# Urban Basis of Political Protest in Syria: Explaining Divergent Patterns of Mobilisation and Demobilisation

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*Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in International Studies.*

Final submission April 2026

# ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the spatial variation in mobilisation capacity across neighbourhoods in three Syrian cities: Daraa, Hama, and Deir-ez-Zor, during the first two years of the Syrian Revolution (2011–2013). Unlike other Arab Spring popular uprisings that occupied central squares, as in Egypt and Tunisia, demonstrators in Syria were unable to sustain control of these spaces under severe repression. Consequently, mobilisation shifted into inner streets and neighbourhood squares, producing sharp intra-city divergence, with some neighbourhoods becoming central hubs of contention, while adjacent areas, exposed to comparable repressive structures, never mobilised or readily demobilised. This puzzle situates micro-socio-spatial characteristics at the centre of the inquiry. The study asks how place-specific configurations shaped each neighbourhood's capacity to mobilise, sustain mobilisation, and resist state repression. It develops the Event-Site Nexus as a theoretical framework for explaining the interaction between geography and political action. Within this framework, mobilisation is co-produced by the organisational capacity of challengers and the repressive power of the state, both of which are facilitated or constrained by the structural characteristics of the site.

The study utilises fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), complemented by in-depth case studies, to identify causal pathways that led to the occurrence or non-occurrence of mobilisation across phases. The methodology proceeds in three steps: establishing case knowledge by tracing the historical development of the three cities and protest phases; quantifying conditions and outcomes into measurable variables; and conducting detailed case studies to examine how specific combinations of conditions interacted in practice. Thirteen causal pathways to mobilisation and three pathways to non-mobilisation emerged. The findings show that urban density, proximity to protest squares and mosque networks, and distance from government and security buildings were essential during the early stages. As contention shifted into neighbourhoods, particularly amid the militarisation of the conflict, social solidarity and fortified urban environments became increasingly decisive.

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**Abbreviations**

| | |
|---|---|
| ACM | Authoritarian Conflict Management |
| CBS | Central Bureau of Statistics, Syria |
| FSA | Free Syrian Army |
| GDPR | General Data Protection Regulation |
| GIS | Geographic Information System |
| IS | Islamic State |
| ML | Machine Learning |
| NLP | Natural Language Processing |
| PPT | Political Process Theory |
| QCA | Qualitative Comparative Analysis |
| RMT | Resource Mobilisation Theory |
| SMI | Syrian Memory Institute |
| SMO | Social Movement Organisation |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNRISD | United Nations Research Institute for Social Development |
| UNRWA | United Nations Relief and Works Agency |

# INTRODUCTION

The advent of the Arab Spring in 2011 created an unprecedented opening for Syrians to pursue a long-awaited political transition in their country. As thousands of Egyptians and Tunisians took to the streets to topple their dictators, enthusiastic Syrians also hoped to replicate their trajectory. Between February and March 2011, calls for protest circulated widely on Facebook, urging Syrians to demonstrate in the capital, Damascus. However, only a handful of protesters, mostly political and human rights activists, managed to assemble on 15 March (Pearlman, 2019). Meanwhile, the first significant mobilisation emerged on 18 March in the southern city of Daraa, when hundreds took to the streets, marking the beginning of Syria's mass protest movement.

The most analytically significant features of the Syrian uprising, this research argues, are not its onset but the scale at which it occurred and the unevenness of its spatial distribution. Within the same city, exposed to broadly similar repression, some neighbourhoods became major hubs of contention while adjacent areas never mobilised or rapidly demobilised. Therefore, the puzzle driving this research is the intra-city divergence rather than the macro-question of onset. Answering it requires a framework capable of capturing how mobilisation is produced and curtailed at the neighbourhood level, where the social structure, built environment, and the state's spatial footprint operate locally.

*"Open the way to the Balad."* This chant echoed through Daraa Mahatta, on the city's northern side, demanding that security forces open the way for them to cross the Zaydi Valley and join their counterparts in Daraa Balad.[1] Security forces on the opposite bank opened fire to prevent this convergence.[2] From this point, the initial dynamics of mobilisation and demobilisation began to crystallise. Protestors sought to generate momentum at the city level, organising large-scale sit-ins, while regime forces prevented visible, sustained mobilisation in strategic nodes. Both sides adapted rapidly. Protestors capitalised on Daraa's clan-based society to sustain mobilisation within physical and socially dense networks (Leenders & Heydemann, 2012), which were relatively impermeable to regime surveillance. The regime, in turn, prioritised the

[1] "Protest confronting the regime delegation in Daraa city and requesting to open the roads", *SMI*, 19 March 2011, Retrieved 12 April 2025, from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/5e3be72f4329510001e7a495

[2] "Security forces open fire on a demonstration in Daraa city", *SMI*, 19 March 2011, Retrieved 12 April 2025, from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/5db5f18d2fa5520001b7815b

fragmentation of mobilisation and the maintenance of control over critical traffic nodes to prevent inter-neighbourhood convergence.

Similar patterns unfolded in other cities. In the revolution's early months, reaching central squares became the uprising's primary goal, as activists sought to overwhelm security forces by directing masses to occupy public spaces. However, the absence of traditional political or social actors typically capable of mobilising people, such as syndicates, political parties, or labour unions, meant that Syrians had to rely heavily on trusted but unorganised social circles: family, friends, and neighbours (Pearlman, 2021). Between May and August 2011, activists succeeded in gathering mass crowds in central squares in Hama, Deir-ez-Zor, and Homs, but this window was nevertheless short-lived. The regime responded with large-scale military campaigns to reassert control over rebellious cities. Faced with escalating repression, activists shifted their strategy, retreating into their trusted, localised social and spatial networks, abandoning city-level mobilisation and reinforcing neighbourhoods as their primary sites of protest (Vignal, 2021; Leenders, 2013).

This shift from city-wide to neighbourhood-level protests generated an intra-city divergence in mobilisation trajectories that cannot be explained by city-level or national-level variables. Within the same city, some neighbourhoods became enduring hubs of contention, thanks to a combination of factors such as social cohesion, dense urban fabric, and strategic location. Others, despite initial mobilisation, rapidly lost momentum, or never mobilised at all. Such variation constitutes the empirical core of this thesis. It seeks to examine spatial variations in mobilisation and demobilisation dynamics in three Syrian cities, namely Hama, Deir-ez-Zor, and Daraa, relying on the analysis of neighbourhoods' social, spatial, and political characteristics. Thus, the primary question of the research is: *How did some neighbourhoods mobilise successfully while others did not? And how did mobilisation capacities change across neighbourhoods and over time?*

This research engages with recent scholarship on the Arab uprisings, aligning with the shift from methodological nationalism toward micro-foundational analysis grounded in the interaction between spatial and relational conditions (Volpi & Jasper, 2018; Schwedler, 2018). Whereas earlier work explained the outbreak of the 2011 uprisings through macro-structural factors, such as neoliberalism, youth unemployment, and the absence of political representation, more recent scholarship (e.g., Mazur, 2021; Ismail, 2013; Beissinger, 2022) has turned to the question of how collective action manifests at the local level. Although square-

based revolutions are more likely to erupt when structural conditions expose regime vulnerabilities (Beissinger, 2022), contention typically migrates into inner streets and neighbourhoods once city-level mobilisation is repressed. At this point, macro-level analysis is insufficient to explain how mobilisation persists, consolidates, or collapses at the micro-spatial level. This is the main gap that the study addresses.

