank reports cover the majority of sources that contain student motivations for protests on campus, testimonial data from these social media and other sources offers the best available data. In an ideal situation, I could have conducted interviews with students protesting in real time during 2012 and 2013. Similarly, conducting interviews with participants now on what they perceive their motivations at the time to have been would have been useful. However, given language and feasibility constraints, utilizing these sources suffices. Additionally, I would ideally be able to understand and communicate in Arabic to ensure no meaning is lost in translation of testimonies. Data had already been translated in English in my sources, but there is no guarantee of perfection in that translation. Sometimes the English data was confusing. However, this represents very few examples. My data set overall utilizes all testimony available to me and includes a diverse set of protest descriptions from various universities.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

After gathering testimony from both Facebook and various publications, I built a data set that included ninety-five posts from the Union of Free Syrian Students Facebook page and thirty-one essays and articles from other published sources, for a total of 126 sources of testimonial data. Most Facebook posts included in my data set provided testimonies from various protests at different campuses that had occurred on any given day. Therefore, many of the posts contained multiple testimonies. The articles and essays, however, generally focused on one testimony from an individual. I imported testimonies into NVivo and coded them based on motivations expressed in the testimonies themselves. I did not begin with a particular set of codes in mind. Rather, I created a coding scheme inductively by examining the data itself and building a scheme based on what students themselves explained their motivations to be. I only acknowledged a

causal relationship and coded testimony accordingly when a student expressed it. While it may

not represent the only motivating factor for campus protest in any given example, it does reflect

what students internalized as their motivations. I coded any quotes in which students explained

their motivations for protesting on campus or participating in another campus action that day or

more generally throughout the early years of the revolution. After reviewing all of my data, I

created thirteen categories of motivations for protesting on campus, as displayed in Table 2:

Code: Motivation for participating in campus protest	Explanation
Against Assad's atrocities	Students express wanting to protest or contribute to an action due to the human rights abuses and other injust responses by the Assad regime
In favor of freedom	Students express desire for increased freedoms or chant for freedom
Desire to overthrow Assad regime	Students explicitly state their desire for regime change
Against accusations of foreign influence	Students want to protest on campus to refute the regime's claim that their movement is controlled by foreign forces
Against the National Union of Syrian Students	Students organize protest to either protest the actions of the NUSS or display their strength to be greater than the NUSS
Against university administration	Students state desire to protest on campus due to actions or statements by university leadership
To control the movement and put forth a symbolic image	Students state their desire to be the face of the Syrian uprising to show others that the movement is youth-led and peaceful
To create contestation through what they have leverage over	Students state the reason for their action on campus as something relating to preventing a return to normality (e.g.: boycotting exams to

	prevent usual university operations)
In favor of dignity and resilience	Students state their desire to show the regime and the world that they cannot be humiliated or suppressed
For religious reasons	Students expressed religious motivations or chanted religious phrases on campus
To express solidarity with all Syrians	Students protested or stated their reason for participating in protest as standing with certain cities facing atrocities or with their fellow countrymen generally experiencing arrest, killing, and exile
To express solidarity with their student peers	Students expressed their motivation to protest to be standing with their student peers who had been brutalized, arrested, exiled, or martyred
Due to the unique tactics available in a university setting	Students state reason for protest on campus to be the specific organizational qualities of a university campus

As previously mentioned, certain testimonies expressed multiple motivations. Therefore, I had to divide each post into multiple references, meaning I extracted quotes from each post and categorized them in their appropriate motivation code. I use the term reference to refer to the text in my testimonial data that supports any given category. In the cases where references themselves presented multiple motivations, I assigned the entire reference to all of the categories that the testimony fit in order to best capture the overall goals and motivations of the entire protest or action. I then examined which motivation for participating in campus protest contained the most coded references to understand what the most commonly expressed motivations for protesting on campus were. I recognized that many of the student motivations revealed in my dataset were not unique to the student movement specifically but rather could be shared motivations of the entire Syrian uprising at large. However, the motivation that appeared most

frequently was something unique to students, and my analysis focused on that particular category.

      In focusing on solidarity with student peers, I do not aim to claim that this was the only motivation or only important factor in protesting on campus. Rather, I acknowledge that Syrians existed in the context of the larger revolution and thus shared motivations with non-students. Furthermore, I do not claim that experiential solidarity operated exactly the same for every person nor do I argue that every student possessed the same degree of it. Instead, I note its prominence and discern its effects when it was central to a given protest or other form of dissent. Eighty sources of testimony and 173 total references supported peer solidarity as a motivation for protest on campus. Following the completion of my coding work, I went back and examined each of those I had coded to the solidarity with student peers category to analyze what effect or effects this factor had on student protest. I created four mechanisms that I noticed a significant amount in the node, meaning that they contained at least ten references.

      I interpreted each piece of evidence within the experiential solidarity with peers category by examining what occurred when students stated that this solidarity had motivated them to protest on campus. If a testimony noted how students were protesting to express solidarity with their arrested and martyred peers, I then looked at the characteristics of these very protests and how protesters behaved at these particular protests. Since experiential solidarity had motivated all of the protests in these examples, I infer that it also contributed to participants' behaviors and the dynamics more generally of these protests. I acknowledge that I cannot claim that experiential solidarity solely drove any of the four mechanisms I outline. Not only could other factors also be contributing to certain dynamics of protest, but perhaps students omitted other motivations other than experiential solidarity for protesting on campus in the first place.

Nevertheless, the examples I use to support my claims do all clearly reflect the centrality of experiential solidarity in contributing to the mechanism in question, even if experiential solidarity did not outright cause something on its own.

Afterwards, I compiled a list of references supporting each of these four mechanisms to be used as support in my analysis. I utilize those references that do not support any particular mechanism but rather just express peer solidarity generally at the start of the analysis to explain solidarity and its emergence. Roughly seventy references do not fit a particular mechanism. For the references that fit multiple mechanisms, I categorized them in both. There were only five of these, however, and all of them supported the most referenced mechanism of "solidarity creates special protests" in addition to one other. I counted them as support in each mechanism they supported. Overall, ninety-five total references within the solidarity with student peers category support one of the four mechanisms. I show more of this quantitative data below.

STATISTICAL RESULTS

My data analysis revealed a variety of expressed motivations in the testimonies, both shared among all Syrians and specific to university students. My dataset yields a total of 524 references extracted from the 126 sources of testimony, all of which I coded according to which of thirteen distinct motivations for campus protest they expressed. Figure 1 displays these thirteen motivations by their frequency across the 524 references.

