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Moral Identity and Protest Cascades in Syria

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Cascade models explain the roles of the intrepid few who initiate protest and the masses who join when the expected utility of dissent flips from negative to positive. Yet questions remain about what motivates participation between those points on the causal chain, or under any conditions of high risk. To explain these anomalies, this article employs theories of moral identity to explore the interdependence of a facet of decision making that rationalist models typically regard as fixed: individuals' awareness of and need to express values central to their sense of self. Three mechanisms describe ways that individuals' responses to early risers trigger moral identity-based motivations for protest. First, by conjuring normative ideals, first movers can activate bystanders' urge to follow their example in order to earn their own self-respect. Secondly, by demonstrating the joy of agency, early risers can inspire bystanders' desire to experience the same gratification. Thirdly, by absorbing punishments, early risers can activate onlookers' sense of moral obligation to contribute to collective efforts. These mechanisms redouble bystanders' sense of the inherent value of protest, apart from its instrumental utility, and intensify their acceptance of risks, independent of the actual risks anticipated. Original interviews with displaced Syrians about their participation in demonstrations illustrate these processes.

Keywords: protest; cascades; social movements; identity; morality; mechanisms; Syria; Arab spring.

What drives sudden upsurges in protest? This question, long bewildering students of revolution, dramatically came to the fore in the Middle East in 2011. Decades of accumulating grievance, as well as various forms of prior resistance, show that these revolts did not erupt 'out of nowhere'. Nonetheless, observers and participants alike were stunned by the swiftness with which large numbers went into the streets to demand political change.

An influential perspective conceptualizes such upheavals as social cascades: 'large-scale social movements in which many people end up thinking something, or doing something, because of the beliefs or actions of a few 'early movers,' who greatly influence those who

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follow'.[1] Cascades offer an instructive metaphor. Their usefulness as a causal explanation, however, hinges on the mechanisms that drive them. Most models posit that a small percentage of people have extreme preferences and protest on principle. When they do, they communicate new information about the costs and benefits of protest, the character of the status quo and/or the reputational consequences of not participating. Bystanders update their preferences on the basis of instrumental rationality. As more join, a tipping point may be reached.

This perspective is helpful for explaining the role of the intrepid few who initiate protest and the critical mass that joins after the expected utility of dissent flips from negative to positive. Yet it leaves us to wonder what motivates people who act between those two points on the causal chain. Participants who follow on the heels of early risers *respond* to protest rather than initiate it. However, their response is not strictly utilitarian, because it occurs when the prospects of success remain dim. Nor are their motivations simply reputational. Whereas early risers break shocking new ground, bystanders are unlikely to pay social costs for remaining on the sidelines.

Dissent under these anomalous conditions, as well as at other times when success is doubtful and the risks are potentially fatal, encourages us to investigate microfoundations of cascades other than instrumental rationality. To that end, I build on theories of moral identity and propose that first movers can impel others to follow by intensifying both their awareness of the values central to their sense of self and their willingness to act upon those values. I explore three mutually reinforcing identity-based mechanisms, each of which offers a counterpoint to mechanisms prominent in conventional cascade models. First, witnessing early risers display esteemed values such as courage can activate bystanders' urge to act in order to earn their own self-respect. Though these values are embedded in cultural norms and social expectations, people who act to affirm them are not necessarily motivated by others' judgements – as reputational models propose – more than their judgements of themselves. Secondly, observing first movers' joy in voicing their true beliefs can also intensify onlookers' desire to exercise agency. Contrary to informational models, subsequent movers are hence re-evaluating not the instrumental benefit of protest for achieving political objectives, but its inherent reward as a form of self-actualization. Finally, in absorbing punishments, early risers can trigger others' feelings of obligation to stand up for a moral principle, and thereby their willingness to make sacrifices that they previously had not. Against rationalist assumptions, new entrants motivated in this way respond less to a decline in external circumstances of risk than to an increase in their own subjective level of risk acceptance.

Like others who emphasize the unpredictability of revolutions,[2] this framework does not purport to forecast when cascades occur, but rather to develop a better understanding of how they operate. It does so by seeking to identify the mechanisms by which early movers in protests affect subsequent movers because, as Jon Elster argues, only mechanisms – frequently occurring, easily recognizable causal patterns that constitute chains of cause–effect relations – open up the black box of social phenomena.[3] Though I focus on mechanisms invoking moral identity, I do not claim that they are more important than other kinds of mechanisms or that they operate in isolation of other mechanisms. I believe the fundamental questions underlying cascade models (What drives the interdependent decision-making that produces sudden, swift changes in behaviour across a population?) invites a range of possible answers. In crafting a new answer grounded in moral identity theory, I seek to bridge two academic literatures and use each to fill gaps left by the other. Research on protest cascades illustrates the explanatory power of the principle that a few first movers can greatly alter incentives for those who follow. However, it has

[1] Sunstein 2003, 54.
[2] Kuran 1991.
[3] Elster 2007, 32–3, 37.

not adequately explored incentives that are purposive rather than utilitarian. By contrast, a large body of research demonstrates the importance of identity, values, culture and emotions in aiding social movements. Yet questions remain about how non-instrumental motivations shift swiftly and spontaneously, especially during the initial uptick of mobilization. As James Jasper writes, 'the first stirrings of a social movement remain poorly understood'.[4]

Some believe that rational choice theory can subsume moral motives as another form of utility.[5] Critics, arguing that doing so stretches the concept of self-interest so broadly that it loses its meaning, sustain the need to distinguish between instrumental and non-instrumental pathways to action.[6] Siding with the latter, I adopt a focus on moral identity to foster debate about assumptions, processes and implications that interest-based cascade models frequently treat as unproblematic. My basic premise is that individuals' awareness of core values, and willingness to act upon those values, varies interdependently in the course of protest. This challenges theories that explicitly regard expressive needs as fixed. The mechanisms that I specify – accentuating the shifting internal meanings of the benefits, risks and internalized norms activated in collective action – likewise diverge from conventional emphases on external outcomes. Finally, my understanding of cascades results in at least three implications that challenge instrumentalist approaches. First, followers into a bandwagon might respond to the meaningfulness of protest incidents as much as the size of a crowd. Secondly, given the malleability of non-instrumental drivers of participation, analysts should be wary of classifying political actors according to the *a priori* intensity of their preferences. Thirdly, bandwagons do not necessarily herd people to follow others contrary to their true beliefs; rather, they can be situations in which individuals become empowered to enact aspects of their authentic selves that they were unable to enact alone.

I illustrate these arguments with evidence from the early months of the Syrian uprising. My analysis offers a distinct, though complementary, perspective to existing scholarship on this case. Several works outline the political and economic backdrop of the Syrian revolt, and especially the effect of neoliberal restructuring in heightening conspicuous corruption while further deteriorating living conditions among the rural and urban working classes.[7] Others examine the initial onset of demonstrations, with attention to protestors' localized perceptions of opportunity and threat,[8] and the escalatory effects of repression.[9] Of particular note is Reinoud Leenders' research on the contribution of dense social networks to solidarity and recruitment,[10] and the slogans with which protestors framed their collective effort.[11] These works offer valuable insight into the contexts, mobilizational dynamics, and sequence of events that enabled the uprising to emerge and spread. Complementing that work, my research goes beyond the structural and strategic functions of social relationships to pinpoint the contingent processes that occur within them.[12] This shift to the micro level seeks to uncover the meanings of contentious interactions for the people involved and how those meanings animate behaviour.