The study accordingly examines spatial variation in mobilisation dynamics across three cities, namely Hama, Deir-ez-Zor, and Daraa, each a mid-sized governorate capital and a key hub of mobilisation, through a neighbourhood-level analysis of social, spatial, and political characteristics. Its central argument is that place-specific configurations of urban form, social structures, and state footprint account for whether and how mobilisation unfolds under conditions of severe repression. No single factor is sufficient on its own to explain mobilisation; rather, particular combinations of factors produced divergent outcomes. These combinations were not static but shifted as the uprising moved from initial mobilisation to consolidation and demobilisation. During the initial phase of mobilisation, the combination of urban density, social cohesion, and proximity to dense networks of mosques and the central square enabled the diffusion of contention and a scale shift across local streets. As repression intensified and shifted contention from central squares into neighbourhoods, the operative configuration shifted to prioritise social cohesion and fortified urban environments distant from state and security infrastructure. Where these configurations failed to materialise, or where state coercive infrastructure effectively fragmented them, mobilisation collapsed.

Theoretically, the research engages with a central puzzle in the social sciences: understanding the drivers of individual and collective behaviour during political crises (Della Porta & Piazza, 2008; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Drawing on urban sociology and political geography (e.g., Næss, 2016; Brenner et al., 2008; Robinson, 2022), it contributes to the growing literature at the nexus of space and contentious politics (e.g., Falleti & Lynch, 2009; Nicholls et al., 2013; Martin, 2015), investigating how built environments and social structures enable, amplify, constrain, or suppress political mobilisation. Urban, social, and political characteristics are treated here as neither static nor universal but evolving, taking different forms across time and scale. The analysis draws on the mechanism-based approach that includes brokerage, diffusion, scale shift, boundary activation, and social appropriation (Tilly, 2001; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015), treating these mechanisms as spatially situated processes, enabled or hindered by the socio-spatial configurations in which they unfold. A historical lens is therefore essential, alongside a dynamic framework capable of tracing the interactions between urban form, social networks,

and political trajectories. The research situates the selected cities within their geographical, social, and political contexts, scrutinising the role of geography in shaping the different manifestations of the uprising across localities and time periods. This framework allows for conceptualising space as a factor that shapes imaginaries, practices, and trajectories of contentious politics (Leitner et al., 2008; Schwedler & King, 2014; Castells, 1983).

To explain divergent outcomes across neighbourhoods, the study adopts a pragmatic approach, synthesising several theoretical traditions to capture the interplay between place and human agency in generating diverse patterns of collective action (Hytrek & Hernández Márquez, 2013; Miller, 2000). Charles Tilly's Model of Mobilisation (1978), together with its later elaborations (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015), serves as the primary basis for explaining social groups' capacity to mobilise and respond to opportunities and threats; John Agnew's (1987, 2011, 2015) theory of place and politics explains the interaction between place and political action. This approach is complemented by Beissinger's (2022) argument that structural conditions create vulnerability to contentious action, while agency determines its outcomes. The conditions examined here, such as urban and social density, mosques, social solidarity, and state footprint, represent the structural configuration at the neighbourhood level, which is activated or suppressed through the interaction between challengers and the state. This interaction constitutes the core of the study's Event-Site Nexus framework.

Methodologically, the study applies Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to identify configurational pathways that lead to the occurrence or non-occurrence of the outcome, operationalised across three distinct phases of the uprising. This step is followed by an in-depth case study analysis, relying on qualitative interviews with activists from selected neighbourhoods, to examine how the combination of conditions interacted in practice. This mixed-methods approach adheres to the sequential explanatory design model (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), in which each step of the framework builds upon, elaborates on, and clarifies the outcomes derived from previous steps (Greene et al., 1989). Repression is treated as an additional structural condition that shapes the environment within which mobilisation unfolds at the neighbourhood level, rather than as a separate outcome.

The primary outcome of the empirical analysis is to demonstrate how different combinations of conditions produced various patterns of mobilisation. Such combinations are represented as different pathways changing over time across the uprising's phases. For instance, urban density, proximity to dense mosque networks, and proximity to protest squares were strongly associated

with mobilisation. Such an association was often reinforced by distance to government or security buildings. Combinations of conditions varied across periods, with mobilisation being more influenced by the interaction between social structures and proximity to the city centre, mosques, and state institutions during the initial phase. However, when protest activities shifted into the neighbourhoods during the second phase, dense urban environments and social solidarity became increasingly influential. These dynamics were further emphasised during the last phase (demobilisation), when militarisation and regime-escalated repression reshaped the spatial and social conditions of protest. These are not treated as contextual factors but constitute the spatial conditions and mechanisms of mobilisation, which the social movement literature has tended to treat as given.

The contribution of this research is twofold. First, it engages recent debates on revolutionary cities and the spatiality of contentious politics (Beissinger, 2022; Schwedler, 2022; Robinson, 2022; Said, 2023; Harb, 2022; Berman et al., 2024; Clarke, 2023), rescaling the analysis of contention from the city to the neighbourhood. Neighbourhoods are treated here not merely as smaller units of analysis but as a distinct spatial infrastructure of mobilisation through which protests are facilitated, sustained, or hindered. The argument that follows is that political opportunity is not only national or city-wide, but unevenly distributed within the city, with socio-spatial conditions playing different roles across place and time. That said, the study does not intend to generate a universal theory but instead to contribute to theory-building on the spatial dynamics of social movements in the Global South by offering an analytical tool adaptable to other local contexts. The role of local urban, social, and economic factors is often overlooked when analysing complex social movements and conflicts associated with a high degree of international intervention, such as Syria, Libya, and Ukraine. This research argues that a complete understanding of the process of interaction between place and politics must be built from the bottom up, drawing on the fundamental elements of the socio-spatial characteristics, perceptions, and actions of local actors.

Second, and more ambitiously, the study highlights the role of urban planning, especially in periods of political transformation, either as a stabilisation factor or as a mechanism for reinforcing structural inequalities and social tensions. Despite not being directly engaged with the issue of post-conflict reconstruction, it shows how producing specific social or urban configurations can influence the political trajectories of cities. This analysis may contribute to widening the debate on theories of post-conflict reconstruction among academics, policymakers, and international organisations.

This thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter One provides a literature review on theories, tools, and drivers of social movements. It engages with recent turns in the study of social movements, situating them in the context of mid-sized Syrian cities under a highly repressive authoritarian regime. It then engages with different approaches to conceptualise mid-sized Syrian cities from a historical perspective, scrutinising how cities were configured across different periods. The primary outcome of this chapter is to deconstruct both the city and the social movement into their fundamental components, which are subsequently operationalised into measurable variables.

Chapter Two proposes a theoretical framework to guide the study and conceptualise the relationship between political collective actions and space. The chapter combines Tilly's (1978) and Agnew's (1987) models to analyse the interaction between the different phases of social movements and the three main components of space: urban, social, and political structures.

Research methodology and design are outlined in Chapter Three. The chapter follows the basic steps of QCA, beginning with the identification of the area of study; acquiring case knowledge; defining conditions and outcomes; conducting the QCA to identify necessary and sufficient conditions; and carrying out in-depth case study analysis.

Chapter Four provides detailed knowledge about the three cities under examination: Hama, Daraa, and Deir-ez-Zor. The analysis examines the rise of neighbourhoods and how patterns of socio-spatial stratification shaped political mobilisation during the uprising. It then provides an in-depth analysis of protests and non-violent events in the three cities in question across the three phases of the study: initial mobilisation, consolidated mobilisation, and demobilisation.