*Figure 1*

Motivations by Number of References
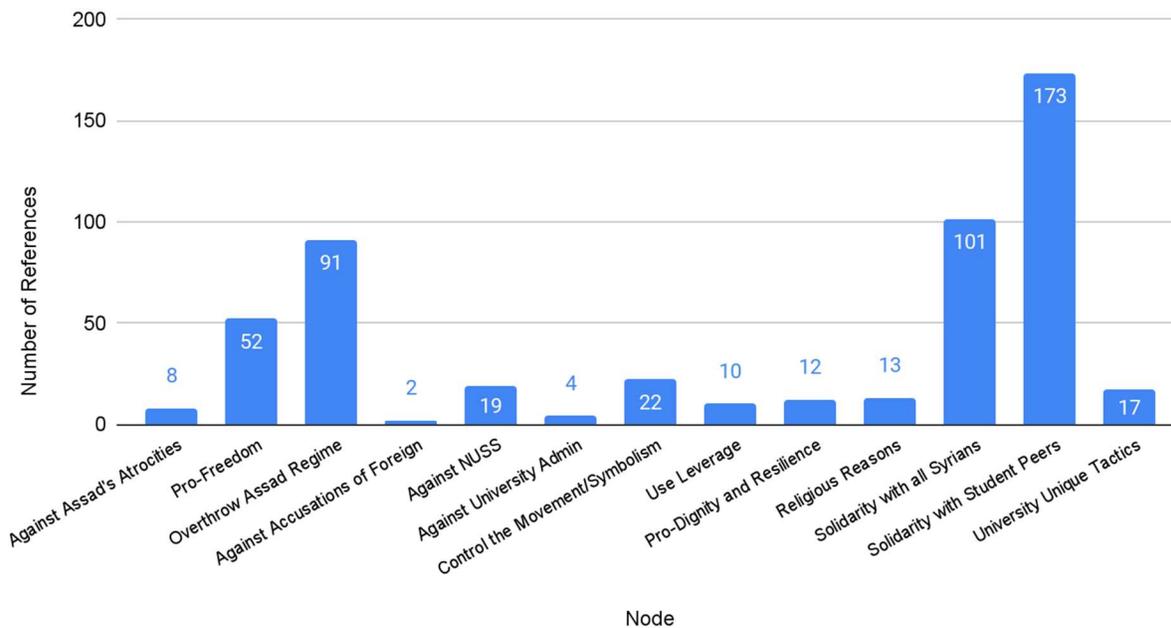
While students expressed multiple motivations repeatedly, those garnering the most support were pro-freedom, the desire to overthrow the Assad regime, solidarity with all Syrians, and solidarity specifically with student peers. The first three motivations do not necessarily reflect anything special or unique to campus protests versus other protests, and thus cannot explain the particular puzzle of why students decided to engage in protest at their universities. Ordinary Syrians of all ages and backgrounds could have been motivated by freedom, overthrowing the regime, and solidarity with those affected by the regime's suppression of the revolution. It makes sense that university students shared these motivations with the general population because they existed as a part of the entire Syrian revolution movement. However, the motivation expressed in the greatest number of testimonies was in fact unique to university students – their solidarity with each other and desire to express that solidarity, and especially with those who were arrested, killed, or faced other repression. A few other motivations specific to students arose, namely protesting the National Union of Syrian Students, challenging

university administration, controlling the movement and putting forth symbolism, using leverage over what they could control, and university unique tactics. Nevertheless, these university-specific motivations that do not include expressing solidarity with their peers when added together combine to a total of 72, which is less than half of the peer solidarity category alone.

The motivation of expressing solidarity with student peers was the most frequently expressed in my data set overall, and it was a motivation that was specific to students and not one that students shared with the larger non-student Syrian population. It thus provided the strongest answer to the question of why students protested on campus despite coordinated and intense repression. I do not aim to claim that intra-student solidarity was the only factor driving protest on campus. Rather, it was a strong contributor and one particularly strong among those that were student-specific. Upon another examination of the 173 references supporting the peer solidarity mechanism, I identified four recurring causal mechanisms relating to peer solidarity. By causal mechanism, I mean the dynamics and processes at least partially driven by solidarity with student peers. First, solidarity aids in protest despite repression, as it was a factor that drove students to not let fear of consequences hinder them. Second, it creates special protests, meaning it drives students to organize protests specifically in the name of that solidarity that would not have occurred otherwise. Third, it helps diffuse protests across space from impetuses at singular campuses, as the solidarity created unity among all students regardless of the university they attended. Fourth, it encourages protection and confrontational tactics based on solidarity, as the solidarity motivated students to prevent negative consequences for their peers. I use the terms repression tolerance, special protests, diffusion across space, and confrontation to identify each of these mechanisms in short-form. After recoding each of the 173 mechanisms based on which of the four mechanisms they supported, I found the following results below.

Figure 2

Solidarity Mechanisms
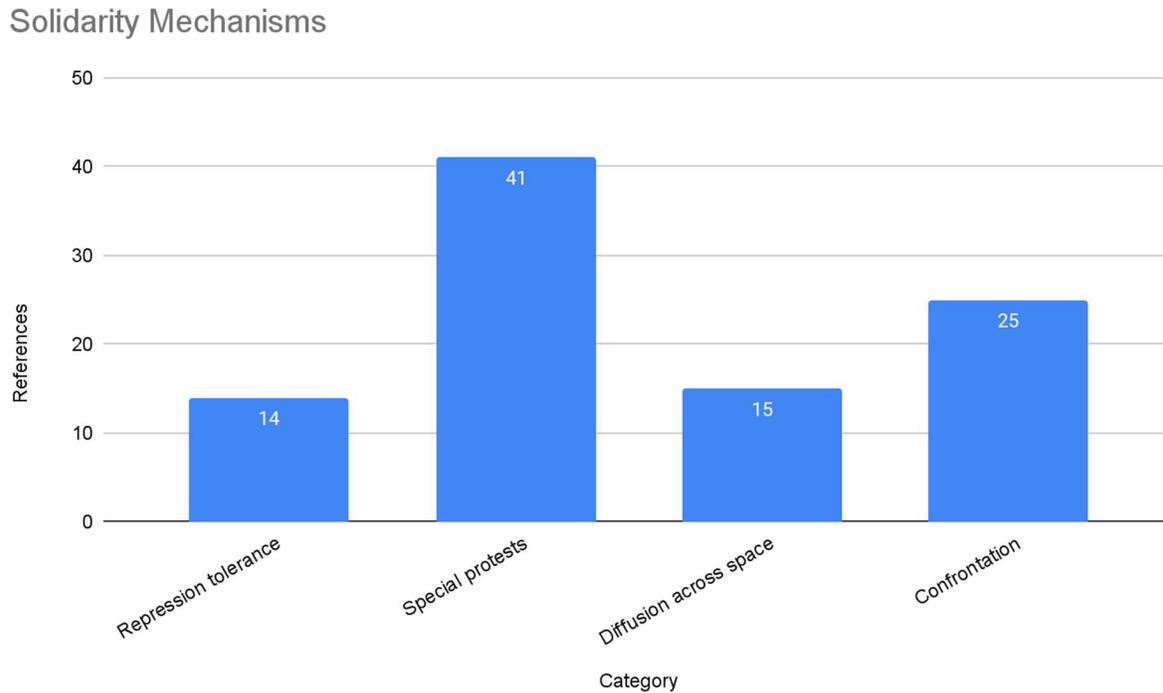
There are differing numbers of references supporting each of these mechanisms.
However, I do not aim to answer which of these mechanisms was most salient. I use the number
of references in the graphs above to support the existence of the mechanisms themselves as
shown by their frequency in appearing within the peer solidarity node. Not every reference
within the peer solidarity node supported one of these four mechanisms, either. Much of this
resulted due to the fact that many testimonies were brief and did not provide enough information
to understand how solidarity influenced that particular action. Nevertheless, more references did
support one of the mechanisms than did not, and thus there are many that support my discussion
of each one. Overall, testimonies expressed the desire to express peer solidarity as the most
frequent motivation for campus protest. The testimonies supporting this category of motivation
also support the existence of four causal mechanisms that explain how this peer solidarity
influenced campus protest.

CHAPTER 3: SOLIDARITY

In this section, I will use my data to answer the following question: Why did students continue to protest on campus in the first two years of the Syrian Revolution, despite coordinated repression and significant consequences? I begin by defining solidarity and presenting my own conceptualization of the experiential solidarity. I illustrate the function and emergence of that experiential solidarity in the context of university students in the early stages of the Syrian Revolution by drawing on testimonies from students that explained in more detail their feelings relating to their peers. I then show how solidarity among student activists encouraged mobilization specifically on university campuses through four mechanisms: (1) by increasing students' tolerance of repression, (2) by spurring protests in the name of solidarity that would not have otherwise occurred, (3) by facilitating the diffusion of protest across space, and (4) by emboldening contentious behavior against security forces. I present specific evidence that supports each of these mechanisms as well as numerical trends from my data set as depicted in Figure 2 that support these claims.

EXPERIENTIAL SOLIDARITY: DEFINITION, EMERGENCE, AND MEANING

Scholz (2008) establishes three types of solidarity – social, political, and civic – each describing different relationships between the community of a distinct solidarity group, such as a social movement or demographic of people, and the individual. The experiential solidarity that became salient in protest rhetoric among students when repressed by their peers in the National Union of Syrian Students and the regime security forces can be characterized by a hybrid of Scholz's definitions of social and political solidarity based on a combination of familial sentiments and a sense of similarity in identity and experience. His definition of civic solidarity does not apply to the Syrian context, as it refers to the responsibility of citizens to protect each

other against "vulnerabilities…that would hinder their civic participation," usually through formal state structures (Wilcox, 2010). Civic participation and institutions facilitating it were not a component of Syria's authoritarian government. However, Scholz's definitions of political and social solidarity aptly explain the unique solidarity among members of the student movement that affected participation, the protests organized, diffusion of protests, and confrontation during protests. He describes political solidarity as the unity among individuals seeking to abolish an injustice or system of oppression. Social solidarity, by contrast, forms from common characteristics that members of a group share, such as common identities, consciousness, and experiences of oppression that produce moral obligations with extents dependent on the degree of cohesion within the group (Scholz, 2008). Close-knit groups like families would have more extensive moral obligations than less cohesive entities like cultural groups (Wilcox, 2010).