With that aim of theory building, I analyze interview that I conducted with 200 Syrian refugees in Jordan and Turkey in 2012 and 2013 about their experiences in the Syrian uprising. My interviewees mentioned various influences upon their decisions to participate in anti-regime

[4] Jasper 2007, 100.
[5] Opp 2013.
[6] King 1992; Stürmer and Simon 2004.
[7] Aboud 2013; Hinnebusch and Zintl 2014.
[8] Leenders and Heydemann 2012.
[9] Droz-Vincent 2014.
[10] Leenders 2012, 2013a.
[11] Leenders 2013b; also see Ismail 2011.
[12] See McAdam 2003.

demonstrations, including expectations about the costs and benefits of collective action, social pressures and emotions. A particularly prominent theme across their testimonials, however, is the understanding that others' protest pushed them to think deeply about who they are, what they value most and for what they are willing to make great sacrifices. In analysing these patterns, my objective is to encourage a broader conversation about the kinds of motivations that can be integrated into critical mass models, not to assert that any particular set of motives is most important or unimportant. To that end, this article begins by reviewing scholarship on protest cascades and on non-instrumental drivers of social movements, and presents a framework that bridges both. Upon justifying the research methodology, it illustrates the three posited moral identity-based mechanisms in the Syrian case. It concludes by calling for continued research on how intrinsic motivations for protest are malleable and interdependent – and thus merit greater attention in dynamic models of protest mobilization.

CASCADES

Most cascade models share general features.[13] Their basic units are discrete, boundedly rational individuals. Each has private, incomplete information and makes public decisions in interaction with others. Agents are heterogeneous in their 'thresholds', which mark the number or proportion of others who must make a choice before they do likewise. A few 'first movers' or 'early risers' can push others past their thresholds, which in turn pushes others, until a 'bandwagon' generates a 'critical mass'. At that 'tipping point', the benefits of engaging in the behaviour begin to exceed the costs.

Applied to protest, the concept of cascades helps elucidate the strategic logic underlying seemingly sudden, spontaneous collective behaviour, and thereby helps rectify older literature on crowds.[14] Revised cascade models consider how protestors interact with regimes,[15] face backlash[16] or vary with the density of social networks.[17] Nonetheless, uncertainty remains about their causal engine, which lays in the mechanisms that generate interpersonal influence. That is, precisely how and why do early risers cause others to follow?

Dominant approaches build on the assumption that individuals are instrumentally rational. A basic model proposes that each additional participant improves the cost–benefit ratio of protest as a means of achieving other goals. On the one hand, turnout increases each person's expectation that others will participate,[18] and that a shift in the balance of power from the regime to the opposition will produce the desired political outcomes.[19] On the other hand, as Mark Granovetter notes, 'The cost to an individual of joining a riot declines as […] size increases, since the probability of being apprehended is smaller the larger the number involved'.[20] The assertion that an increase in participant numbers decreases the risks for others is powerfully parsimonious. However, it ignores the fact that regimes often intensify punishments in the face of challenges.[21] We are left to wonder why anyone would rebel when dangers are severe.

[13] Berk 1974; Granovetter 1978; Kuran 1991, 1995; Maxwell and Oliver 1993; Lohmann 1993, 1994, 2000; Schelling 1978.
[14] Berk 1974.
[15] DeNardo 1985.
[16] Chong 1991.
[17] Granovetter 1985; Oberschall 1973.
[18] Schelling 1978.
[19] DeNardo 1985.
[20] Granovetter 1978, 1422.
[21] Lohmann 1994, 88.

Modified models emphasize different aspects of instrumentality. Susanne Lohmann argues that regimes maintain themselves because evidence of their deficiencies is dispersed.[22] Protest turnout communicates peoples' dissatisfaction, which indicates a regime's negative character and thereby convinces others to join the opposition. This recognition of the evolution of preferences over time enriches rudimentary cascade models. Nonetheless, it misrepresents settings in which citizens have long been cognizant of regimes' failings. In Syria, for example, widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo propelled a popular uprising, not vice versa.[23]

Other models consider the implications of participation on social status. The concept of 'reputational cascades' proposes that fence sitters join popular mobilizations for fear of being seen as cowardly, selfish or otherwise not worthy of respect. This perspective expands materialist definitions of utility maximization to encompass interpersonal dynamics. Yet it does not explain the motivations of the first to follow the lead of early risers. What is the peer pressure to protest when only an exceptional minority is doing so?

These theories convincingly show how the general utility of participation increases with participant numbers, and how this can produce rapid shifts in collective action. Nevertheless, they do not capture the range of motivations that impel people to participate. Their limitations come to light during the onset of a cascade, especially in authoritarian or repressive contexts. This is a moment when, under conditions in which public dissent is extremely unusual, a person or small group initiates protest and bystanders must decide whether to join. The motivations of the first to follow are puzzling. They protest only after others do so, which suggests that their motivations are not extreme views held independently, but the outcome of choices made interdependently. At the same time, their behaviour falls outside conventional understandings of instrumental utility. Entering the fray before a critical mass takes shape, they act when the success of collective action is highly uncertain and the reputational costs of nonparticipation are minimal, or even inverted.

These anomalies suggest the need to supplement assumptions of instrumental rationality with an appreciation of 'value rationality' or decision making to fulfil the human need for dignity, integrity and self-respect.[24] Abundant scholarship acknowledges the importance of such non-instrumental motivations, sometimes referred to as purposive incentives,[25] moral incentives,[26] expressive motivations,[27] self-motives[28] or inner-felt obligations.[29] Intrinsically motivated activities are those in which people engage for their own sake and not because they lead to extrinsic rewards.[30] Applying these concepts, scholars recognize that individuals frequently contribute to collective efforts because they believe that doing so is right.[31]

People are multidimensional. While non-instrumental values are not the only factors affecting their decision making, they are important ones to which cascade scholars typically give little attention. When they do, they tend to treat them as invariant. Gerald Marwell and Pamela Oliver briefly differentiate between incentives that organizers can manipulate and 'intrinsic incentives', which stem from the very act of participating. 'Some people enjoy being part of a group joined

[22] Lohmann 1993, 2000.
[23] George 2003; Hinnebusch and Zintl 2014; International Crisis Group 2011.
[24] Varshney 2003.
[25] Clark and Wilson 1961, 134–5.
[26] van Stekelenburg 2013.
[27] Chong 1991, 74.
[28] Gecas 2000, 101.
[29] Stürmer and Simon 2004.
[30] Deci 1975, 23.
[31] Etzioni 1986; Shamir 1990.

in a demonstration, others do it with clenched teeth', they explain. 'A person is either motivated by that incentive or not'.[32] Timur Kuran argues that the threshold at which an individual publicly reveals private preferences is a result of three factors: the substantive utility of the desired outcome, the reputational utility for one's social status and the expressive utility of being true to one's beliefs.[33] He proposes that substantive and reputational utilities change during a protest cascade, but a person's expressive needs do not. As Kuran explains, expressive needs are a pre-existing personality trait that distinguishes the minority of 'activists' from the 'nonactivist' majority:

> [Activists] have unusually intense wants on particular matters, coupled with extraordinarily great expressive needs […] They are inclined to speak their minds even at the risk of severe punishment, and regardless of whether truthful speech can make a difference […] The generally far more numerous nonactivists are […] followers who will participate only if others have already lowered the cost or raised the benefit of participation […] The activists have fixed public preferences that are more or less consistent with their private preferences; the nonactivists' public preferences depend on the prevailing reputational incentives.[34]

Kuran accentuates the significance of variation in expressive needs across a population and acknowledges that a person's expressive needs might vary across issue areas that they hold to be more or less important.[35] Yet this tells only part of the story. Even on a single topic, an individual's compulsion to assert his or her true beliefs can change dramatically as conditions shift. Just as identity is constantly 'in motion' and 'under construction',[36] so is the centrality of self-expression to one's identity contingent, intersubjective and socially constructed.[37] In the course of contention, therefore, nonactivists who scarcely imagined criticizing the government can become activists willing to die for a cause.