The results of QCA throughout the various steps are presented in Chapter Five. It begins by quantifying conditions and outcomes drawn from existing datasets and original data constructed by the researcher. This is followed by the construction of the results table, which includes configurational pathways that determine whether the outcome occurs or not.

Chapter Six conducts an in-depth analysis of five case studies identified through the QCA results. Two neighbourhoods from Hama (Hader and Bab Qibli), two from Deir-ez-Zor (Old Airport and Joubeleh), and one from Daraa (Tareq Sadd with Daraa Camp as a secondary case). Each case study examines how specific configurational pathways interact to shape mobilisation outcomes within the neighbourhood. The concluding chapter synthesises the empirical and theoretical findings of the thesis. It revisits the central research question and articulates the

answers into three broader analytical propositions concerning the local unevenness of political opportunity, socio-spatial conditions as situated mechanisms, and the neighbourhood as a distinct infrastructure of mobilisation. It closes by reflecting on the principal methodological and practical limitations of the research and mapping four directions for future inquiry: the systematic study of repression as a dependent variable, the spatial analysis of protest diffusion, neighbourhood social network dynamics, and the micro-urban geometry of protest squares.

# CHAPTER 1. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE CITY

This chapter engages with an interdisciplinary literature that spans urban studies, political geography, and the sociology of social movements. It examines how the spatial location, social background, and articulated demands of mobilised groups shape the forms and dynamics of their collective action. This inquiry provides a framework for investigating the spatial, social, and political factors that produce heterogeneous patterns of mobilisation and repression across different urban settings. It sits at the intersection of political geography and the study of contentious politics, where urban space is not only a container for action but also a variable shaping political behaviour. The objective is to examine how both the city and the collective action are theorised in existing literature, before translating these frameworks into measurable variables in subsequent chapters. This approach treats urban, social, and political characteristics as neither static nor universal, but as dynamic conditions that evolve across historical periods and spatial contexts. This necessitates a dynamic, historical approach to the analysis of urban space and collective action.

The chapter is organised into three main sections. The first section examines the main components of social movements, attempting to answer the questions of why and how people rebel, before reframing these debates within a meso-level, spatially sensitive analytical perspective. The second part explores the intersection of geography and contentious politics, drawing on scholarship that conceptualises the spatiality of protest and political action, with special attention to neighbourhood-level mobilisation dynamics. The third section traces the social-spatial organisation of mid-sized Syrian cities through historical patterns of urbanisation and social-spatial organisation, establishing the analytical foundation for the empirical phase carried out in the subsequent chapters.

## 1.1 Understanding Social Movements

The study of contentious politics has traditionally focused on why people participate in social movements and how those movements rise and decline, based on factors internal or external to the movement groups. Yet a persistent gap remains, particularly in scholarship of the Global South: the limited understanding of how protestors organise, operate, and adapt across diverse places. This gap is most pronounced at the meso-level, the analytical scale that mediates between micro-level participation decisions, grounded in individual grievances and cost-

benefit calculations, and macro-level political structural conditions, such as regime type and elite alignment. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in engaging with mechanisms and dynamics that operate at the meso-level, treating social networks and the built environment as the primary structures of mobilisation as they manifest within neighbourhoods, streets, and dense virtual networks. It is in these settings that collective agency is hindered or facilitated by structural urban, social, or political conditions, thus determining who can mobilise and who can consolidate mobilisation.

Social movements are commonly understood as collective efforts situated outside the institutional political systems, undertaken by individuals or groups sharing common interests and aspirations for societal change (i.e., Tilly, 1978; McAdam & Marks, 1996; Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Knoke, 1990). As Meyer and Reyes (2010) suggest, when people cannot express their claims and discontent through conventional and constitutional channels, they turn to movements and revolutions. Contemporary movements employ a diverse repertoire: marches, protests, picketing, and strikes. Street protest is arguably the most visible manifestation of a non-violent social movement. Street protests are defined as temporary occupations of public space by a critical mass aimed at exerting political, cultural, or social influence on governing authorities (Fillieule, 1997).

This configurational and multiscale analysis builds on a growing body of scholarship that recognises the analytical centrality of the meso-level in contentious politics (Beissinger, 2022; Berman et al., 2024). Physical contexts, including physical geography and community structures, function as more than passive containers for political action; they are constitutive elements that structure the possibilities of collective action, shape its outcomes, and condition its diffusion to new urban spaces. The intersection of conditions such as neighbourhood proximity, social infrastructure, and proximity to strategic sites can provide insights into contention analysis that national-level analysis usually misses.

This configurational approach is particularly needed in contexts such as Syria, where meaningful political participation is severely constrained and civil society organisations remain fragmented due to the authoritarian regime's control over economic, social, and political domains, thereby giving greater attention to grassroots activism (Bayat, 2002). Under these conditions, distinctive forms of collective action emerge, initiated by ordinary people and marginalised groups who utilise non-institutional channels, including informal and everyday practices to navigate around state regulations and secure basic necessities (Bayat, 2010). While

such practices often fall outside traditional definitions of social movements, they nonetheless possess the capacity to generate the social infrastructures, such as the shared routines, mutual aid networks, and neighbourhood familiarity, upon which more organised and overtly political collective actions can build when opportunities arise.

However, the transition from these socio-spatial settings to sustained collective action, and the variation in mobilisation outcomes across places, cannot be read from spatial and social properties alone. Although such practices are often associated with urban informality, density, poverty, and limited state presence (Bayat, 2010; Ismail, 2013), further empirical analysis is needed to grasp the full complexity of spatial variation in mobilisation outcomes. Furthermore, the macro- and micro-political structures within which contention occurs are another major aspect of inquiry in this research. The type of regime, its institutional and informal patrimonial networks (Mazur, 2021), strongly shape the likelihood of mobilisation outcomes, escalation into violence, and even descent into civil conflict.

Social movements rarely follow a linear trajectory; they evolve simultaneously and dialectically. The evolving nature of the Syrian Revolution illustrates this clearly: it shifted from a spontaneous, peaceful movement to a more organised political opposition, and eventually to armed rebellion and proxy warfare, where peaceful demonstrations, institutional opposition, and armed rebellion coexisted, often feeding into and transforming one another. Mainstream social movement theories have tended to overlook this interaction between non-violent and violent actions. This research addresses that gap by examining how state repression under authoritarian rule shapes mobilisation outcomes. It also explores how geography influences the forms and patterns in which peaceful and violent repertoires emerge alongside one another.

The remainder of this section engages with the major literature of contentious politics along two main questions: why and how people rebel. “Why people rebel” explains the rationality and motivations underlying collective action, and “how people rebel” investigates the mechanisms through which mobilisation is initiated, sustained and declined. In Section 1.2, “where people rebel” is the third question that aims to engage with the spatial dimension of mobilisation and the impact of the social and built-environment structures under which contention unfolds. The literature on revolutionary cities and the spatiality of contention is central to this debate, which is subsequently utilised in the next chapter to contrast the Event-Site Nexus framework that will underpin the analytical structure of the research.

### 1.1.1 Why Do People Rebel?

Why people participate in collective action has been a foundational question in the field of social movements and political violence, gaining further centrality as social movement studies consolidated as a subfield within sociology and political science. In "What Is a Social Movement?" Johnston (2014) traces the turning point at which social movements were reframed as forms of contentious politics, rather than as irrational pathology, deviance, and social breakdown (Le Bon, 1895), introduces a conceptual distinction between rational, purposive collective action and irrational collective behaviour. If participation in a movement is, at least in part, a rational act, then the central question becomes: What motivates individuals to join a movement, and under what conditions do those preferences shift?