The solidarity that rose to the forefront of campus protests can be characterized as a hybrid between social and political solidarity, which I will call experiential solidarity. The political solidarity, one element of the experiential solidarity, was not necessarily unique to students as all Syrians challenging the Assad regime were united in seeking to abolish a system of oppression. As previously mentioned, Syrian students did not exist outside the context of the larger revolution, and thus voiced motivations of freedom, regime change, and solidarity as part of the larger protest movement. For example, on March 12, 2012, students in the Faculty of Information Technology at Aleppo University "launched a massive demonstration" calling for "freedom, overthrowing the regime, and the execution of the criminal murderer of our people in Homs" (General Union of Syrian Students, 03/12/22). Similarly, on March 29, 2012, students in the Industrial Institute at Deir Al-Zor University staged a "massive demonstration…supporting the stricken cities, calling for freedom and the overthrow of the regime after hoisting the

independence flag on the Institute" (03/29/12). These examples fit Scholz's definition of political solidarity given that the students stood with their fellow citizens in hopes of abolishing the oppressive regime. They protested in the name of their fellow afflicted citizens one hundred separate times in my data set while protesting on campus, as seen in Figure 1 on page 2 (General Union of Syrian Students, n.d.; Sawahel, 2012; Hussain, 2016). This general political solidarity thus was present, but social solidarity specific to students will be the focus of this analysis given its unique role in encouraging students to protest on campus as opposed to other locations.

Social solidarity is the component that made experiential solidarity unique to students, as it stemmed from the common identities and similarities in experience among students. Jasper (1998) notes that solidarity is the emotion that makes a collective. In this case, social solidarity made the collective from feelings of shared identities and experiences. This produced extensive moral obligations due to the familial nature of the cohesion among the students. In Pearlman's (2023) unpublished manuscript tentatively titled *Home is the details*, a student of medicine illustrates how solidarity with his peers arose in protest and what defined the feeling itself. Referring to a close friend he had met months earlier, he explains, "We were not close before we started going to demonstrations but protesting together cemented our relationship. There was no bond like sharing that experience. We would come to school in the morning, attend lectures, and then go out and protest. He became my brother. Not a cousin or a friend, but a brother" (29). The shared experience of protesting on campus while possessing the identity of a student and attending classes created a feeling of solidarity that this medical student expressed in the form of a familial relationship. As Scholz establishes, this constitutes social solidarity due to their common experiences of engaging in high risk demonstrations and their shared identities as students (Wilcox, 2010). This solidarity can produce varying levels of moral obligations

depending on the degree of closeness and cohesiveness in the group (Wilcox, 2010). By evoking familial relationships and referring to his friend as his "brother," the medical student expresses a strong degree of closeness that would produce high levels of moral obligation per Scholz's theory (Wilcox, 2010). This aspect of solidarity combined with the political solidarity previously discussed to produce the experiential solidarity that served unique functions within the student movement.

This social solidarity that students expressed as a familial relationship continued to emerge throughout the first two years of campus protest. Following raids and inspections of student housing in Hama in April of 2012, the "free students," the name by which the students often referred to themselves, rose banners with the slogan "Don't know what to do for my brothers" (General Union of Syrian Students, 04/11/2012). Again, members of the student movement referred to each other in familial terms, suggesting a strong sense of unity. Scholz (2008) prescribes that a degree of cohesion this strong will positively affect the extent of moral obligations within the group. In the Syrian context, this shaped the obligations in how students approached collective action and protest because of the salient moral obligations produced from the combination of general political solidarity and this familial unity. For example, on January 17, 2012, while protesting, students specifically dedicated songs to the mothers of their peers who had become martyrs, suggesting familial relationships as they empathized with the mothers of their peers and protested for them (01/17/2012).

Furthermore, on March 25, 2013, students dedicated a demonstration and a video to the mother of their martyrs, telling them that "we are your sons, mothers" (03/25/13). They protested again specifically to express their familial unity, because they had a strong moral obligation to honor and stand with their fallen peers and their families. Students continued to express their

solidarity, and it shaped their collective action. By expressing that solidarity in familial terms, they revealed a degree of closeness that would create strong and salient moral obligations.

As previously discussed, experiential solidarity relies upon similarity in identity, shared experiences of oppression, and unity in challenging injustice. The experiential solidarity thus produced a collective identity of Syrian university students challenging the regime. Jasper and Polletta (2014) explain how collective identity can influence strategic and tactical decisions, or make certain strategic options more intrinsically appealing. In the Syrian case, this collective identity of revolutionary university students influenced participation, diffusion, and behavior within protests.

The experiential solidarity exhibited by students while mobilizing on campus can thus be described as a combination between political solidarity shared among all members of the revolution and the social solidarity characterized by common experiences and familial sentiments specific to students. This definition is critical to understanding why it became so prominent in protests and affected student collective action in unique ways. The specific mechanisms through which experiential solidarity affected protest will now be discussed.

MECHANISMS THROUGH WHICH EXPERIENTIAL SOLIDARITY AFFECTS PROTEST

This solidarity prominent in the Syrian student movement, which blends the contents of political and social solidarity coined by Scholz into a distinct kind of solidarity that I call experiential solidarity, contributed to the creation of four unique dynamics of protest and mobilization on campus in the beginning of the Syrian revolution. I explain each of these mechanisms in detail below.

Experiential solidarity aids in persistence in spite of repression

Repression of collective action aims to deter mobilization and incite fear of consequences. However, the experiential solidarity among students protesting on campus contributed to persistence in spite of this fear of repression. Pearlman (2016) has also looked at how repression, moral obligations, and protest participation are interrelated. She argues that repression levied on "early risers" of a movement can "activate onlookers' sense of moral obligation to contribute to collective efforts." I extend this idea to argue that experiential solidarity can activate a moral obligation to contribute to collective action when members of that solidarity group face repression, regardless of status as an early or late riser. In the context of students protesting on campus, it was not just repression of early risers that fostered participation. Student testimonies emphasize proximate impetuses of repression of their movement throughout the first two years of the revolution that activated their moral obligation to express solidarity and contributed to their persistence of participation.

In protests where solidarity emerged as a stated motivation for mobilizing, participants often expressed an insistence to express their message of solidarity when faced with heavy repression. Fear did not disappear, but protesters surmounted it, rather than allowing it to silence them, as they acted aware of consequences for doing so (Pearlman, 2016). Experiential solidarity was one factor that drove them to surmount that fear. As discussed in the previous chapter, experiential solidarity encouraged a strong moral obligation due to its social and political elements. Both students' shared experiences of oppression and their similarities in identity drove them to act on their experiential solidarity when their peers faced repression. When repression attacked this solidarity and moral obligation, some students resisted by persisting and not allowing repression to have its intended effect.

As previously discussed, repression was extremely prevalent on campuses as soon as students began mobilization in 2011. In addition to brutal tactics like beating and tear gas, approximately 35,000 students were arrested from the start of the revolution through the end of 2013. In addition, many were killed (Ziadeh, 2013). While no precise numbers exist for the total number of university students killed at campus protests, killings and raids were common at protests throughout my data set. The regime used this intense repression to try to put an end to the revolution. Nevertheless, the repression did not have its intended effect of deterring mobilization on campus. Possessing strong feelings of solidarity with members of the student movement, protesters could mobilize despite repression because the solidarity fostered a moral obligation that encouraged persistence when attacked. When security forces attacked a protest or other action with repression, students persisted in mobilizing because their moral obligation to express solidarity was attacked. When they were prevented from acting on that obligation, many students felt and expressed indignation.