Among rational choice theorists, Dennis Chong goes further in showcasing the social and psychological benefits of dissent. Still, he argues that they are usually 'operative only when collective action has reached fairly sizable proportions and shows signs of being successful'.[38] He thus rejects the relevance of intrinsic incentives when protest remains incipient. Along similar lines, he argues that the strength of moral and altruistic motives for participating in social movements is determined by the closeness of social bonds[39] or the degree to which 'effective organizations' carefully plan and execute collective action.[40] This disallows the ability of such motives to animate bystanders in the absence of the structures known to aid mobilization.

If cascade modellers shed light on spontaneous, interdependent decision making but neglect shifts in non-instrumental incentives, other social movement scholars do the reverse. Viktor Gecas argues that self-esteem, self-efficacy and authenticity offer powerful motivations to participate in social movements, but the extent to which such self-motives are mobilized depends on the presence of charismatic leadership.[41] This leaves us to wonder how first movers can inspire others' essential values by virtue of their example, rather than their deliberate recruitment efforts. Elisabeth Wood goes beyond leadership in her attribution of high-risk

[32] Marwell and Oliver 1993, 189.
[33] Kuran 1995, 35.
[34] Kuran 1995, 50–1.
[35] Kuran 1995, 30, 34.
[36] van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2007, 161.
[37] Goodwin 2011; Kurzman 2004b.
[38] Chong 1991, 95.
[39] Chong 1991, 67, 71.
[40] Chong 1990, 10.
[41] Gecas 2000, 102.

protest to individuals' pleasure and pride in exercising agency, participation and defiance. As these motivations increase with members in a movement, however, she notes that the puzzle is 'What sets in motion this recursive process?'[42] Wood argues that local circumstances, namely past state violence and the proximity of insurgent forces, generate opportunities for collective action, which in turn spread new beliefs. This long-term view of evolving political culture helps explain why some communities rebel more than others. Yet it does not fully unlock what motivates individuals – those who are in highly mobilized communities or especially those who are not – to make the pivotal step from silence to voice. More fine-grained, micro-level research is needed to show how Wood's theorized motivations come into play in the moment-to-moment fluctuations of protest events.

Scholarship on the role of emotions in social movements focuses attention on contingent impetuses to protest that are not attributable to structural contexts.[43] Within this research programme, of particular relevance are arguments about the incendiary power of indignation[44] and 'moral shocks': unexpected events or pieces of information that instigate such outrage that they incline one to political action, even without personal or organizational contacts.[45] While this work does much to explain participation, anger – like other emotions – is a label that masks an array of feelings, cognitions and impulses that social scientists should work to distinguish analytically.[46] I leverage the concept of moral identity in an effort to do so. Identity-based motivations for protest share with emotional motivations their origin in subjective, evaluative experiences that are evoked by external stimuli and involve action tendencies.[47] Yet whereas emotions are bodily phenomena with a visceral, spontaneous, automatic quality,[48] moral identity refers to the centrality of values and principles to one's self-concept.[49] The latter is thus more reflective than reflexive, and is grounded in intentionality and reasons in ways that involuntary emotional responses are not. Augusto Blasi argues that, because emotions reflect pre-existing concerns, it is one's concern for morality that generates 'moral emotions' such as empathy or guilt, not vice versa.[50] To get to the origins of moral motivation, therefore, we must look past emotions to uncover individuals' understandings of good and bad and probe how meanings attached to those understandings generate behaviour.

MORAL IDENTITY-BASED MECHANISMS

Research on identity in social movements has tended to concentrate on the processes by which members of a group come to share politically meaningful social or collective identities.[51] This focus is encouraged by findings that the transition from a sense of 'I' to 'we' is an important reason why people contribute to collective action.[52] Nonetheless, research ought not lose sight of the degree to which the fulfilment of a sense of 'I' is also a powerful motivator, especially when a social movement is incipient and no group with members has crystallized as such.

[42] Wood 2003, 238.
[43] See Klandermans 1997; Aminzade and McAdam 2001; Flam and King 2005; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Pearlman 2013.
[44] Castells 2012; Gamson 1992; Kahneman and Sunstein 2005; Lupsha 1971; Moore 1978; Scott 1976; Ullmann-Margalit and Sunstein 2001.
[45] Jasper 1997, 106.
[46] Jasper 2011, 286.
[47] Frijda 1986, 4.
[48] Blasi 1999, 2.
[49] Hardy and Carlo 2011, 510.
[50] Blasi 1999, 16.
[51] Gecas 2000, 94.
[52] van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2007, 163–4.

Among the manifold aspects of personal identity, moral anchoring is particularly pertinent for questions of dissent. As Charles Taylor famously wrote, 'To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space'. He elaborates:

> Who am I? […] (T)his can't necessarily be answered by giving name and genealogy. What does answer this question for us is an understanding of what is of crucial importance to us. To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose.[53]

A large strand of psychological research on the role of the self in moral motivation examines how personality structures differ in the centrality of morality to their goals.[54] Crafting a more dynamic approach, Benoît Monin and Alexander Jordan call attention to 'the situational malleability of moral self-regard, or one's self-perceived moral standing at any given moment'.[55] Steven Hitlin adds that this situational sensitivity of moral selfhood is particularly salient during ruptures in the *status quo*, when normal social-structural roles are insufficient to guide action and people are thus apt to 'fall back on values-based personal identity to adjudicate between […] behavioral options'.[56] These understandings call attention to the mechanisms through which moral identity leads to action. Still, existing studies offer little information about them.[57]

Linking the concept of moral identity to protest cascades can offer a launching pad for identifying such mechanisms. With that goal, I outline three mechanisms through which individuals' response to first movers intensifies both their awareness of the values central to their sense of self and their willingness to act upon those values. First, early risers can activate others' urge to take action in order to earn or affirm self-respect. Attention to this mechanism suggests that first movers trigger a shift not only in the impact of participation on others' reputations, but also in its consequences for their own feelings of moral worth. My understanding of self-respect resonates with Gecas' definition of self-esteem as the motivation to view oneself favourably.[58] Yet as Richard King explains, whereas self-esteem depends on a person's concrete successes, self-respect is an assertion of moral equality.[59] In the Middle East, the human need for self-respect was integral to the theme of 'dignity' prominent throughout the 2011 uprisings. One Tunisian's description of his country's revolt thus captured a region-wide longing:

> Each Tunisian was forced to be complicit with corruption to a certain degree. This phenomenon led to a form of collective and individual self-degradation […] Multiple compromises, different ways of paying allegiance to power, even active participation in its networks […] produced frustrations, humiliations, and feelings of disrespect for oneself and others in all social classes […] The Tunisian revolution expressed above all a will to recover a sense of individual and collective self-respect.[60]

The motivational power of self-respect in the Arab revolts writ large was mirrored in individuals' participation at the local level, and thus offers a window into the micro–macro

[53] Taylor 1989, 27–8.
[54] See Hardy and Carlo 2011.
[55] Monin and Jordan 2009, 341.
[56] Hitlin 2011, 522.
[57] Hardy and Carlo 2011, 510.
[58] Gecas 2000, 101.
[59] King 1992, 71.
[60] Khairi 2011, 243–4.

linkages underlying large-scale transformations such as revolutions. Applied to cascades, attention to self-respect suggests that, when early risers voice dissent, bystanders who privately share those revealed preferences might be moved to compare themselves to them. If they do not emulate their lead, they might feel lesser in some way: less brave, less virtuous, less committed, etc. That feeling can undermine their moral self-regard and motivate them to partake in protest to win it back. As King documents in the self-understandings of civil rights activists, self-respect is not an inherent state of mind or a good bestowed by others, but instead requires that one take action to publicly uphold one's moral status.[61] This urge for self-respect, as an expression of moral identity, is intertwined with social identity to the degree that individuals define themselves in terms of social category memberships and strive for positive association with those categories.[62] Still, participants who act on such internalized values are not necessarily motivated by others' opinions rather than their opinions of themselves. One's sense of self does not take shape in a vacuum, but the need to be true to oneself is no less real for it.