A fundamental dichotomy emerges in classical theories of social movements. On one hand, rational choice approaches emphasise cost-benefit calculations, while identity-based and network-oriented approaches argue that identification with a cause, social embeddedness, and emotional affinity weigh heavily in participation decisions (Simon et al., 1998). The grand theories of social movements, such as Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT) and Political Process Theory (PPT), prioritised either formal professional organisations and structural factors of mobilisation (Olson, 1965; McCarthy & Zald, 1977), or macro-political environments and elite alignments (McAdam, 1986). However, both fall short analytically when the unit of inquiry shifts to the sub-national level, local, and configurational dynamics. Two more recent shifts, the relational and the interactional, have responded to these limitations by engaging more dynamically with how individuals participate in collective action.

The relational turn reframes participation decisions as a product of the individual's position within dense social networks (Siméant-Germanos, 2021). Within such networks, individual participation is monitored, rewarded, or sanctioned, altering cost-benefit calculations through obligations, solidarity, and positive expectations of efficacy (Tarrow, 2011; Fireman & Gamson, 1979). In authoritarian contexts, the distinction between low-risk and high-risk activism becomes especially relevant, where the consequences of participation may include imprisonment or death (McAdam, 1986). Sustained participation under such conditions typically requires a prior history of activism, commitment to the movement's ideology, strong integration into activist networks, and relative freedom from personal constraints.

Earlier scholars bridged rational choice and network approaches, arguing that people are strategically rational, but their decision-making is influenced by their social position, including

having sympathetic friends, being embedded in a social network that spreads information, grievances, and identity building, and assurance of collective participation (Wisely, 1990; Granovetter, 1978; Chwe, 1999; Dixon & Roscigno, 2003). However, social networks should be contextualised as embedded in particular spatial settings, kinship clusters, or religious institutions. The density and configuration of both spatial and social structures mutually influence one another, underscoring the importance of studying them in a unified framework. This processual perspective illuminates how contention generates its own momentum. The feeling of time intensification during contentious events generates new identities and organisational structures, solidified by bonds of trust among participants, which, in turn, ensure the sustainability of participation and the emergence of a cohesive movement (Della Porta, 2016; Bishara D, 2021; Said, 2023).

The second major shift came with the interactional perspective to analyse contentious politics. It perceives contention as an ongoing exchange between challengers, the state, and other actors, rather than a unilateral act by a movement (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). While making decisions about participation in the movement, individuals often adopt a "wait-and-see" posture, observing whether others will participate before deciding whether to align with a collective action (Volpi & Jasper, 2018). The increasing participation of individuals, particularly those who do not usually participate, such as the elderly, families, and women, signals that the movement is viable and that a "snowball effect" toward reaching a critical mass is underway (Pearlman, 2020). This approach gives equal analytical attention to the interaction between actors and politics (Tarrow, 2011), as well as to the physical or virtual arenas where contentious encounters take place (Volpi & Jasper, 2018; Schwedler, 2022). Arenas, as explained by Schwedler (2022), are not given spaces but structured settings whose spatial properties (visibility, accessibility, proximity to security forces) continually shape and are shaped by the interaction between challengers and the state. The state may alter the physical environment of arenas, thus changing the conditions under which the interaction can occur. Therefore, spatial conditions of contention are to be understood as dynamic variables that co-evolve with the protest cycle itself.

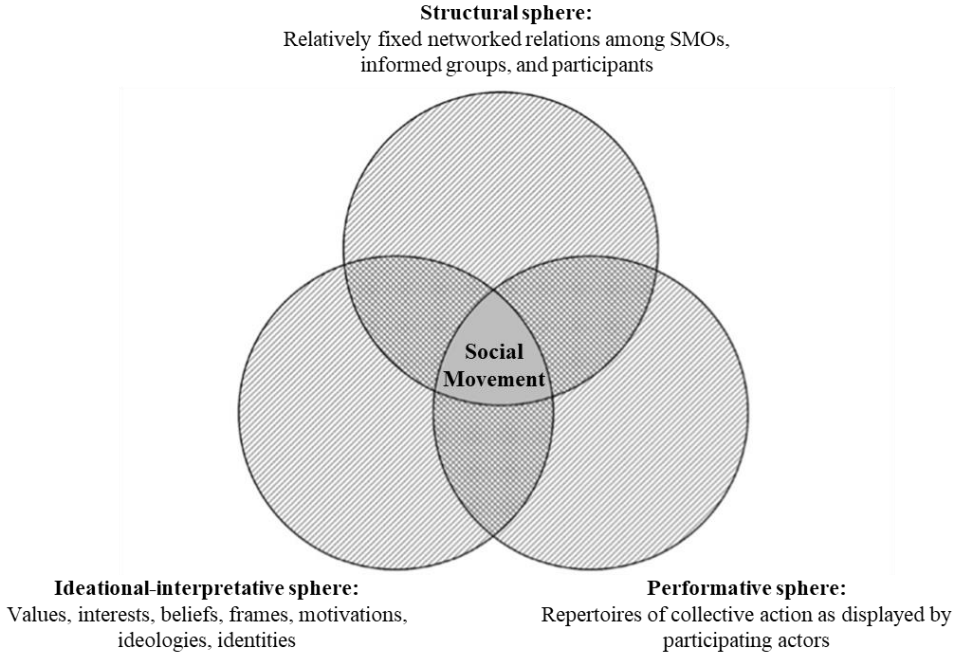
In this research, the neighbourhood is analytically considered as the arena. Neighbourhood spatial properties, such as building density, street layout, proximity to mosques, and state footprint, are understood as conditions for interaction. Building on relational approaches, local social networks within the neighbourhoods are also understood as primary factors shaping participation. Protests in Syria were highly decentralised, grassroots-led, widely spread across

hundreds of towns and neighbourhoods, and geographically dispersed over an extended period. Therefore, the dynamics of mobilisation varied over time and across places. This research adopts a more dynamic, context-sensitive, and meso-level approach to understand the transition from structure to agency, and from macro-level conditions to micro-level collective action. This approach understands mobilisation within the social, spatial, and political configurations of places. In this sense, the place of protest (in our case, the neighbourhoods) is where macro- and micro-structures are mediated, in which historical processes of urbanisation influence opportunities, constraints, and organisational capacities of social actors, and thus their involvement in collective actions.

### 1.1.2 How Do People Rebel? Mechanisms and processes of mobilisation.

While the question of *why* people rebel focuses on motivations and mobilisation thresholds, the question of how shifts the focus to the operational, organisational, and tactical aspects of the contention. Social movements differ significantly in their motivations, objectives, and tactics. Some emerge spontaneously, while others are organised and led by organised actors (Johnston, 2014). However, scholarship has identified three primary components often causing the shift from contention to collective action: the social base, consisting of individuals, organisations, or social structures that undertake collective action; the repertoire of tactics employed; and the framing process including ideas, values, beliefs, or identities that unify participants and orient their actions (Tilly, 1978; McAdam et al., 2012; Johnston, 2014). These components are not static but interactive: framing interprets political opportunities and mobilises social bases (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015), while the interaction between internal movement characteristics and state response shapes the repertoire of contention, ranging from peaceful marches and symbolic acts to armed confrontation (Della Porta, 1995; Johnston, 2014; Goldstone & Ritter, 2018).