When describing her participation across multiple protests and other actions in March of 2012, Nawal, a student at Damascus University describes how she feels when active in the revolution on campus: "It's an amazing feeling…it's like you've broken all the injustice and fear" even though the "threat of being shot or arrested [is] ever present" (Sandels, 2012). While she does not provide more context into what specific elements of demonstrating produce this feeling, or what she includes in "injustice," she expresses a new ability to protest, despite the previous "injustice and fear" that hindered it. She acknowledges her newfound ability to surmount her fear, but omits discussion of what factors compelled her to do so.

Other individual testimonies reveal why students were able to overcome the fear that they held to protest anyways. Ahmed, a student at Damascus University who had never protested

before or during the revolution, in April of 2011, decried the secret police strolling in plain clothes at the university and raids and arrests in student dormitories. Following the seemingly unwarranted arrest of his brother, he declared: "I will not be quiet anymore. I am not scared anymore. I love my brother. Some students have been so badly beaten you cannot recognise their face" (Macleod and Flamand, 2011). Inactive in political activity beforehand, Ahmed then intended to speak out and participate out of solidarity with his brother and other students who had faced horrific consequences. His brother's arrest and the overall brutal repression of his fellow students produced an insistence in him "not to be quiet anymore" and to not allow fear to stop him from speaking out. His moral obligation to express solidarity and protest repression could not be inhibited by fear of negative consequences. His experiential solidarity not only with his brother but with all of the "students…so badly beaten" contributed to his desire to surmount fear of repression to protest anyways.

The Union of Free Syrian Students, coordinating action across campuses, also demonstrated this mechanism of experiential solidarity contributing to surmounting fear in their general statement at the beginning of the second semester of the 2011-2012 academic school year. Released on February 13, 2012, the union called for a strike of attending all classes and urged students "to participate in turning the universities into a permanent tension point and a continuity demonstrating and sit-in place for…civil disobedience" (02/13/12). The statement continues to say that "this [, referring to the tension and civil disobedience,] is the very least that can be done to express solidarity with the martyrs of revolution and the Syrian detainees in the prisons specially the heroes of our colleagues of students who wrote with their blood the history of Syria and their bodies filled the prisons" (02/13/12). The statement authors, speaking on behalf of the union leading student mobilization, request and seek to inspire participation

because of the repression levied on their peers and the sacrifice those peers have made. They evoke sentiments of solidarity with their peers who "wrote with their blood" and "filled the prisons," and try to create persistence because those with whom students feel solidarity have been attacked. The authors do not focus on negative consequences for participating, but instead highlight how others have already been affected by repression as a way to motivate contestation. While the statement does not convey a willingness to protest despite fear, it does acknowledge that experiential solidarity can aid in surmounting fear to participate in protest.

Moreover, experiential solidarity motivated protesters to withstand repression and arrests occurring in real time during protests and continue their demonstration. At Aleppo University on March 28, 2012, a student recounted that they had gone out with around 700 people to stand with their arrested and martyred peers. They recount: "security forces and shabiha attacked us…but we [insisted] to continue" (General Union of Syrian Students, 03/28/2012). The attacks from security forces and shabiha included tear gas, throwing of objects, and at least five arrests (03/28/2012). While witnessing peers being arrested and experiencing physical repression, they "insisted" that the demonstration persist. Their desire to protest for their peers who had been arrested and killed outweighed the silencing power of fear of repression. Therefore, their need to act on their experiential solidarity with their peers contributed to the erosion of the silencing power of fear resulting from repression.

However, repression did not just create fear and inhibit mobilization because of the strength of solidarity with those afflicted. Similarly, in the Faculty of Medicine at Aleppo University on February 23, 2012, students launched a mass demonstration for their peers who had been detained (General Union of Syrian Students, 03/05/2012). An eyewitness described "when the militias of Al-Assad [come] with their [heavy] arms, the morales [were] so

strong…liberals challenged the militias…[despite] the militias [threatening] the liberal with arms and detention" (03/05/2012). Their morale from acting on experiential solidarity with their detained peers was so strong that repression could not deter them. They actually grew more resolved to express that solidarity, out of a moral obligation to do so. Others who may not possess this same experiential solidarity could have also experienced increased resolve to protest after faced with repression. However, it provided an added contribution towards doing so for students protesting on campus, as their experiential solidarity remained central to this protest. The experiential solidarity thus at least partially contributed to their ability to overcome the fear that previously silenced many Syrians.

Individuals providing testimony from daily protest further demonstrated this mechanism that solidarity caused repression to create outrage and an insistence to protest. On March 20, 2012, students at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering at Aleppo University conducted a sit-in and demonstration "asking for releasing their arrested friends" (03/20/12). An observer explains: "they went in a demonstration, which made the security start attacking them, surrounding them inside the building and hitting them…which increased their insistence to deliver their word…so they went in another demonstration despite the attacking of security on the first demonstration and separating it by hitting" (03/20/12). In this scenario, the testimony suggests that repression, in the form of "attacking," "surrounding," and "hitting," increased protesters' desire to "deliver their word," which they stated as the request for "releasing their arrested friends." In other words, repression actually strengthened their resolve to express their message of experiential solidarity.

Similarly, on April 4, 2012, students at Arab International University in Daraa staged a sit-in "in solidarity with a fellow detainee…Yassin al-Homsi" (04/04/12). Regime-aligned

students then began insulting, provoking, and trying to forcibly move students inside, but the demonstrators "refused [their] entry" to the sit-in and remained for more than an hour in al-Homsi's honor (04/04/12). The students' single stated purpose of the sit-in was to stand in solidarity with their friend and peer, and they insisted on expressing that message after facing repression and threats. They persevered because their moral obligation was so strong that neither fear of repression nor actual repression could deter it. Experiential solidarity drove this protest and thus likely contributed to their refusal to succumb to repression in that protest as well.

Similar scenarios in which repression of planned protests arose and participants demonstrated a willingness to protest despite that because of solidarity appeared five other times in my data set, as well (01/23/2012; 01/30/2012; 03/12/2012; 04/30/2012; Mardini, 2016). Other factors, such as desires to display resilience or feeling as if they had little left to lose, certainly could have contributed to students' willingness to engage in such a high risk activity. However, their determination to express solidarity with their peers clearly made it so that repression did not exclusively demobilize protest. It also activated feelings of experiential solidarity among students that added motivation to protest on campus and sustain that protest.

This mechanism, which suggests that experiential solidarity can contribute to the transformation of the effects of repression by encouraging participants to sustain protest rather than abandon it, arose fourteen times in my data set. That is, 14.7 percent of all references that detail mobilization based on experiential solidarity with peers suggested that solidarity affected motivation via this mechanism. Evidence supporting it was particularly present in testimonies in which students provided details of repression of individual protests, as the actual repression is central to this mechanism's function. While less frequently appearing in my data set than the other three mechanisms that I discuss below, it still warrants discussion and analysis given its

repeated expression. Experiential solidarity was so strong that repression only increased students' insistence to express it and contributed to their ability to surmount fear.

Solidarity creates special protests with the goal of demonstrating solidarity

Solidarity also spurred specific protests in the name of solidarity that would not have occurred otherwise. In other words, students staged demonstrations specifically to declare their solidarity with their peers. Subsequent action for the purpose of expressing solidarity often followed because of the repression these protests invited. Other scholars have noted the centrality of solidarity, even if not experiential solidarity, to motivating specific protests in the revolution broadly and students specifically. Rubin and Bose (2022) found that students acted in solidarity throughout the revolution and often documented their acts on social media to provide a counternarrative to that of the regime that portrayed them as terrorists. These solidarity protests thus were visible and constituted a special kind of protest that was repeated in the university context. Rodineliussen (2019) has also found solidarity to be important in terms of creating specific protest and action among activists in the Arab Spring more broadly. I extend this idea of solidarity motivating specific protest to protests on university campuses. However, I examine a narrower, more tightly knit form of solidarity – experiential solidarity – among students and argue that it affected not only the decision to mobilize but their choice of location, too. It remains possible that these specific solidarity demonstrations on university campuses would have occurred otherwise. However, the particular protests I will now present would not have occurred if strong feelings of solidarity were not present within the student movement in the Syrian revolution.