Second, early risers can inspire others' desire to act in order to actualize agency. Consideration of this mechanism calls attention to variability in bystanders' valorization of protest not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself. Wood describes the pleasure of agency as 'the positive affect associated with self-determination, autonomy, self-esteem, efficacy, and pride that come from the successful assertion of intention'.[63] Gecas adds that self-efficacy is people's desire to perceive themselves as causal agents in their environment, and their corresponding instinct to avoid the feelings of powerlessness, helplessness or inferiority that result when they do not.[64] Early risers demonstrate the sense of liberation and relief that one can attain by revealing publicly what one has long harboured privately.[65] In repressive environments, their exceptional acts of agency might be the first of the sort that onlookers have beheld. Under such conditions, first movers do not simply present others with the choice of whether to follow their lead. They demand choice where its absence had largely been taken for granted. First movers can thus invite others to contemplate that which had been unrealistic, irrelevant, foolhardy or even agonizing to imagine: the thrill of acting as an autonomous political agent. No less, it can intensify their felt need to experience that joy.

Third, early risers can trigger others' feelings of obligation to stand up for moral principle. Attention to this mechanism suggests that first movers can influence others' willingness to accept the costs of protest, regardless of whether those costs decline. In authoritarian contexts, early risers are not only the first to protest; they are typically also the first to elicit state repression and absorb punishments. Apart from awakening emotions of empathy or anger, government killing, injury or arrest of dissenters presents ethical dilemmas to co-oppositionists who have yet to participate in collective action. Such bystanders might find themselves forced to contemplate whether it is fair to prioritize their wellbeing while others make sacrifices for a cause in which they also believe. First movers' example can thus awaken in them the basic human desire to live consistently with the values that constitute one's self-concept,[66] and thereby impel them to act accordingly. The motivational power of an activated sense of duty explains a puzzle for theories of collective action. Rationalist cascade models hold that, as the number of protestors increases, the risks for the average participant decrease. In participating, however, the average protestor might assume risks greater than he or she previously had.

[61] King 1992, 72–3.
[62] Tajfel 1981.
[63] Wood 2003, 235.
[64] Gecas 2000, 101.
[65] Kuran 1995, 44.
[66] Etzioni 1986; Gecas 2000; Monin and Jordan 2009; Shamir 1990.

That new willingness is unlikely due to an offsetting rise in anticipated gains alone, especially during the early phase of a cascade. Rather, it encourages us to consider how subjective levels of risk aversion change in the unfolding of contentious politics, and not always in parallel with actual risk.

In summary, first movers can influence those who follow by causing them to face grave questions related to self-respect (*what must I do to earn pride in myself?*), agency (*who am I if I do not stand up and assert my true self?*) and obligation (*what is my duty to others and to the principles I hold dear?*). Such questions might be stifled as long as public dissent remains marginal. Sight, or even knowledge, of others' protesting brings them to the fore. This does not suggest that, in the heat of contention, individuals pause and engage in soul searching. Private deliberation about one's moral identity might occur in an instant, or it might be only after the fact that participants understand in these terms the rationales that pushed them to act. Like utility maximization, this portrayal of an inner moral dialogue is thus a theoretical rather than empirical representation of the cognitive processes entailed in the individual decision to join a cascade. Different people engage in them to different degrees.

Attention to these sources of variation in individuals' awareness of moral identity, and need to act upon it, carries at least three theoretical and empirical implications that diverge from those of standard cascade models. Primarily, shifts in the identity-based costs and benefits of protest are not strictly dependent on the number of other participants, as posited by most rationalist approaches. Gecas notes, 'People feel pride and satisfaction in the affirmation of their values, guilt and shame in not living up to their values, and anger or fear when their values are threatened.'[67] Other protestors need not be numerous to animate these values and associated motivations; a poignant incident involving one person can be as impactful as a crowd. Correspondingly, an identity-oriented conceptualization of the point at which an individual decides to join a protest is quite different from rationalists' description of a threshold unleashed when a certain number of people take to the streets. As Jeff Goodwin and Charles Kurzman argue, this point is unknowable to protestors themselves, no less to outsiders.[68]

In addition, attention to the variability of individuals' inner compulsion to protest casts doubt on a tradition in social movement research that identifies types of dissenters based on how much they value a collective good or are willing to act for its sake. Such classifications include Kuran's 'activists' and 'nonactivists', Bert Klandermans's 'sympathizers' and 'core activists', and Charles Tilly's 'zealots', 'misers', 'opportunists' and 'run-of-the-mill contenders',[69] among others.[70] Such *a priori* distinctions risk creating the misleading impression that people's relationships to collective action fall into fixed boxes rather than mirror the fluidity and unpredictability of collective action itself. Ideal types are of course simplifications to aid analysis; in using them, however, we ought be sensitive to the difficulty of forecasting oppositionists' behaviour in advance. Once a repressive regime's revolutionary floodgates are pierced, individuals sometimes surprise even themselves with their own daring. Analysis of moral identity-based motivations reveals ways in which the onset of mass mobilization can activate powerful activist tendencies in people who, before that onset, had little inkling that they had them. Those motivations, and the inclination to act upon them, are not categorical. People can be more or less strongly moved to act on values of self-respect, agency and obligation, just as they can be more or less strongly moved to act on material self-interest. Individuals possess

[67] Gecas 2000, 95.
[68] Goodwin 2011; Kurzman 2004b.
[69] Tilly 1978, 88.
[70] Klandermans 2003, 691.

unique mixtures of moral identity and interest-based motivations, which is part of what gives cascade models their distinctive dynamism.

Finally, analytical attention to moral identity challenges a conventional view that bandwagons bring individuals to act contrary to their true beliefs. Sushil Bikchandani, David Hirshleifer and Ivo Welch define informational cascades as the collective outcome when 'it is optimal for an individual, having observed the actions of those ahead of him, to follow the behaviour of the preceding individual without regard to his own information'.[71] Cass Sunstein views a reputational cascade as that which occurs when 'people think they know what is right, or what is likely to be right, but they nonetheless go along with the crowd in order to maintain the good opinion of others'.[72] Kuran speaks of expressive needs as one's struggle for self-assertion and decisional autonomy against the 'tyranny of the should'. An individual threshold is thus the outcome of a 'tradeoff between outer security and inner peace, between social approval and personal autonomy'.[73]

My posited mechanisms offer a different view. Against the idea that cascades involve a contradiction between public imperatives and private preferences, I suggest that early risers might rally others precisely because they resonate deeply with their private preferences. I posit ways that cascades generate power not by turning people away from their authentic selves but by empowering them to express their selfhood more fully, if not enact aspects of it that had been repressed.[74] An identity-based perspective hence suggests that cascades are not necessarily situations in which 'the blind lead the blind'.[75] Instead, they can be spaces in which some people come to see their core values more clearly than before, and act upon them in ways they could not alone.