***Figure 1. Dimensions of Social Movement Analysis***




Source: Johnston (2014)

Social actors emerge through the transformation of social bases into organised or semi-organised social structures, resulting from the deliberate mobilisation of material and symbolic resources (Della Porta, 1995; Pickvance, 1977). Social actors can take several forms: formal (e.g., parties, unions, and associations), less formal (e.g., social movement actors), or individuals (e.g., leaders, activists, or sympathisers) (Snow et al., 1980). Building networks within and across active groups is essential for sharing information and pooling resources to sustain and expand movements into new locations (Granovetter, 1983). In authoritarian contexts, such as Syria, social actors emerge from informal, grassroots political activity and are better understood as loose networks embedded in religious, family, or neighbourhood circles (e.g., Caruso & Cini, 2020; Della Porta & Diani, 2006).

Passy (2001) identifies three main functions of social structures in mobilisation: socialisation, driven by shared norms and identity; structural-connection, which bridges the gap between those disposed to political issues and prospective participants; and decision-shaping, whereby social networks shape individuals' preferences and decisions about whether to join a movement. In *Revolution in Syria* (2021), Kevin Mazur investigated the role of dense social networks in enabling local-level mobilisation. He explains that, in the absence of national political organisation, tightly knit community structures facilitated coordination, trust, and

solidarity through kinship ties, religious networks, and neighbourhood interactions, thereby lowering the cost of participation. However, dense social networks might serve a dual function: as vehicles for counter-mobilisation or demobilisation when combined with state surveillance, infrastructure of control, or patronage networks, enabling the state to repress or contain mobilisation more effectively.

Framing is an interpretive act that allows individuals to reinterpret aspects of their daily lives as issues of political contestation (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Pre-existing structural positions and identities are often recalled and reinforced during the construction of group consciousness. Meyer & Reyes (2010) argue that this process is crucial not only for internal cohesion but also for forging solidarity across different movements and expanding the scope of a movement's goals and alliances. Collective identity and solidarity constitute the ideational bond that binds individuals within a movement (Johnston, 2014). Yet, the framing process is highly dynamic, shaped by external events or by everyday interactions within social networks (Passy, 2001).

Mobilisation consolidation

The temporal evolution of social movements, including their evolution, consolidation or diminution, constitutes another crucial area of inquiry of contentious politics. Jenkins (1983) argues that social movements typically unfold in two stages. First, there is the spontaneous, loosely organised phase, characterised by the collective behaviour of masses interacting at a basic level. Second, the institutionalised phase occurs when the movement is led by clear leadership that pursues more specific goals through formal organisation. However, this transition is not deterministic: movements might start, continue, and end in a spontaneous shape if they fail to form a Social Movement Organisation (SMO), or if they are suppressed or co-opted by the state before achieving formalisation. Tarrow's (2011) concept of "modular collective action" captures how similar repertoires can now be adopted across different geographic and social sites, including strikes, petitions, and public demonstrations. This concept explains the transition from traditional parochial, segmented, or particular, toward a more modern, cosmopolitan, autonomous, and modular collective action, allowing us to understand how scattered groups can be combined to sustain challenges to states, which is an essential perspective to analyse how a decentralised and leaderless movement, like the Syrian uprising, could diffuse across numerous locations without centralised coordination. However, this research test how the modularity of repertoire is influenced by the physical and social infrastructures available to challengers.

More recent scholarship perceives the transition from initial to sustained mobilisation and the eventual demobilisation as a dynamic process shaped by resources, identities and organisations. The unfolding of contention over time is a "mechanism-process" constituted conceptually as causal links. The mechanism-based approach shifts the analysis of contentious politics beyond static, single-event and variable-based correlations toward eventful, generative, context-sensitive mechanism-based explanations (Della Porta, 2016; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015; Tarrow, 2011). Mechanisms are understood as delimited classes of changes that alter relations between elements in certain ways across different contexts. At different levels of aggregation, mechanisms compound into processes, including episodes of contention such as mobilisation, demobilisation, and scale shift. While mechanisms provide a powerful interpretation of *how* mobilisation unfolds, they often overlook the physical infrastructure through which they operate. The integration of such mechanisms into the analytical framework developed in this study aims to address this gap. Different mechanisms are often explained in the literature to theorise how sporadic collective actions evolve:

*Co-presence*. Under authoritarian conditions where classical political organisation does not exist, collective actions often build from scratch (Pearlman, 2020) and construct their own physical and social mobilisation structures over time, such as local coordination committees, that can generate the power of mobilisation. The mechanism of co-presence that developed within these mobilisation structures, such as shared neighbourhoods or public spaces, where participants are co-present and share experiences, becomes the generative power that transforms episodic events into a sustained revolutionary community, deepening movement identity, and sustaining mobilisation over time (Bishara, 2021; Beissinger, 2022; Said, 2023). As explained by Beissinger (2022), co-presence is both spatial and social, depending on the availability of sites such as mosques, squares, and dense residential areas, as well as on social networks that gather relatively outside the state's surveillance.

*Diffusion*. A critical mechanism for sustaining and consolidating movements is the diffusion of contention, repertoire or framing from one site to another (Tarrow, 2011). Diffusion may occur through a direct transfer of repertoire and information along established social networks (relational), through third-party brokers, such as NGOs or political entrepreneurs (mediated), or through mass media or individuals who do not share direct social ties (non-relational). The conduit through which contention diffuses affects the degree of movement consolidation. For instance, diffusion via digital media could be faster than relational pathways, but it lacks the personal trust founded in denser, place-based social networks (Tarrow, 2011).

*Brokerage*. Brokers serve as connectors between previously unconnected social sites, integrating local groups into broader movement networks, and lowering the cost of communication and coordination (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015; Tarrow, 2011). Expanding the outreach of protest beyond the immediate place of protest often happens more effectively when brokerage and diffusion culminate in "coordinated action," unifying perceptions, repertoires, and attributions of similarity across different groups within the city or country (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). The result is an "upward scale shift", in which mobilisation shifts among local, regional, and national levels, engaging new actors and interacting with several layers of repression. This scale shift is more likely to occur when similar groups feel they face mutual structural threats, forming new collective identities centred around these threats or grievances while transcending parochial boundaries.

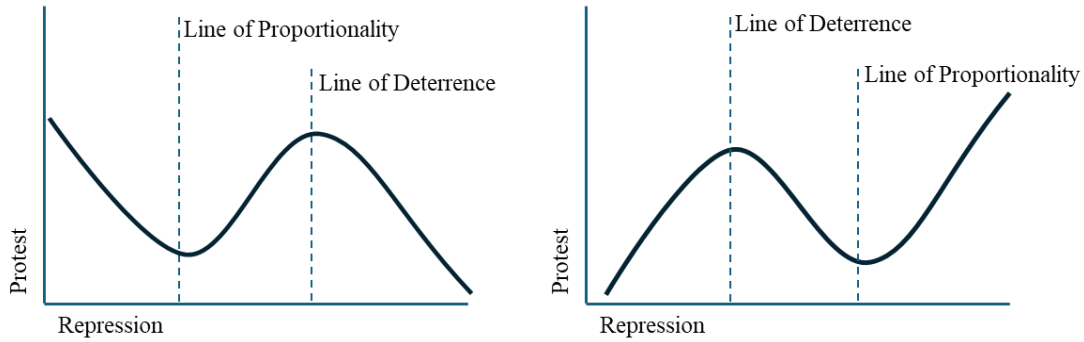
### Demobilisation

The transition to demobilisation can be theorised as resulting from several interacting factors, including mobilisation fatigue, state repression, or the normalisation of politics. When movements fail to achieve change, participants may experience emotional adaptation or moral injury, leading to cognitive dissonance, disengagement, and feelings of shame, distrust and time normalisation (Della Porta, 2016). External factors may also be influential: the state might alter the physical environment in which groups assemble by fencing them off, removing symbolic places, or increasing surveillance or repression around them (Schwedler, 2022). Consolidated movements that do not achieve their goals might eventually split into an institutionalised wing and/or radicalised wing, the latter employing more extreme tactics to sustain their interests (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