Students demonstrated this mechanism of solidarity creating collective action for the purpose of expressing solidarity itself at moments when they sought to showcase their movement

to outside observers. In the early stages of the revolution, there were instances in which observers from the Arab League and the United Nations visited Syria to observe the increasingly deadly conflict and provide input on reforms ("Syria signs deal," 2011; "UNSMIS background," 2012). They visited places of tension, like university campuses. When they were present, students sought to showcase their movement, creating moments in which these dynamics of protest became heightened. For example, in May of 2012, UN monitors observed student demonstrations at Aleppo University, in which they gathered inside and outside the campus square to protest against the regime and in honor of their friends who had been arrested or killed (Saad and Gladstone, 2012). In fact, many students actually approached the observers to show them lists of students who had been detained or killed. Regardless of the presence of these observers, NUSS members began throwing stones at students engaging in protest. Shabiha also arrived, dispelling tear gas and arresting an unspecified number of people (Saad and Gladstone, 2012). They exhibited solidarity with their peers and a desire to help them when provided with an opportunity to potentially improve their peers' situations through securing their release from regime prisons. This protest, and the actions within it, specifically the act of approaching the monitors with specific names, would not have occurred in the absence of experiential solidarity.

Similarly, at Deir al-Zour University in January of 2012, students participated in a strike from attending their exams, refusing to enter the classroom buildings, while the Arab League observers were present (General Union of Syrian Students, 01/13/2012). The Union of Free Syrian Students in Deir al-Zour cited their reasoning as protesting the "blood of their colleagues, in the presence of Arab observers." Students thus expressed solidarity when they wanted to send a message to the outside world, and again pursued specific actions in its name. It remains unclear what they would have done in the presence of observers if solidarity was not present, as that

clearly motivated this mobilization. The presence of observers created moments in which this mechanism played out very clearly.

The Union of Free Syrian Students also declared action in the name of solidarity to be one of its core purposes in their official statements and calls to action. In November of 2012, in the wake of an entire year of heavy repression and an extensive campaign to arrest students, the union demanded the following actions in hopes of standing with their peers and improving conditions for all students on campus: that "all armed forces" be "denied access" to universities, "all kinds of assaults, physical and moral pressure and threats directed at students inside and outside the campus" be stopped, and "the immediate release of all the detained students" (General Union of Syrian Students, 11/13/2012). Mobilizing to both end the consequences and repression of student activists and express their solidarity with those who had been affected motivated the union's action and comprised part of its purpose.

This call for action in the name of solidarity was not isolated. In a campaign aimed at garnering support domestically and publicizing their efforts internationally, unnamed students from the Union of Free Syrian Students leadership started a boycott of all exams "to show solidarity with their fellow students, some of which had been detained or killed" (*Revolt of the students,* 2012). "After 12,000 dead people there cannot be any more pretending of normality" (*Revolt of the students,* 2012). The activity the union chooses to principally mobilize for in this call to action specifically names solidarity as its purpose. This binding feeling motivates students to pursue repeated protest and acts of contestation in the university context, as evidenced by this boycott campaign aimed at standing with their arrested and martyred peers. While the union likely had multiple motivations and could have pursued action in experiential solidarity's

absence, solidarity encouraged unique, repeated actions for the purpose of showing solidarity, and that constituted part of its central, stated mission.

Furthermore, experiential solidarity inspired nearly immediate reactionary protests in the name of specific students who had disappeared or were killed, sometimes turning into larger demonstrations with multiple demands general to the Syrian revolution as a whole. Solidarity with one's martyred peers created the impetus for these protests and would not have developed in the absence of such feelings. For example, on January 17, 2012, in the Faculty of Information Technology at Aleppo University, students staged a protest "in response to the attack of security last night on campus [accommodations]" in which "they arrested the student Kawa Khder" (General Union of Syrian Students, 01/17/2012). While Kawa's arrest prompted this protest, it developed into a call for "freedom for Kawa and all prisoners of dignity in prisons of [the] country" (01/17/2012). Inspired by solidarity for individual peers, students mobilized nearly immediately following the injustice and created a new protest specifically to act on these feelings. If students did not share feelings of common identity and shared oppression with Kawa, this specific type of protest in which students staged a large demonstration would not have occurred. Many similar instances arose. On April 24, 2012, at Al Hasakah University, "free students sat at the Faculty of Civil Engineering…for the release of a detainee, he is a student in the faculty" (04/25/2012). This protest initially focused on solidarity with this peer "soon turned into a wonderful demonstration" (04/25/2012). Thus, larger protests developed from impetuses based in solidarity. Specific kinds of protests arose because of these feelings, and they would not have occurred in the same fashion in its absence.

These protests reacting to immediate injustices against their peers often led to further repression, arrests, and killing by security forces on campuses, only fueling further action in the

name of solidarity with fellow students. For example, in response to the murder of their peers in the Faculty of Science, students chanted and erected signs in protest at an unnamed university with the slogan "Who kills the students of science is a 'criminal…criminal…criminal'" (General Union of Syrian Students, 06/08/2012). The students who had been killed at the Faculty of Science were mobilizing based on peer solidarity in the first place. Their deaths then spurred another protest in which students denounced the killing and expressed solidarity again, while this time the protest focused on the victims of the previous protest. This cycle, driven by proximate impetuses of arrests or killings, ultimately resulted from the solidarity that produced moral obligations and motivated students to seek to help their afflicted peers. Repression and injustices led to protest in the name of solidarity, which led to further repression, which prompted further mobilization afterwards to protest that repression.

It arose many other times, such as at the University of Aleppo on January 17, 2012, when a days-long sit-in was occurring to call for "the release of their colleagues," in addition to an immediate protest "against [the] campaign of arrests at night yesterday by security men" (01/17/2012). Students were arrested, beaten, and expelled from the university, causing the Union of Free Syrian Students to declare "Demonstrations will be continued." This cycle driven by experiential solidarity is a subsection of this mechanism and appeared in nine references, or in 9.5 percent of my data set (General Union of Syrian Students, 01/17/2012; 01/31/2012; 03/28/2012; 03/29/2012; 04/25/2012; Saad and Gladstone, 2012). Therefore, solidarity lay at the root of creating repeated protest by encouraging continued action for arrested and martyred students as well as reactionary protest for proximate instances of repression and injustice by security forces.

In addition to this cycle of repression fueling further protests and injustices, students often planned commemoratory events or prayer services for their martyred peers that often developed into demonstrations calling for solidarity. At Aleppo University on April 24, 2012, students organized "prayers on the martyr spirit [of] the hero Mahmoud Ghazal," a student at the Faculty of Dentistry (04/25/2012). Following their prayers, they went out in multiple demonstrations, evidenced by multiple short Youtube videos pasted below the entry of the post (04/25/2012). In the Faculty of Agricultural Engineering at Damascus University on May 21, 2012, students left the funeral of the "heroic martyr 'Mahmood Sukkariyah'" to form a procession demonstration into the Damascus suburbs (05/23/2012). Similarly, at an unspecified university in Dar'a on August 31, 2012, students engaged in a funeral procession of their peer at the university, referred to as "the martyr Ghaleb al Jabawi," which turned into a demonstration for the "farewell of the martyr," evidenced by a Youtube video pasted below the phrase (08/31/2012). In each of these scenarios, ceremonies or demonstrations were organized in the name of students' "heroes" with whom they felt solidarity and empathy. Those ceremonies or initial demonstrations often transformed into larger ones. This pattern of commemorations or protests for martyrs spurring further demonstrations arose four times in my data set in addition to the examples discussed above, whether in Qamishlo, Damascus, or Aleppo (03/06/2012; 03/28/2012; 08/24/2012). In these scenarios, the demonstrations would not have occurred if not for solidarity and the moral obligations it produces. Perhaps, other demonstrations could have occurred in their place, but these specific commemoration events and subsequent protests would not have occurred in solidarity's absence.