METHODOLOGY

I explore these arguments with qualitative data from open-ended interviews that I conducted with displaced Syrians during 3.5 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Jordan (2012 and 2013) and Turkey (2013). These were the first trips of my on-going research for a book on the Syrian conflict. Due to danger inside Syria, the nearly five million citizens who have taken refuge outside the country (approximately 20 per cent of the Syrian population, as of this writing) offer the most feasible access to first-hand accounts of the revolt. Refugees offer a particularly valuable channel to the universe of Syrians who participated in demonstrations because most have fled after they or their communities faced violent reprisals for their anti-regime activity.[76]

I identified interviewees using a snowball sampling, an appropriate method for this 'hard to reach' population whose parameters shift daily and for whom no sampling frame exists.[77] I used multiple entry points into different social networks to obtain as diverse a sample as possible. As most refugees cross borders nearest their homes, I carried out research in several towns in two countries. Given the fluidity across borders,[78] I was also able to interview some who reside primarily in Syria and were only temporarily outside it. The resulting interviewee pool varies by age, class and region (Table 1). At the same time, nearly all my interviewees supported the uprising against the Syrian regime, and the majority were Sunni Muslim males between the ages

[71] Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, and Welch 1992, 992; also see Anderson and Holt 2008, 335.
[72] Sunstein 2003, 74.
[73] Kuran 1995, 32–3.
[74] See Reicher 2002.
[75] Contrast to Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, and Welch 1992; Hirshleifer 1995; Sunstein 2003.
[76] Özden 2013, 3; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2013, 15.
[77] Goodman 2011, 350.
[78] Roussel 2014.

TABLE 1 *Interviewees: Basic Demographics*

	Interviews
Total number	200
Country of interview	61.50% Jordan; 38.50% Turkey
	Interviewees
Gender	69.00% male; 31.00% female
Age	6.00% aged 0–19; 28.00% aged 20–29 54.00% aged 30–49; 12.00% aged 50–65
Marital status	65.00% married, divorced or widowed; 32.50% unmarried 2.50% unknown
Urban/rural origins	56.50% urban; 35.00% rural; 8.50% unknown
Governorate of origin	29.00% Daraa; 16.50% Damascus or Damascus suburbs 16.50% Homs; 8.00% Latakia; 7.50% Aleppo; 6.50% Hama 6.50% Idlib; 4.00% Hasaka; 1.00% Raqqa; 1.00% Swayda 0.50% Deir ez-Zor; 0.50% Golan Heights; 2.50% unknown

Note: urban status is accorded to the capital cities of governorates, as well as to Qamishli and all of the Damascus suburbs, given the size and density of their populations and/or their close proximity to densely populated areas. Remaining localities are considered to be rural.

of eighteen and forty. This mirrors the demographics of both participants in the demonstration movement[79] and the overall refugee population,[80] though the latter skews female[81] due to the fact that more men eventually joined the armed rebellion or have been killed, arrested or disappeared in the course of anti-regime activity.[82]

My interviews, all but a few in Arabic, ranged from twenty-minute one-on-one conversations to group discussions involving several individuals over hours, to oral histories recorded over days. I typically began by asking interviewees how they responded when they first heard about uprisings in other Arab countries in early 2011 and then invited them to recount their experiences in, and thoughts about, events in Syria thereafter. Open-ended interviews of this sort are valuable sources of data on causal mechanisms because they create space for people to provide local knowledge about context, decision making and processes that researchers might not think to elicit in questionnaires.[83] Comments that emerge organically in the course of semi-structured conversations may also be more credible than responses to 'bald' queries.[84]

Still, individuals' *post hoc* explanations of their actions can carry deliberate or inadvertent misrepresentations, harden into social scripts or assert lofty motivations rather than admit to base ones. I thus approach narratives with an ethnographic sensibility, in the sense of seeking to glean the meaning of behaviour to the actors involved.[85] I developed tools to do so through my general immersion in Syrian refugee communities, which built on years of living in the Middle East over the past two decades. During fieldwork, I stayed with families, talked in coffee shops into the wee hours, spent time with the injured in hospitals, etc. Multi-site, cross-temporal participant observation gave me a bedrock of knowledge with which to contextualize and critically scrutinize individuals' self-reporting. Beyond this, I compared interview data to

[79] *Al-Jazeera* 2012.
[80] US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2013, 1.
[81] See United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php.
[82] See Center for Documentation of Violations in Syria, http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/about
[83] Patterson and Monroe 1998, 330.
[84] Wood 2003, 241.
[85] Schatz 2009, 5.

a range of published sources, from daily press coverage to human rights investigations, novels, political cartoons and videos. These allowed me to confirm that my interlocutors' reflections resonated with those of an exponentially larger number of Syrians.

This research design does not allow me to test hypotheses about the relative importance of instrumental or non-instrumental motivations, or predict when uprisings will occur. However, it can help develop theory by grounding explanations in a more nuanced understanding of the subjective worlds that inform decision making. As Kurzman argues, all social theory passes through individuals' inner states; we either impute our own assumptions about those states or attempt to gain data.[86] Though imperfect, personal testimonials are an important source of such data.

THE SYRIAN CONTEXT

In 1970, General Hafez al-Assad seized power within the Ba'ath Party regime established by a coup in 1963. Over the next three decades, he established a durable authoritarian regime based on a well-organized ruling party, complex bureaucracy, large public sector, ample welfare state, sectarian loyalists and cross-sectarian alliances. When an omnipresent security apparatus did not forestall opposition, regime violence did. The Muslim Brotherhood fought the regime with armed attacks from the late 1970s and led an insurrection in the city of Hama in 1982. Assad launched a scorched earth assault that flattened the city and left up to tens of thousands dead. A generation of Syrians was warned of how the regime would respond to challenges.

In 2000, Assad died and his son Bashar assumed power. Many Syrians supported the young, Western-educated ophthalmologist and his pledges of reform.[87] In an opening known as the 'Damascus Spring', new civil society forums engaged in debate and unprecedented petitions demanded change.[88] Within months, however, the government cracked down on oppositionists. Meanwhile, market reforms enriched crony capitalists and nurtured middle-class consumerism, while also cutting subsidies and services for the bulk of the population that was coping with high unemployment and inflation.[89] Mismanaged government responses to drought exacerbated discontent, particularly among a rural population that already suffered from regime neglect.[90]

After four decades of authoritarian rule, many Syrians longed for greater freedom, rule of law and economic opportunity. Yet few dared to voice those demands publicly. Citizens' fear of expressing criticism varied by class, residence and other social characteristics, but affected nearly everyone to some degree. 'They planted fear in us and taught us fear ever since we were kids', one man explained. 'Do not oppose the ruler. Be careful, the walls have ears.'[91] A ubiquitous cult of personality coerced compliance,[92] and wariness of undercover informants infused everyday social interactions.[93] To be Syrian, Lisa Wedeen argued, was to be proficient in publicly acting as if one believed in the regime, even though one did not.[94] In Kuran's terms, people knew that the best strategy for getting by was to falsify their private preferences. 'We lived on the saying *watee sowtak* (keep your voice low), one man from Qamishli said.[95]

[86] Kurzman 2004a.
[87] Perthes 2006.
[88] George 2003; Perthes 2006.
[89] Aboud 2013; Hinnebusch and Zintl 2014; Perthes 2006; Wedeen 2013.
[90] Hinnebusch and Zintl 2014; International Crisis Group 2011.
[91] E.K., personal interview, 18 September 2012.
[92] Wedeen 1998.
[93] BBC 2012; Middle East Report 2011.
[94] Wedeen 1999.
[95] Z.H., personal interview, 3 September 2013.

Another from Aleppo added that the motto of daily life was *khaleek*, meaning 'just go along with things'.[96]

Beginning in late 2010, Tunisia, and then Egypt, launched what became a wave of popular protest across the Arab world. Syrians I met said that they were elated by the forced resignation of authoritarian presidents. Still, many citizens and outside analysts judged Syria to be immune from the revolutionary tide.[97] Compared to other Arab autocracies that saw mass demonstrations, Syria's single-party police state was more repressive, its military more infused with the regime and its civil society more severely curtailed. Beyond this, the regime enjoyed assets such as a popular foreign policy, the legacy of a welfare state and generally high regard for the head of state.[98] Whereas in Tunisia and Egypt most of the largely homogenous society was alienated from the government, Syria was an ethnic mosaic in which many members of minority sects supported the president, who comes from the minority Alawite sect.