Under repressive regimes where large gatherings are rare and institutional channels are blocked, mobilisation is carried out through small-group tactics operating via personal networks (Kuran, 1995; Johnston, 2014). Such a decentralised and dynamic organisation allows challengers to innovate new tactics to surprise the authorities, who in return adapt by escalating counter-innovative repressive measures, producing a mobilisation-demobilisation competition (Tarrow, 2011). The repression-mobilisation nexus is too complex to be captured by a single trajectory; rather, it is best understood as a combination of both deterrence and outrage curves. This can be operationalised as two S-curves (Johnston, 2011), each composed of opposing U-shaped dynamics: the deterrence curve, where repression raises the cost of mobilisation until it becomes infeasible, and the outrage curve, where repression beyond

tolerable thresholds provokes greater mobilisation. Within a single episode of contention, multiple dynamics might coexist. Repression may be effective in the short term, successfully demobilising activists and deterring participation, while fuelling greater frustration, inspiring creative resistance, or sustaining opposition networks in the long run. Activists adapt to repressive environments through innovative strategies that sustain activities and maintain opposition networks, while regimes may simultaneously employ a broader range of counterrevolutionary measures beyond direct violence. If dissidents decide to respond to state repression with violence, a tit-for-tat situation can emerge, where escalating repression leads to escalating resistance, and vice versa (Della Porta, 1995). Reflecting on the Syrian case, Leenders (2013) summarises that whether people demobilise or resist depends on the amount of coercion utilised by the state, people's perceptions of repression, and the perceived costs of submission.

***Figure 2. S-curves of Repression-Protest Relationships***




Source: Johnston (2011)

Repression is treated in this research as a structural constraint, which, like mobilisation actions, is facilitated or hindered by the socio-spatial characteristics of the neighbourhood where the mobilisation unfolds. This research aims to go beyond analysing only the direct effects of some spatial properties of neighbourhoods on mobilisation or repression, but also to scrutinise them within a dynamic framework that is spatially and temporally sensitive to a phased approach comprising initial mobilisation, mobilisation consolidation, and demobilisation. Socio-spatial properties' effects could vary across spatial conditions or repression intensities: some features that facilitate mobilisation during initial phases might become irrelevant or counterproductive if surveillance is intensified or urban spaces are reshaped. Other properties that offer physical protection, such as urban density, may become more crucial when repression escalates. This research engages with the literature that treats social movements as context-dependent, while

going beyond the mainstream political context, which includes regime type, to focus more on the physical-spatial context encompassing the urban environment, social networks, and state presence. This leads to a third question: where do people rebel? The next section investigates the spatiality of protest, conceptualising the neighbourhood as a distinct infrastructure of mobilisation.

## 1.2 Where do people rebel? Spatiality of Social Movements.

In recent decades, questions scrutinising the relationship between geography and social movements have attracted growing scholarly attention (Tarrow, 1988; Routledge, 2013; Zhao, 1998; Leitner et al., 2008; Oslender, 2016). Scholars in this field have primarily sought to understand how the material, symbolic, and relational dimensions of place shape protest practices, imaginaries, and trajectories. As Routledge (2013) suggests, every place produces its own opportunities and constraints for collective action. These geographical variations are grounded in the spatial specificity of the factors shaping social movements (McAdam et. al., 1996, cited in Miller, 2000): class composition, economic history, social density, educational levels, and histories of activism all vary across places, producing different configurations of resources, political opportunities, and socio-spatial interactions.

Contemporary scholarship has sharpened this spatial approach by directing it toward urban settings in particular. A distinct spatial theory of revolution has emerged to distinguish between rural and urban dynamics and their implications for social control, collective action, and repression. Beissinger (2022) identifies five spatial aspects that structure urban revolutions: the population and social-network density needed to generate unified identity and spread information rapidly; the built environment, including buildings, streets and squares, which enables or impedes action; proximity to state power, which shapes the repression-mobilisation nexus; communication infrastructure enabling rapid coordination; and the diverse social formations found in urban areas, including student, labour, class-based and political organisations. Beissinger further introduces the concept of the "proximity dilemma" or repression-disruption trade-off to describe how closeness to centres of state power simultaneously amplifies a movement's capacity for disruption and its exposure to regime repression. While urban density provides challengers with a strategic advantage, it equally equips the state with tools such as digital surveillance, reshaping of urban spaces, and internet shutdowns (Uitermark et al., 2012).

These developments have reconceptualised the socio-spatial organisations of cities and neighbourhoods not as passive containers for action but as active constituents that shape the trajectories of contention (Beissinger, 2022; Said, 2023). The physical structure of the city, including street design, the availability of public spaces, and the proximity of institutions, affects the dynamics and strength of social interactions and individuals' capacity to self-organise (Sewell, 2001). The "political opportunity" is redefined as spatially structured, arguing that the city is the most analytically productive level at which these structures operate (Leitner et al., 2008; Nicholls et al., 2013). This framework moves the spatial turn in contentious politics from descriptive to explanatory: from describing where protests occur to investigating how spatial configurations of the city actively produce variation in mobilisation capacity across its different neighbourhoods.

This spatial turn has also reshaped even how traditional mainstream social movement theories are applied. As Miller (2000) notes, in RMT, spatial variations increasingly appear as factors influencing strategic decisions, the formation of collective identity, and the emergence of SMOs, as well as alliances between them. Similarly, PPT suggests that mobilisation tends to begin in locations where political opportunities are most favourable, before diffusing to other areas where opportunities remain ample. Yet alterations in the political structure or the advent of a perceived political opportunity are usually framed (or interpreted) differently across contexts or communities (Martin, 2003; Nicholls et al., 2013), leading to dissimilar actions. Overall, beyond the place as an incubator of actions, the literature identifies two additional primary ways in which place shapes contentious politics:

*Place as an identity builder*

Tangible places can also serve as the foundation for identity-based activism, which frequently arises from and mirrors the specific social, economic, and historical circumstances of a location (Castells, 1983; Martin, 2003; Hytrek & Márquez, 2013). Place-based identities can strongly convey the aims and motivations behind activism. This process is often supported by what has been termed the "place frame": a shared interpretive lens rooted in common structural conditions. Collins (1981) contends that individuals from similar social groups tend to interpret events around them through the same lens of values and norms developed under the structural conditions of their everyday lives.

*Place as an object of struggle*

Political actions do not only occur 'in' a place, but they also occur 'for' the place and, once carried out, affect the place and reshape its physical structures. Activists may feel a moral responsibility towards specific places, motivating them to engage in collective efforts to protect or transform them (Hooper & Ortolano, 2012). Many social movements aim to reorder geography itself: Miller (2000) argues that the transformation of space is often inseparable from the transformation of power relations. Tilly and Tarrow (2006) distinguish between 'sites of contention', or human settings, and 'conditions of contention', which are the characteristics of sites and relations that shape the incubated contention.