Not only did solidarity motivate special protests that would not have occurred in its absence, but it also spurred students to pursue other forms of collective action aimed at standing

with their martyred and detained peers. One such tactic that it inspired was striking from attending classes or taking exams. For example, on March 12, 2012, at the Faculty of Medicine in Deir Al-Zour, students participated in a strike "for the sake of the martyr Abd Al Razzaq, a student at the Faculty of Medicine." An unnamed participant promised it will "still continue" (03/12/2012). Their solidarity with their martyred classmate motivated them to pursue collective action with the specific purpose of expressing the solidarity itself. Controlling what they could, they decided to challenge the status quo by organizing a strike. Similar instances of strikes in the name of solidarity with one's peers arose two other times (03/12/2012; 03/28/2012). Additionally, when recounting her participation years later, Nur, an engineering students at the time in Daraya, explained, "I deliberately did not go to some exams to protest the detention of some friends and the retention of others in besieged and conflict ridden areas whereby those were prevented from attending their universities" (al-Naqri, 2016). Nur not only felt an obligation to express solidarity with her friends, but also university students more largely, suggesting a very strong and salient solidarity. In fact, the experiential solidarity was so strong that she decided to inhibit her own progress in school to express it. Sit-ins also arose in the name of solidarity, such as the silent one specifically held for the martyr Yassin al-Homsi on April 4, 2012 (General Union of Syrian students, 04/04/2012). Solidarity thus spurred unique forms of dissent in its name.

On top of strikes, solidarity also fostered sit-ins and written messages of standing with their fellow students who had been killed or detained. On March 6, 2012, at the University of Kalamoon, reacting to a raid by shabiha on campus the night before, students "stained the picture of the killer and the war criminal, which was in the main path of the university, in red as a symbol of the martyr's blood that [was] shed by the traitor Bashar" (03/06/2012). Similarly, on

March 12, 2012, at the same university, students wrote the names of two martyrs from the university on the flag and raised it (03/12/2012). While not a protest in the name of solidarity, students still pursued action aimed at expressing solidarity and remembering those who had been unjustly killed at the hands of the regime. They disrespected a picture of a once untouchable figure in Syria, Bashar Al-Assad, and altered the Syrian flag because solidarity motivated them to act in its name. Experiential solidarity motivated traditional forms of protest and other tactics of collective action, which may not have occurred in its absence.

Solidarity motivated students to plan and participate in protests and other forms of collective action specifically to express that solidarity. In fact, this mechanism was most commonly demonstrated of the four mechanisms that resulted from experiential solidarity, with forty-one references, or 43.2 percent of all references in this category (Figure 2). Whether for specific individuals who had been detained or killed, or generally for all their student peers in Syria who had been arrested or murdered, this purpose of action was extremely common among protests on university campuses. In the absence of solidarity, these specific actions would not have occurred. That is not to say that no action would have occurred, but the specific protests, strikes, and sit-ins that did happen would not have occurred in the way that they did if experiential solidarity was not present among students. Solidarity thus produced specific actions in its name.

Solidarity contributes to diffusion of protests across space from impetuses at one campus

McAdam and Rucht (1993) define diffusion by listing the following necessary elements: someone or something that transmits or emits, someone or some group that adopts, an item like information that is diffused, and a channel of diffusion. In the Syrian case, a protester or group of protesters at one campus transmitted information about injustices occurring to students at other

universities through social media and likely other digital modes of communication. I argue that this diffusion resulted at least partially from experiential solidarity that was not confined to a single university, but rather existed among all Syrian university students. Experiential solidarity among university students had this nationwide scope because all of them shared its two components – similarity in identity and common experiences of oppression. When an injustice occurred at any given university, it often drove students to mobilize at other universities. These injustices could take the form of particularly brutal or visible repression, a raid by security forces on a certain campus, a killing or multiple killings of students, or a moral shock. Jasper (1995) defines moral shock as the act of "an event or situation [raising] such a sense of outrage in people that they become inclined toward political action, even in absence of a network of contacts." This term may not characterize ongoing repression in Syria given that moral shock refers to a singular, very provocative event, but there were a few examples that fit this definition given the particularly extreme nature of the events in question.

The earliest stages of protest on campus demonstrate this mechanism of solidarity diffusing protests. After the founding of the Union of Free Syrian Students in September of 2011, students signaled their intention to purposefully continue this diffusion; they stated one of their goals to be to "combine the energy of the free Syrian students in all the Syrian universities" ("The student movement in Syria," 2012). In this statement, students explicitly stated their goal of diffusing protest by combining energy in all Syrian universities. However, experiential solidarity often influenced the diffusion of protest on its own. In April of 2011, only a month after the revolution began and before the Union of Free Syrian Students had been established, students of medicine at Damascus University mobilized based on "outrage" that over a dozen protesters had been killed in Homs two days prior with the help of the Assad-aligned National

Union of Syrian Students (Macleod and Flamand, 2011). While the protesters had not witnessed the atrocities at their own university, they still mobilized in support of those who were killed in another city and against those who were responsible for the death of their peers. Given that experiential solidarity results from both shared identity and experiences of oppression, protests diffused because of the solidarity as those elements cannot be confined to a single campus. Students stood with those at other universities as solidarity was not confined to a location within Syria.

This mechanism of solidarity diffusing protest and action across campuses from impetuses at one campus becomes prevalent in the establishment of new chapters of the Union of Free Syrian Students and their official statements. On March 15, 2012, on the one-year anniversary of the revolution, students at Damascus University gave a speech "announcing their separation from the Union of Al-[Assad's] Students to join the Union of Free Students" in hopes of "supporting the free students of Aleppo University" and "backing up Homs" (General Union of Syrian Students, 03/17/2012). They note the atrocities committed by the shabiha, a group situated within Assad's security forces, at these universities. Students at Damascus University therefore established a chapter of the UFSS, aimed at mobilizing and organizing students to continue the revolution, because of other universities, namely Aleppo University and Al-Baath University in Homs. The Union of Free Syrian students also refers to Al-Baath University as Homs University. Solidarity with those afflicted at those other universities compelled them to plan mobilization at their own university. Experiential solidarity did not just cause students to stand with their peers on their on campus, but actually diffused protests to other campuses as well.

Moreover, leadership of the entire Union of Free Syrian Students issued a statement on February 10, 2012, expressing outrage and a desire to act in solidarity with those experiencing injustice at Homs University (General Union of Syrian Students, 02/10/2012). After noting the unwarranted and repressive behavior by security forces on campus, the statement asks "what's the kind of honour or sanctity left for Homs university?" It then declares that the union confirms its original stance and "[affirms their] strike on attending the total hours in the second quarter" due to the University of Homs having become a part of the shelling of Homs and the large number of detainees held there. In a statement aimed at continuing mobilization, the union seeks to motivate further action nationwide based on atrocities at the University of Homs. By calling for nationwide protest and action for those attending Homs University specifically, they exhibit feelings of solidarity specifically with those student peers. The specific university at which the injustices occurred did not matter because the scope of solidarity was all Syrian university students. Therefore, it diffuses action, or leads to an expression of intention to diffuse action, across Syrian university campuses, based on impetuses at another university.

Multiple other protests also arose nationwide when impetuses on one campus triggered mobilizing experiential solidarity among students at other campuses. On April 3, 2012, students at the International University of Science and Technology in Ghabagheb, Syria, specifically organized and participated in a protest to "support" those at Arab European University, in Daraa, Syria, resulting in security forces surrounding the student protesters and arresting them at random (General Union of Syrian Students, 04/04/2012). Leading up to the protest at International University of Science and Technology, students at the Arab International University had experienced heightened repression as a result of ongoing sit-ins and action for a specific detained peer (04/04/2012). While students at IUST may not have personally known

those affected at AIU, they still protested in outrage as if they did. One student, referring to the repression at AIU, decried the "land of the university [being] full of blood" (04/04/2012). Students at IUST mobilized specifically in solidarity with students at AIU, suggesting that this experiential solidarity at least contributed to the diffusion of protest.