Against the backdrop on an electrified regional atmosphere, however, observers noted Syrians beginning to broach political topics in conversation, on the Internet and in anti-regime graffiti.[99] A spontaneous demonstration in the old city of Damascus emboldened bystanders, as did a handful of vigils in solidarity with revolts in other countries.[100] Nonetheless, initial online calls for direct protest against the Syrian regime failed to take off.[101] Activists on social media urged mass demonstrations under the slogan 'Day of Rage' on 15 March. In some towns, would-be protestors arrived surreptitiously at pre-designated places, found security patrols already there, and walked by without stopping.[102] In others, demonstrations began, but armed personnel overwhelmed protestors, arrested dozens and then forcibly suppressed a subsequent demonstration calling for their release.[103] 'Syria is the last country where regime change will occur', one aspiring activist lamented in the wake of these events. 'The culture of protesting is not present here. They oppressed it until they killed it Another added,'.[104]

Meanwhile in the provincial town of Daraa, security forces arrested some fifteen children after anti-regime graffiti appeared on a school wall.[105] Relatives beseeched local officials for the children's release.[106] The chief of regional police, a notoriously corrupt cousin of Bashar al-Assad, dismissed them with words that every Daraawee I met could quote: 'Forget your children. Go home to your wives and make more children. And if you do not know how, bring your wives to us and we will show you'. A small group decided to protest at a neighbourhood mosque that Friday. When prayers ended, one man shouted, 'God is great!' Some ran away but others followed, and an incipient demonstration marched towards the central mosque. One activist involved that day was amazed by the swiftness with which bystanders responded:

> We expected that people would sympathize with us, but we were surprised that it only took one minute for everyone to know what was going on when they saw us marching. People joined us and started chanting. People came from everywhere, from houses, from the streets, from other mosques.[107]

[96] R.A., personal interview, 5 September 2013.
[97] Abdulhamid 2011; *Al-Jazeera* 2011.
[98] Hinnebusch and Zintl 2014; International Crisis Group 2011.
[99] International Crisis Group 2011, 8–10.
[100] Abbas 2011, 1–2.
[101] Sands 2011.
[102] L.M., personal interview, 15 November 2013.
[103] Abouzeid 2011; International Crisis Group 2011, 10.
[104] *New York Times* 2011; also see Al Hendi 2012.
[105] See Leenders 2012; Leenders 2013a; Leenders 2013b.
[106] International Crisis Group 2011, 13–15.
[107] D.L., personal interview, 9 October 2012.

Within hours, several hundred protestors faced off with security personnel, who shot two protestors dead. Funerals the next day became larger demonstrations, and on-going demonstrations that week produced more casualties. Other Syrians watched videos of protests and repression, which circulated via the Internet and satellite television. That Friday, tens of thousands joined solidarity demonstrations in cities across Syria.[108] 'I know this place will never be the same', novelist Samar Yazbek wrote from Damascus that day. 'Fear no longer seems as automatic as breathing'.[109]

Twelve days passed and sixty-one people were killed before the president addressed the parliament.[110] 'We were very hopeful', a physician described anticipation when dozens gathered at his hospital to watch the televised speech. 'But he showed no understanding at all of the reasons for the demonstrations. He said, "If you want war, we are ready for war". We couldn't believe our ears […] It became painfully clear: this person should not be ruling us'.[111] The revolutionary bandwagon grew thereafter, despite escalating repression.[112] By summer, millions had gone onto the streets to demand the overthrow of the regime. Significant portions of the polity remained ambivalent or opposed to the revolt.[113] A protest cascade, however, had passed a tipping point.

MORAL IDENTITY-BASED MECHANISMS IN SYRIA

In Syria, as elsewhere, a small number of individuals stunned onlookers when they publicly protested the government. Bystanders might have reasonably judged it too dangerous or futile to follow their lead. Why did many follow, regardless? Personal testimonials demonstrate the salience of the three posited identity-based mechanisms.

Self-respect

By demonstrating courage, integrity and dignity, the first movers in protest challenged others who regarded these esteemed values as central to their self-concept. This could compel spectators to consider what *not* participating indicated about their own moral worth. A father described how participants were recruited in this way from the first street protests in Daraa:

> The barrier of fear broke when some people started participating in a demonstration and others were watching them […] Some people were afraid. But when someone saw another person standing up and being brave, he'd think, 'What's the difference between him and me? Is he a man and I'm not a man? No! I'm a man, too. So I'll also join!'
>
> These are words I heard from people all over Syria. When the people of Daraa rose up, they encouraged people in Duma, in Homs, in Idlib. They would say, 'What? In Daraa, are they men, and are we're not men?' This is what broke the barrier of fear.[114]

This emphasis on masculinity showed how personal identity was embedded in social expectations about gender, honour and other norms. Nonetheless, the speaker describes

[108] Abouzeid 2011.
[109] Yazbek 2011, 5.
[110] Human Rights Watch 2011.
[111] T.J., personal interview, 11 October 2012.
[112] Human Rights Watch 2012.
[113] Star 2012; Wedeen 2013.
[114] T.A., personal interview, 16 September 2012.

individuals being propelled primarily by their own reactions to their non-participation, rather than others' reactions. Their responses demonstrate how norms, internalized as personal evaluative criteria, motivate people by generating feelings of self-worth when they follow them and feelings of self-doubt when they do not.[115] Another man emphasizes this point, again through a gendered lens:

> The role of women was strong […] They got an idea of why we're going out or we'd tell them that they [regime forces] killed the son of this person or the brother of that person. They'd say, 'Why did they kill? They're criminals! Go out against them!'
>
> That gave us a strong sense of purpose […] Women raise and teach us, so they're strong sources of motivation. And they'd go out, too. Men who weren't going would say, 'Those women are not afraid. Why should I be afraid? Why am I standing here? Why don't I speak my mind?' I have friends who were well off and worried about their interests. When they saw women out marching, they'd watch. Within an hour they'd be out, too. They'd have an internal discussion with themselves. They'd say, 'If women go out, why shouldn't I go out?' And with that, they crossed the line of fear.[116]

That these two testimonials come from people from a provincial area might suggest the dominance of traditional norms in communities with particularly dense social ties.[117] Yet similar motivations were unleashed across the country whenever individuals felt challenged by the example of those who rose up before them, and concluded that they needed to join the collective effort in order to affirm their moral status. Like the case of women in Daraa, this challenge was starkest when early risers' courage tested facets of onlookers' self-concepts, such as when the less privileged or able-bodied took action while the more fortunate lingered on the sidelines. Another citizen recalls a story from the Damascus suburbs:

> A man was paralyzed as a result of torture in prison. He was arrested in the beginning of the revolution and released after two months. The first thing he told his family was that he wanted to be in the first demonstration in his town against the regime. When the people saw him participating in the demonstration in his wheelchair, they said, 'We can't stay at home when this paralyzed man is out supporting the revolution.' That gave them power. It showed them an example: the regime can't do more than that.[118]

Taking these narratives as insight into inner worlds otherwise inaccessible to researchers, we see how early risers galvanized onlookers' core identities and deeply held values. Those onlookers did not respond to the size of the protest, but to the meaningfulness of its very occurrence. Acting when turnout was small, early followers were unlikely to perceive a significant shift in the utility of protest for reputational or other ends. Rather, what shifted was their felt need to voice dissent as an expression of their moral selves. This sentiment comes to the fore in another oppositionist's recollections of attending a protest in Damascus in the uprising's first week, during which he witnessed government forces shooting unarmed demonstrators:

> Walking away we cried like little children, feeling useless and helpless. I had no doubt I was going to be told it was not my fault and that there was nothing I could have done. But to have seen the massacre of innocent people right in front of my eyes, and standing only a few meters away from the murderers that were doing it, I could not help but assure myself that I was a coward.[119]

[115] Shamir 1990, 321.
[116] I.M., personal interview, 17 September 2012.
[117] See Leenders 2012.
[118] J.I., personal interview, 20 October 2012.
[119] McTighe 2012.