### 1.2.1 Spatial strategies of mobilisation

Leitner et al. (2008) argue that to understand the spatiality of contentious politics, one must examine how geographical contexts shape the imaginaries, practices, and trajectories of social movements. They outline five components of spatiality: the scalar strategy of the social movement between local, regional, and national levels, which shapes framing and mobilisation tactics, prompting the SMOs to focus their struggle against the local or centralised state (Miller, 2000); the materiality of the place itself, includes roads, parks, walls, fences, and residential layouts, which regulate and mediate social relations and mobility; the type of social networking that develops in a place, which serves to share knowledge, strategies, and tactics (Sewell, 2001); the type and strength of coalitions formed between various socio-spatial positionalities of social groups with different identities, imaginaries, and interests; and the mobility of people in a place, which signifies multiple meanings, practices, and powers.

Hooks and Lobao (2010) explain that adopting a spatial thinking of political research enables a more nuanced understanding of causal mechanisms. In this sense, spatial context functions as an environmental mechanism that influences social life through cause-and-effect relations (Tilly, 2001). This relationship is dialectical, implying that social actors do not simply inhabit a place; they also produce and reshape it in pursuit of strategic goals. Therefore, spatial analysis requires acknowledging the heterogeneity of both people and places, often going beyond statistical aggregates and generalisations (Jones & Duncan, 1996; Gregory, 1994). Individuals experience and act within places differently, depending not only on their own social backgrounds but also on the social composition, histories, and symbolic meanings of the places they inhabit.

While the effect of space in shaping mobilisation has been increasingly addressed in recent scholarship, an analytical gap persists: the question of intra-city variation. Why do some neighbourhoods within the same revolutionary city sustain high levels of mobilisation while others, facing broadly similar macro-conditions, do not? The different roles of urban settings and scales in restructuring relationships, interactions, and operational trajectories remain underexplored. This section will map the spatial strategies that movements deploy across different urban scales, comparing between city- and neighbourhood-level contention.

Beissinger (2022) identifies two spatial strategies of revolution: nodal strategies, centred on the occupation of central squares, and linear strategies, based on marches through city streets. Protestors often prioritise main squares because they enable large gatherings, express anti-regime visibility, foster bounded community and solidarity, and attract substantial media coverage. Paradoxically, central squares, often constructed by the state to exhibit its power, are appropriated by protestors to perform alternative sovereignty. The symbolism associated with these squares attracts higher levels of mobilisation nationally than at non-symbolic or locally affiliated locations. However, they intensify the proximity dilemma: they are highly visible and disruptive but also maximally exposed to regime repression. When regimes successfully restrict challengers' access to central squares, movements shift to alternative spatial strategies.

The primary alternative to the central square is the neighbourhood. Dense, informal urban areas serve as counter-spaces where collective action can unfold outside direct state oversight. Neighbourhoods act as relational incubators, where dense social networks are built and maintained, reinforced by the proximity of homes and the intimacy of narrow alleys. Such environments produce a social density that allows cohesive communities to resist state infiltration, exchange information, and formal organisations and committees, which together become the backbone of sustained mobilisation. The dense peripheral neighbourhoods of southern Beirut have developed their own governance logic and organisational structure due to the absence of governmental institutions and state services, making the neighbourhood the de facto operative scale of political life (Harb & Atallah, 2015). On a smaller scale, mosques, parks, and other local monumental sites function as critical mobilising structures, offering organic arenas for assembly in repressive environments, especially at moments when large crowds gather naturally, such as Friday prayers or football matches, which can be co-opted for protests. Under sustained repression, these sites might further transform into "surviving sites": field hospitals and logistical hubs for challengers (Beissinger, 2022).

In contrast to the large public squares and wide boulevards, which rely on the power of numbers to showcase visibility, create a moral shock, and promote a sense of citizenship, protest within narrow alleys and local sites aims at providing challengers with protection from state surveillance and security patrols (Beissinger, 2022; Ismail, 2022), while broadening the movement's base through marches across multiple dispersed locations. In this sense, neighbourhoods are conceptualised as incubators for subjectivities and infrastructures that allow for endurance of mobilisation. They are the primary relational and material unit of analysis for understanding mobilisation consolidation (Beissinger, 2022; Ismail, 2022; Robinson, 2022). Neighbourhood-level analysis is rooted in practices of everyday life and micro-politics that challenge hegemonic state representations and spatial ordering (Ismail, 2022; Bradlow, 2024; Said, 2023). Spaces such as alleyways, workshops, and coffee shops, what Ismail (2022) calls "infrastructures of action", are often reactivated during mass uprisings, repurposed as organisational nodes for political contention. When political mobilisation unfolds within small spaces, it is shaped by the local political identity rooted in the immediate environment (Chakraborty, 2024; Martin, 2003). Neighbourhood analysis, therefore, encompasses territorial strategies such as building occupation and the formation of popular committees, solidified by extended co-presence and the creation of alternative governance structures.

Reconceptualising social movements through spatial thinking redirects attention to the city's micro-geography and its effects on collective action, including social ties, physical spaces, and vulnerability to state penetration. Despite these advances, the literature has not consistently addressed the puzzle that motivates this research: why mobilisation flourishes in some areas while remaining quiet in others, even within the same city (Ismail, 2022; Beissinger, 2022). This research argues that the transition from initial mobilisation to consolidated contention can be understood by the subjectivation of local actors within their immediate surroundings. Thus, the outbreak of political action depends on the interaction of spatial proximity and relational trust. This approach is particularly relevant in Mashreq cities for three reasons observed by Bayat (2000): the common identity appears mainly on the micro urban scale; the social networks that extend beyond kinship and ethnicity are highly unstructured and unorganised; and the state, although authoritarian, lacks the capacity, technology and ideological hegemony to impose full control over society, leaving uncontrolled holes for activism. These characteristics position the neighbourhood not only as an analytical unit but also as a

sociologically necessary component for analysing social movements under these circumstances.

Several factors should be analysed on multiple scales including the spatial embodiment of social cohesion that transfer social solidarity into collective action through place-based framing (Taylor & Whittier, 1992; Meyer & Reyes, 2010), the translation of national-level grievances into local-driven actions, the re-appropriation of local urban spaces, such as local streets and residential courtyards, into political arenas, and the ability to overcome legacies of violence and mobilisation fatigue to consolidate mobilisation. Furthermore, the ability of activists to develop "spatial routines", leading marches through narrow streets in dense areas. These routines transferred into scripts of encounters between challengers and police (Said, 2023; Robinson, 2022), giving protestors a tactical navigability advantage to escape security apparatus within areas of familiarity.

Urban, social, and political elements form the foundation of the theoretical framework in the next chapter. The framework seeks to examine how these place-specific configurations interact to shape protest dynamics across time in Syria. The next chapter will explain how the interaction between political contention and the space is better understood by focusing on three interdependent dimensions of place: the urban environment, the structure of social relations, and the role of governing actors. These elements constitute the spatial foundation upon which contentious action is both enabled and constrained. In Lefebvre's terms (1991), this approach tackles the various aspects of the space: perceived space, including the streets, squares, and buildings that physically condition movement; the conceived space, including the strategic and symbolic meanings that challengers and regimes project onto urban territory; and lived space, including the everyday relational practices through which neighbourhoods become political arenas.

## 1.3 Socio-Spatial Organisation of Mid-Sized Syrian Cities

Sociologists and urbanists have long sought to conceptualise the socio-spatial organisation of cities by dividing them into discrete units and analysing their architectural, economic, political, and symbolic dimensions (Katznelson, 1993; Castells, 1977; Lefebvre, 1991). In this study, therefore, understanding the urbanisation of Syrian cities is a necessary step before conceptualising their spatial organisation and the consequences for divergent patterns of political mobilisation across different parts of the city. Classical, predominantly Western, urban

theories provide foundational insights into how social groups are distributed spatially and associated with distinct resources, power, and urban morphology, yet applying them to other socio-historical settings poses theoretical and methodological challenges, as they primarily reflect the historical trajectories of European and North American cities (Nieuwenhuijze, 2023). In the Middle East, additional vertical factors, such as kinship networks, play roles equal to, if not more critical than, consumption cleavages (Weber, 1970; Préteceille, 1986), and the mechanisms underlying residential segregation differ significantly, given the significance of informal housing and rural-to-urban migration. Moreover, even within the literature on Global South urbanism, scholarly attention has disproportionately focused on large cities and capitals, often at the expense of small and mid-sized urban centres.