Similarly, on April 5, 2012 at Damascus University, students demonstrated to denounce the storming of the University of Homs and attack on free students there (04/05/2012). It eventually transformed into a protest also against what was happening at Arab International University. Students mobilized for their peers who had been specifically targeted at two universities. While not explicitly stating or expressing solidarity in this instance, the act of protesting for peers at other universities suggests at least some feelings of solidarity with them given their insistence to protest. Similar instances in which solidarity with peers who experienced specific injustices at campus protests diffused protest to multiple other campuses occurred four additional times in my data set (01/27/2012; 01/31/2012; 03/20/2012; 03/28/2012).

Protests organized by students already exiled from Syria as well as the spread of protests within faculties of individual universities also reflect experiential solidarity's effects on diffusion of protests. On February 13, 2012, the Union of Free Syrian Students released a statement that included gratitude towards Syrian students who had fled the country who had brought the revolution abroad and protested for the "hero martyrs" of the student movement (General Union of Syrian Students, 02/13/2012). This suggests that protests had diffused abroad to express solidarity with those killed domestically in Syria. While no longer protesting on campus per se, these actions by those exiled abroad reveals that university students felt experiential solidarity not only with those within their own institution but also at other institutions. It encourages

students to mobilize wherever they find themselves, because they still identify as students with unique experiences of injustice at Syrian universities.

Expatriate students from Homs staged demonstrations in Kuwait in support of student protests and other collective action organized by free students in Homs in three additional references in my data set (01/19/2012; 01/23/2012; 01/24/2012). Protests also diffused on smaller scales, from one faculty to another within a single university, further demonstrating how solidarity spread protest across physical and locational barriers. On March 5, 2012, students at the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Aleppo demonstrated against the "massacres" that had occurred at the University of Aleppo the day before (03/05/2012). As they marched past the Faculty of Dentistry, students of dentistry joined them. The Faculty of Medicine also held a separate protest specifically in solidarity with the detainees arrested the day before at the university (03/05/2012). Protest therefore diffused across and within campuses regardless of where an impetus, often an injustice, occurred.

In summary, solidarity among Syrian university students caused protests to spread regardless of where precisely the impetus occurred. These impetuses often came in the form of a moral shock that sparked students to act in solidarity with those affected by the atrocity. This occurred across universities throughout Syria, internationally among exiled students, and within large universities where many faculties exist within them. The Union of Free Syrian Students also stated this diffusion to be one of its goals, recognizing that solidarity with students experiencing arrests and killing would motivate others regardless of location. This mechanism highlights the national scope of the experiential solidarity shared by students; their unique experiences of oppression at their respective universities and identities as students is not confined to specific institutions.

Solidarity encourages protectionary behavior and confrontational tactics

Solidarity also shaped dynamics within protests by motivating students to act more confrontationally towards security forces attacking themselves or their peers. The moral obligations produced from solidarity included the responsibility to protect one another from injustices during action because one component of experiential solidarity is a shared experience of oppression. When students observed their peers facing repression and other negative consequences, they protected each other as if they had personal relationships because they shared experiences of oppression and felt similarities in identity with one another. Students' collective identity and the experiential solidarity that accompanied it made it so that strategies of protection were not only appealing, but natural. This desire to protect one another produced confrontation, as it meant that students tried to physically stop security forces from arresting their peers, or fought back when they attacked someone. It also quickly spurred the creation of new protests either to relieve pressure from security forces on other demonstrations or out of anger at the injustices committed towards another. Thus, students used protest tactics influenced by their solidarity, and often made situations more confrontational. By confrontational, I mean more physically and verbally combative and aggressive.

This mechanism proposes that solidarity escalated protests by spurring students to confront security forces in newly bold ways. It becomes evident in instances of physical repression, like beating, tear gas, and usage of lethal weapons, and students' reaction to it. On March 11, 2012, in the Faculty of Science at Damascus University, five students began shouting "Allah Akbar" in protest, so "the militias of Alassad attacked them by [brutally] beating one of them" (General Union of Syrian Students, 03/12/2012). When security refused an ambulance entry, militia continued to beat the student until she lost consciousness. Hearing screaming,

around thirty students amassed to stop the beating. The militias tried to disperse the students to prevent a demonstration, but ended up leaving and chanting for Assad as they left (03/12/2012). Without knowledge of who the girl being beaten was, students intervened because experiential solidarity existed among all students participating in the revolution and produced an obligation to protect one another due to shared identity and experience. This is not to say that one has to possess the identity of a Syrian revolutionary university student to engage in this sort of behavior, but rather I propose that experiential solidarity can be an added motivation to do so. Students exhibited confrontational behavior in this small protest because of their desire to protect and help their peer being beaten. Experiential solidarity thus encouraged confrontation with security forces out of the protective efforts it fostered.

In other instances where security forces engaged in physical repression during protest, students within the same protest used various physical protection tactics. On February 23, 2012, in the Faculty of Dentistry at the University of Aleppo, students staged a demonstration that turned into a sit-in in which they called for the release of various of the imprisoned peers (General Union of Syrian Students, 03/05/2012). During the sit-in, security forces began brutally beating a protester in the main square of the faculty, so the students chanted "leave him, leave him." After students shut the door to the faculty, "the militias [were] crazy and attacked us…breaking windows…[and beating] all they see," reported a student participant, so they remained to ensure all of the dental students returned (03/05/2012). The experiential solidarity among students encouraged them to be protective of one another because it created a unified group with moral obligations to stand with one another. When one student was attacked, other students confronted security forces through a chant, seeking to block their entry, and physically fighting back to counter their attempted beatings. Students displayed solidarity in their protection

of each other during protest, and it contributed to their resolve to stop repression and other negative consequences for any participant in the collective action.

Individuals also exhibited this mechanism through which experiential solidarity affects confrontation when they themselves tried to physically stop a detainment of a peer in real time. For example, at the Faculty of Agriculture at Aleppo University on April 3, 2012, students were demonstrating when security forces fired tear gas that caused suffocation of some participants, and then proceeded to arrest and beat those students (General Union of Syrian Students, 04/04/2012). As their peers were arrested, students physically tried to grab those being detained away from the hands of the shabiha; the post links to a video of participants trying to rescue someone from them. They risk negative consequences for themselves to prevent harm towards one of their peers, suggesting at least some level of solidarity has driven them to help one another regardless of whether or not they had a prior relationship. Confrontation arose in the form of further beating and arrests, as students refused not to do all in their power to protect one another (04/04/2012). Similarly, in University Square at Aleppo University on April 1, 2012, after six students were arrested, a group of girls tried to rid them from the hands of security (04/04/2012). Despite beatings "with batons and electricity sticks," the girls continued their efforts. Eventually, five bombs of tear gas physically ended their efforts (04/04/2012). Their desire to stand with their peers to prevent harm indicates that some feeling or multiple feelings driving them to protect one another could not be broken by physical repression. Experiential solidarity at least partially motivated them to do so, given that their confrontation began as soon as security forces began arresting their peers. Perhaps students could have exhibited this behavior in protests that did not occur on campus among mostly university students, but they chose to protest on campus and protect their student peers rather than attend another protest. Similar to

how solidarity allowed students to surmount fear of protest, it also weakened the demobilizing fear of confrontation.

Students also confronted vehicles and put their lives on the line in hopes of preventing the completion of many arrests at a large protest. In recounting an experience at a large protest at Aleppo University in May of 2012, a law student remembers how security forces entered the residential dorms and quad to arrest students ("Conversations: On Aleppo University," 2016). A group of female students stood in front of the bus of security forces entering the area to stop them, and were actually run over by the bus because they refused to stop. They ultimately sacrificed their lives because they protected the six being arrested at all costs. Their student peers with whom they felt experiential solidarity faced dangerous consequences, so that solidarity encouraged or contributed to their desire to stop that repression.

Other times, those seeking to prevent arrests had to be protected themselves. For example, on April 4, 2012, also at Aleppo University, security forces began insulting and beating a group of students, and arrested three of them and proceeded to continue beating them inside their bus (General Union of Syrian Students, 04/05/2012). A group of female students then engaged in a "verbal clash [with]...elements of the security forces." Shabiha began approaching these girls, so a large group of free students surrounded the girls and physically resisted their approach (04/05/2012). In this scenario, students not only confronted security to prevent the original arrest of the three students, but also to protect those that sought to prevent those original arrests. This further reflects the extent to which experiential solidarity encouraged confrontation in hopes of protecting each other – students would not back down until they were certain they had stopped harm from befalling their peers or had done all they could to do so.