The young Damascene went on satellite television that night as an eyewitness, launching his career as a citizen journalist. He explicitly mentions his certainty that no one would judge him for abandoning the demonstration. Thus, it was not reputational worries that pushed him to act. Far from it, he expected others to try to quell his guilt. Yet his negative feelings of lost self-respect were overpowering nonetheless. Such feelings provided an enduring motivator: thenceforth, he committed to the dangerous work of writing on behalf of the uprising, eventually leading to his escape into exile.

Agency

In demonstrating the joy of publicly expressing their true beliefs, rather than falsifying them as usual under authoritarian rule, early risers inspired others to strive to exercise agency as well. That the first protestors relished the thrill of voicing dissent was lost on none who watched them in person or on their screens. Activist Razan Zeitouneh described being mesmerized by videos of 'young men (who) steal moments in the night to demonstrate and chant slogans'. They went out, despite the tanks and snipers, to 'prove that they still own the ground that they liberated from fear'.[120] A military officer similarly described awe upon his first encounter with such manifestations of agency. Arriving at a demonstration as a security agent, he 'stared with astonishment and admiration at the courage of Syrian youth'. What he witnessed was so powerful that it convinced him to join the opposition. 'The real reason for my defection', he explained, 'was the impact of the dignity and freedom I beheld in the eyes and chants of demonstrators'.[121]

In these instances, early risers did not move others by signalling new information about the regime's negative character or prospects for overthrowing it. Rather, they exhibited the reward of auto-emancipation, which ignited bystanders' yearning for the same experience. Those bystanders might not have been aware of their need for self-expression; after all, to find peace in Assad's Syria, it was best not to allow oneself to be taunted by such a want, which could not be satisfied. As long as the regime appeared stable, working for change seemed, in Nathan Brown's words, 'like fighting gravity'.[122] An incipient protest revealed people both fighting gravity and relishing the sweetness of doing so. It thus challenged others: do you not wish to do likewise?

Those who answered in the affirmative and joined the protest movement then tasted the pride and pleasure in agency that Wood and others describe. My interviewees' faces would alight, and sometimes their eyes would tear, when they recalled their first demonstration. 'It was the first time I went out and said "No"', a student from rural Idlib recalled.[123] 'It was like talking from your heart, in spite of everything', a mother from Homs said.[124] 'I could die in a year or two. I don't think that I will ever feel happier than I was during that protest', a young man from Hama agreed.[125] Another man insisted that his first demonstration was better than his wedding day. 'And when I said that in front of my wife, she refused to talk to me for a month', he laughed.[126]

These speakers suggest that to express political voice after denying it for years – or a lifetime – entails more than merely revealing preferences. It means fulfilment of a sense of self that had been subjugated. 'I feel that I truly own myself and my freedom' one activist

[120] Zeitouneh 2011.
[121] Daghistani 2012.
[122] Brown 2014, 300.
[123] I.E, personal interview, 2 September 2013.
[124] Y.H., personal interview, 22 August 2013.
[125] D.F., personal interview, 25 September 2013.
[126] B.A., personal interview, 26 September 2013.

described those early demonstrations. 'Sometimes I turn to my friends in the demonstration and kiss them as we exchange congratulations.'[127] Some relay that, in mustering the courage to dissent, they came to discover perhaps that most intimate aspect of their moral personhoods: their own voice. An activist explains:

> The demonstration ignites: you are among all these 'infiltrators,' the voices are roaring, you imagine your body carried by the slogans, and you visualize all the walls of fear and the markers of humiliation falling […] You feel that you will stand there tall, continuing your hysterical chanting, because for the first time you can hear your voice.[128]

A woman from Swayda relayed a similar experience:

> I was in a demonstration […] I started to whisper *freedom*. And after that I started to hear myself repeating, *freedom*, *freedom, freedom.* And then I started shouting *freedom*! […] I thought: This is the first time I've ever heard my voice. This is the first time I have a soul and I'm not afraid any more of death or being arrested or anything else. I wanted to feel this freedom forever. And I told myself that I'd never let anyone steal my voice from me again. And after that day I started to join all the demonstrations.[129]

These testimonials challenge Kuran's understanding of individuals' need for self-expression as fixed and Marwell and Oliver's conceptualization of intrinsic incentives as a personality trait that a person either possesses or does not. Syrian protestors instead suggest that their need to express dissent changed as they beheld others expressing themselves and found the capacity to do so themselves. One oppositionist thus described travelling to a demonstration with a friend: 'She kept saying on the way, "I am afraid, I am afraid." Then when she got there she became like a tiger!'[130]

Once individuals experienced the thrill of agency, it could redouble their passion to experience it repeatedly. A shop owner-turned-fighter from Aleppo recalled his first demonstration in those terms:

> As a Muslim, I felt like I was going on hajj. For three days, I didn't have a voice. No sound would come out. You really feel like you're free. The feeling of freedom was extraordinary. You felt like you did something that no one before you could do. The addiction grew. Wherever there was a protest, I needed to be in it. Because of the feeling I had.[131]

Thus some who had never imagined even seeing an anti-regime demonstration felt irreversibly transformed once they took part in them. As one oppositionist wrote, 'Nothing will bring back those who have […] experienced the ecstasy of rebelling'.[132] A focus on moral identity helps explain this transformation by drawing attention to how individuals' desires to experience agency–an inner motivation that shifts in social interaction–is part of what gives protest cascades their extraordinary dynamism.

Obligation

The above testimonials about self-respect and agency showcase shifts in protestors' valorization of the intrinsic benefits of dissent. No less, first movers impelled a change in protestors' willingness to bear the costs of dissent, and even triggered a sense of moral duty to do so.

[127] Zeitouneh 2011.
[128] Zeitouneh 2011.
[129] B.J., personal interview, 7 October 2012.
[130] Steavenson 2011.
[131] N.C., personal interview, 10 September 2013.
[132] Saleh 2011.

Several of the speakers previously cited mention nonparticipants acting after comparing themselves to participants and rhetorically questioning if they were less brave or honourable. A parallel yet inverse conversation unfolded when bystanders witnessed, or even learned about, those who were arrested, killed or maimed for the sake of the revolt. Here, the internal query did not centre on whether nonparticipants were inferior to participants. Rather, it asked on what basis they could act as if they were superior, in the sense of deserving to enjoy safety and comfort while others made grave sacrifices.

A mother from Daraa explained: 'The barrier of fear began to break when they started to kill people. You would think, "I'm not better than those people who got killed." When you see people get killed right in front of you, you're no longer afraid.'[133] A physician from Hama concurred: 'If one person dies, you ask, am I better than him? No I'm not, so I'll go out, too'.[134] A third citizen elaborated:

> When the first person got killed in the demonstrations, people started to say to themselves: 'The question now is whether to enter into a battle'. It's not a simple choice. It's a big change. They think, 'the people in my society and my village have decided to fight and may end up dying. Is it fair for them to die and for me to stay alive?'[135]

Some scholars attribute these 'inner felt obligations' to the strong social networks or collective identities linking members of a group.[136] Yet many Syrians explicitly deny that it was their pre-existing relationships with other protestors that motivated them to protest, and instead highlight motivations existing in the absence of such relationships. Attributing his actions to a more universal humanity, an Aleppine explained how he read news about the first killings in Daraa via Twitter. 'I cried', he said. 'Imagine that you are praying for someone you don't know. It happened to me because these people shared my cause and they were courageous enough to rise up'.[137] A man from Daraa agreed that early movers could awaken a sense of moral responsibility even among strangers:

> People saw other people dying. This individual who died, for example, is not my relative, but he is like me. Because you feel the same humiliation, the same subjugation. They step on your dignity […] [*You say*] 'That's it. I do not want to live. I want to die like him'.[138]

Many who were moved to protest insisted that they could not have predicted how the punishment of early risers would affect them until they witnessed those punishments. 'You can't understand what it is like to see people killed until you experience it', a man from Hama explained. 'Only then can you really understand the effect it has on you.'[139] A young woman from Aleppo elaborated, 'We expected that, if a revolution rises up, there would be blood. But imagining a picture is different from witnessing it with your own eyes'.[140]

These descriptions about responses to repression against first movers were echoed by some first movers themselves. A protest leader in Aleppo recalled how demonstrations remained small until the regime escalated the violence to suppress them:

> When they started attacking us, the people who were standing on the sides and watching came to help us. Then everyone began to protest with us. Because of the blood. Blood is the force of the

[133] U.D., personal interview, 6 October 2012.
[134] T.J., personal interview, 11 October 2012.
[135] J.I., personal interview, 20 October 2012.
[136] Chong 1991; Stürmer and Simon 2004.
[137] M.A., personal interview, 30 August 2013.
[138] T.A., personal interview, 16 September 2012.
[139] T.J., personal interview, 11 October 2012.
[140] J.S., personal interview, 20 September 2012.

> revolution. When Bashar started to kill, someone should have convinced him to do the opposite. We were only chanting in the streets. We could have chanted for the rest of our lives without anyone even paying attention to us. But blood is what allowed us to work the way we did. Blood is what moves people.[141]

These testimonials are consistent with theories about the role of indignation and moral shocks in increasing protest. Yet they also dig deeper into people's basic self-concepts to uncover the essential ideas about right and wrong that animate those emotional reflexes. Interjecting the concept of moral identity into a cascades framework reveals how some protestors' sacrifices can inspire others to accept risks that they previously were not willing to accept. This calls attention to rationales for protest quite distinct from the its utility for achieving other goals – and sometimes despite reasons for doubting any utility besides living consistently with one's values.

CONCLUSION

Cascade models accept the premise that a few initial protestors can encourage others and thereby launch a large-scale upheaval. Yet questions remain about the causal crux of the model, which lays in the mechanisms generating interpersonal influence. Conventional approaches hold that the greater the number of people who participate in protest, the more subsequent actors are likely to join due to expectations of its increased effectiveness in serving political or social interests. I modify cascade models to include mechanisms stemming from moral identity – the frame of commitments and principles that defines who people are and from within which they distinguish good and bad – as a window into the larger universe of non-instrumental incentives.

I focus on variation in an element of decision making that conventional cascade models hold as constant: individuals' needs to express themselves and their inclination to protest on the basis of intrinsic incentives. Building on that premise, I propose that bystanders can be moved to join protests due to an intensification of both their awareness of the values central to their sense of self and their willingness to act upon those values. Testimonials from Syria show how first movers in dissent inspired others to join by activating their urge to earn or affirm self-respect, igniting their desire to experience the joy of exercising agency and triggering their sense of a moral obligation to bear the costs of collective action. These mechanisms redoubled bystanders' sense of the inherent value of protest, regardless of its instrumental utility, and intensified their acceptance of risks, independent of the actual risks anticipated. They activated impulses that were shaped by cultural norms and social expectations. Yet it would be a discredit and misunderstanding to assume that people acting on those motivations were concerned with others' opinions more than their own opinions of themselves.

In bridging research on the social-psychological dimensions of dissent with the literature on cascades, my arguments benefit from a framework developed primarily by rationalist theorists while escaping some of its limitations. This research invites us to continue to explore the ways that individuals' expressive needs, as a component of the thresholds at which they join collective action, change through interdependent decision making. Attention to this source of dynamism shines a spotlight on complexities that conventional models obscure. It helps explain the actions of the first to follow early risers, as they respond to protest rather than initiate it, yet do so at a time when the expected instrumental or reputational payoffs of participation remain minimal. Beyond this, an appreciation of the malleability of moral motives suggests that

[141] N.C., personal interview, 10 September 2013.

entrants into a cascade respond to impetuses quite different from the size of a crowd, that the intensity of their awakened preferences can defy *a priori* categorizations of activist inclinations and that bandwagons can empower spaces for authentic self-fulfilment more than the surrender of one's authenticity to the whims of a mob.

Further exploration of these and other identity-based processes offers a foundation for new questions, such as why some events rather than others trigger collective action and which triggers most diffuse across localities. It can help us think differently about the kinds of value-oriented influences that travel through social media or social networks.[142] In showing how people can be deeply moved by people they do not know, it also encourages us to consider meaningful interpersonal influences that occur outside meaningful interpersonal relationships. It also suggests paths for generating new forms of community, insofar as the significance of the shared experience of protesting creates bonds among those who were not previously linked. Future research can extend these insights. It can track how the relative weight of instrumental and non-instrumental motivations shifts over the course of a cascade and further explore the heterogeneity of identity-based motivations across populations or cultural contexts. While I have focused on situations in which first movers lead largely by example, others can probe cases in which they deliberately seek to activate others' sense of moral identity as a recruitment strategy. Future research can also trace how varying regime responses affect identity-based mechanisms. For example, are there 'optimal' amounts of repression that make a mobilizing sense of duty outweigh demobilizing feelings of fear, or vice versa?

Testimonials from Syria offer insight with which to explore such questions. Personal narratives of this sort are tricky. Individuals might have different, and less pure, motives than they remember after the fact or choose to relay to a foreign researcher. Absent other data, however, we cannot afford to dismiss participants' self-reporting, particularly for uncovering complex motivations related to personal discovery and transformation. Taking Syrian protestors' self-understandings seriously encourages us to appreciate the degree to which they treasure their rebellion as an expression of moral identity. That millions of citizens came to exercise political voice was in part an outcome of the ways in which early participants emboldened others by igniting their compulsion to stand up on principle and their willingness to face risks. In bearing witness to others' protests, many Syrians discovered in themselves expressive needs and courage that they did not know they possessed. Once they experienced the joys of agency and gratification of self-respect, many pledged that there was 'no going back' to their previously degrading relationship with politics.[143] In this sense, some dissidents are accurate in concluding, 'The regime is gone'. For them, the question that remains is: 'How do we get rid of it?'[144]

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[142] See Castells 2012; Gerbaudo 2012.
[143] Shadid 2011.
[144] Al-Zubaidi 2012.1

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17 September 2012: I.M. from Daraa Governorate; Irbid, Jordan.
18 September 2012: E.K. from Golani Displaced Persons Camp, Daraa; Amman, Jordan.
20 September 2012: J.S. from Aleppo; Amman, Jordan.
6 October 2012: U.D. from Daraa; Ramtha, Jordan.
7 October 2012: B.J. from Swayda; Amman, Jordan.
9 October 2012: D.L. from Daraa; Amman Jordan.
11 October 2012: T.J. from Hama; Irbid, Jordan.
13 October 2012: Z.H. from Daraa; Irbid, Jordan.
20 October 2012: D.L. from Daraa; Amman, Jordan.
20 October 2012: J.I. from Damascus suburbs; Amman, Jordan.
17 August 2013: L.M. from Daraa; Amman, Jordan.
22 August 2013: Y.H. from Homs; Amman, Jordan.
2 September 2013: I.E. from Idlib; Antakya, Turkey.
3 September 2013: Z.H. from Qamishli; Antakya, Turkey.
5 September 2013: R.A. from Aleppo; Antakya, Turkey.
10 September 2013: N.C. from Aleppo; Antakya, Turkey.
25 September 2013: D.F. from Hama; Reyhanlı, Turkey.
26 September 2013: B.A. from Hama; Reyhanlı, Turkey.
30 October 2013: M.A. from Aleppo; Istanbul, Turkey.
15 November 2013: Second interview with L.M. from Daraa, via Skype.