Students also expressly planned how to protect each other and confront security forces before engaging in the protest or other action itself. On February 23, 2012, students staged a particularly large and thus contentious protest in the Faculty of Medicine at Aleppo University (General Union of Syrian Students, 03/05/2012). After physical attacks and arrests by security forces, a witness explained how students flocked to areas where the militias threatened participants with arms and moved in ways that inhibited entry of security forces to the protest. He then explains that "the boy [has] its role in demonstrations" and "the girl [has hers]," following his description of how the group responded to the repression (03/05/2012). In this description of students' protectionary responses, the participant suggests that nearly all knew how to respond to protect each other, or knew their role, and at least some followed through. Regardless of whether these students knew their peers facing danger or not, they protected their peers with whom they felt experiential solidarity through confrontation. This solidarity that motivated protest time and time again on campus encouraged them to stop attacks and arrests. This testimony also implies that participants already knew what to do; the experiential solidarity was not fleeting but rather had surfaced in previous mobilization and produced specific roles for protest participants.

At another protest at Aleppo University March of 2012, after security forces arrested five individuals and forced the remaining participants inside the faculty building with tear gas and surrounded it, students responded with "shouting and takbeer" (General Union of Syrian Students, 03/21/2012). Security then stopped surrounding the building and entered to follow the shouting, allowing students to exit and proceed in another demonstration (03/21/2012). By refusing to allow security to attack their movement and confronting them verbally, they not only intensified contention at the protest but also provided themselves with the opportunity to

continue expressing their demands. Their experiential solidarity contributed to this refusal to accept any harm against their peers, like the arrest of five of them, or repression of the entire protest. They acted in unison when faced with repression and arrest and utilized strategies that had developed because solidarity had spurred confrontation many times previously. Solidarity influenced confrontation as Syrian university students sought to protect one another and the movement as a whole.

Students not involved in the particular protest in which participants were facing danger of arrest, murder, or other repression also exhibited solidarity and confronted security forces in the way that they created new protests to alleviate pressure at the protest at risk of negative consequences. On March 25, 2012, students staged a protest at the Faculty of Information Technology "to support their brothers at the Faculty of Literature," which soon attracted security forces and shabiha firing tear gas on them (General Union of Syrian Students, 03/28/2012). Due to this, students at the Faculty of Education and the Institute for Trade began a protest to "relieve the pressure of security and shabiha attacks on the rest of the faculties." Security forces then attacked this demonstration, arresting at least four students, causing those demonstrating to throw stones at the security forces until they were forced to disperse by heavy use of tear gas (03/28/2012). Students thus willingly provoked security by staging another protest because they would not allow students at another faculty who were facing dangerous repression and arrests without trying to stop it. Their experiential solidarity remained evident in their use of the term "brothers," again suggesting a strong degree of cohesion expressed as a familial relationship. Whether throwing stones at shabiha or provoking them in other ways, this solidarity encouraged protectionary efforts as if they actually were family. They willingly confronted security and did all they could to aid their peers in danger of arrest, injury, or death.

Students also protected one another by drawing security forces to a particular location in hopes of allowing another group of students to protest safely. For example, on April 5, 2012, students at the Faculty of Science at Aleppo University demonstrated in a courtyard to overwhelm and distract security, so that students of another faculty could successfully stage a demonstration at the front of the college (General Union of Syrian Students, 04/06/2012). Security forces arrested two students and beat two other students in the courtyard as a result. These students purposefully placed themselves in a situation in which a confrontation with security forces was nearly certain specifically because they wanted to help their peers protest with less danger. Experiential solidarity, contributing to this desire to prevent danger for their peers, added to this protectionary behavior, and arose many times in decisions to alleviate pressure and danger facing their peers. In fact, there were five other instances in my data set of protests staged to draw security forces away from other protests (03/05/2012; 03/06/2012; 04/04/2012).

With encouragement resulting from experimental solidarity, students consistently sought to protect one another from harm and negative consequences while protesting. This spurred confrontation as students physically sought to prevent harm by security forces and also purposefully distracted or overwhelmed them. This mechanism arose twenty-five times in my data set. Many examples have been discussed above showing how students physically sought to stop arrests of their colleagues, fought security forces who beat up any of their peers, strategically moved and blocked each other from harm during protest, and organized action with the intention of distracting security from another protest or overwhelming them. It is the second-most numerous mechanism in my data set in terms of the number of testimonies depicting it, as it arose frequently whenever students provided testimony that detailed the dynamics of a specific

protest or other action. Solidarity created the desire to protect one's fellow students, causing

confrontation in hopes of preventing harm or negative consequences for one another.

CONCLUSION

Why did university students protest on campus, despite organized and intense repression? In this thesis, I have argued that experiential solidarity had a unique role in motivating students to protest on campus. I coin experiential solidarity as a hybrid between Scholz's (2008) definitions of social and political solidarity, consisting of similarities in identity, shared experiences of oppression, and unification in challenging an injustice or unjust system. In the Syrian case, common identities as young people attending school, shared experiences of political control and suppression of free expression on campus, and unified action challenging the unjust regime composed the experiential solidarity among university students. Experiential solidarity affected protest in the following four ways: it aided in persistence in spite of repression, it created special protests, it contributed to diffusion of protests across space from impetuses at one campus, and it fostered protection and encouraged confrontational tactics. Other explanations specific to universities like their symbolism as sites of protest and the mobilization tactics they facilitate do not answer the question of why students protest on campus as well as the role of experiential solidarity does. This explanation not only answers the question of why students chose to protest where they did, but also contributes to an understanding of how students participated and what occurred because of this solidarity.

The findings of this research present interesting implications for the field of social movement studies. It enters into a debate with scholars like Zhao (1998) who argue that physical and structural factors of universities influenced why protests occurred or motivated students to protest. While Schwedler (2012) and Schwedler (2022) assign more agency to the actors themselves similar to this paper, this study also departs from their logic as it focuses on the collective identity of the actors themselves as a contributing factor as opposed to characteristics

of the location of action itself. It suggests that emotions and identity can play an important role in decisions about location. They can also influence the very dynamics of the protests and other actions themselves, which adds to the body of literature that evaluates the role of identity and solidarities on recruitment, resilience, and other dynamics of protest (McAdam and Paulsen, 1993; Oberschall, 1973; Jasper, 1997; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). Nevertheless, it still departs in the way it relates identity and solidarity to space.

Overall, this analysis of university protest testimony from various sources has revealed that relationships among people at a given location can actually influence their choice to protest at locations where conditions may not be amenable to protest. In the Syrian case, experiential solidarity among students at universities encouraged them to engage in high risk dissent at a location where negative consequences were almost certain, even when other locations could have potentially hosted protests. Experiential solidarity can definitely be present among other communities within Syria and abroad. However, given its basis in identity and specific experiences of oppression, it likely would not operate exactly the same in other contexts and possibly affect social movements in unique ways. Nevertheless, this research presents implications in other high risk contexts for groups possessing experiential solidarity relating to why they may choose to withstand dangerous conditions while protesting, why they confront agents of repression, or what may motivate them to protest at all.

Future research can test the limits of this argument and further define how collective identity, emotions, and space relate to one another. Specifically, it would be interesting to evaluate other subgroups of the Syrian revolution to discover if solidarity similarly motivated where people protested or to what degree it existed. Research can be conducted on other units like towns, specific demographics like religious minorities, and many other groups. Furthermore,

studies on the existence and role of solidarity in the context of universities in other social movements in different countries can test the applicability of this argument and proposed mechanisms in other cases. It would be especially interesting to study the presence and effects of solidarity in other high-risk mobilization contexts where previous collective action has been suppressed, given that it forms a key element of the experiential solidarity discussed here. Finally, further research on the role of collective identity and emotions on not only protest recruitment and strategies but also on the dynamics of protests themselves can further develop this field and contribute to an understanding of why social movements occur in the contexts that they do.

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