To spatially, socially, and politically conceptualise mid-sized cities in Syria and the broader region, it is necessary to adopt a historically grounded approach that can identify driving forces of cities' organisation and stratification, and explore how the resulting social structures, physical morphologies, and state formations produce distinct organisational capacities for collective action. Classical thinkers, such as Ibn Khaldun, conceptualised the city as existing at the crossroads of the urban environment and political authority (Benhadda, 2020), while Lapidus (1967) argues that the essence of the so-called Islamic city should be understood not as a fixed form but as a dynamic social process driven by interactions among military elites, religious leaders, local notables and merchants. The evolution of the cities in Syria is typically examined across three distinct historical phases: the Islamic, the modern/colonial, and the (neo)liberal period, each introducing new spatial typologies, social categories, and axes of stratification (Faroqhi, 1984; Arnaud, 2008). Urban organisation unfolded as a layered process of expansion in which new urban layers coexisted with, rather than integrated with, previous ones, producing a heterogeneous morphology.

### 1.3.1 The Evolution of the City

Across the historical phases of city evolution, four key factors emerge as recurring drivers of urban development: the successive ideological and urban policy shift brought by ruling actors; rapid population growth driven primarily by migration (Ibrahim, 1996); the interaction among diverse social groups compositing the city's social fabric; and the dynamics of power sharing among social groups, local elites and governance structures (Lapidus, 1967, cited in Alsayyad, 1996). Each phase introduced new spatial typologies, social categories, and axes of

stratification, continually redrawing the lines of urban inequality. These factors will later be operationalised as conditions for analysing collective action.

The early development of Syrian cities was shaped by a combination of topographic and geographic factors, such as proximity to water sources and connectivity to surrounding rural areas and trade routes, and internal social dynamics, including economic activities, migration waves, and social structures (David, 2004; Metral, 2004; Abu-Lughod, 1966; Othman, 1999). Drawing on David's (2004) edited volume, the Syrian city can be understood as a place where diverse social groups co-existed without necessarily integrating, each preserving, to an extent, aspects of their ethnic, religious, economic, and social traditions, with this heterogeneity spatially expressed through residential segregation demarcated by major roads. Socio-spatial heterogeneity encompassed tribal, sectarian, gender-based, and economic levels (Abu-Lughod, 1987; Othman, 1998; Ibrahim, 1996), though these factors overlapped rather than operating in isolation. Members of the same sect commonly engaged in similar economic activities and lived and worked within the same neighbourhoods (Ibrahim, 1996). The rural-urban relationship constituted a primary driver of urban expansion, with cities relying on rural hinterlands for food and taxes while providing services, protection, and goods in return (Bianquis, 2004). Migration flowed from the countryside toward the city, driven by social mobility motivation, environmental pressure, or political displacement. Other patterns included villages that were absorbed by the urban growth (Dibyat, 2004).

With the onset of modernity, the urbanisation of Mashreq cities diverged from their historical trajectories, without following a path comparable to that of the global north. Cities in the Global South are argued to have ‘rushed’ into urbanised and modernised phases without experiencing an industrial period (Kasarda & Crenshaw, 1991), an imbalance that was attributed to colonial and imperialist systems by dependency theorists (Hermassi, 1978). As Ibrahim (1996) demonstrates, urbanisation rates have outpaced the state’s limited ability to provide adequate services, jobs, and housing, leading to “over-urbanisation” and reinforcing socio-spatial inequality. Through their modernisation projects, Ottomans and later colonial powers opted to construct new city centres and residential neighbourhoods with geometric streets and boulevards and railway connections, rather than modernising the existing urban fabric, creating a durable spatial and social dualism (Faroqhi, 1984; Arnaud, 2008). Modern services and investments were concentrated in European enclaves while traditional neighbourhoods remained underdeveloped and underserved (Chukhovich, 2014; Ibrahim, 1996).

This dualism was deepened by post-independence governments, which institutionalised spatial inequality through urban planning, which was later translated into de facto discrimination in terms of service provision and housing quality (Khoury & Razzaz, 1984; Verdeil, 2011). Much of the trade and administrative facilities were relocated from the old city to the newly developed neighbourhoods, consigning the old city quarters to traditional economic activities and low-income residents (Kurdi, 2004). These stratification patterns have persisted across the decades due to Syria's predominantly family-based housing system and limited residential mobility (Fuccaro, 2020; Wind & Ibrahim, 2020). In sum, while the pre-modern social organisation was shaped by economic, cultural, and social structures, state-led urban projects and their subsequent socio-economic transformations were decisive in reshaping the city's physical layout, altering social structures, and redefining rural-urban relations.

### 1.3.2 The Division of the City

During the colonial and post-colonial periods, the city came to be perceived as dual in nature, consisting of both old and modern sections. Over time, this perception evolved, and the city came to be understood as divided on multiple levels—spatial, social, and economic. The factors that led to this division have also altered. Since the 1950s, the urbanisation of large and mid-sized cities in Syria has been initially associated with the outcomes of state-led modernisation policies. However, this perception gradually shifted again toward viewing urbanisation as a result of failed urban policies implemented by successive regimes, first socialist, then neoliberal. Scholars such as Batatu (1999), Barout (2011), and Hinnebusch (1982b) have argued that the Ba'ath regime's economic policies negatively affected both urban and rural areas. These policies involved the nationalisation of factories and commercial institutions, land reform measures, and infrastructure investments to integrate rural areas into the national economy.

According to Barout (2011), urbanisation in the Syrian middle and small cities was characterised by the ruralisation of cities, the impoverishment of rural areas, and the disruption of the exploitative relationship between urban centres and rural hinterlands. Ruralisation not only affected the city's architectural composition; it also shaped the values and attitudes of rural migrants and urban natives, eventually leading to physical and social polarisation, which translated into social cleavages during political upheavals. Hinnebusch (1982a) argues that the ruralisation of Syrian cities paralleled a similar process within the state bureaucracy itself. The Ba'ath Party relied heavily on rural constituencies, particularly peasants, for political

mobilisation. Over time, this reliance translated into control over key administrative and military institutions by rural populations, many of whom were Alawite. The peasant class gained economic and political influence during the Ba'ath era, due to their growing presence within the state bureaucracy and to land reform, which increased the number of landowners among them. As Batatu (1999) demonstrates, this new political class gained influence through land redistribution and increasing participation in state structures. These changes were reflected in the urban landscape, where neighbourhoods emerged to house public servants and military personnel. In essence, failed rural development and the ruralisation, politicisation, and sectarianisation of the city and state bureaucracy produced two major effects on the urban environment: the rise of informal and dense areas to accommodate newcomers (many of whom shared similar socio-economic and ethno-sectarian profiles) and the spatial reproduction of social marginalisation.

Although technically integrated into the city, newly arrived groups often remained spatially, economically, and socially marginalised. Residents in peripheral neighbourhoods often maintained strong ties to their rural or tribal places of origin, using the city as a place for economic exchange (David, 2004). These different processes of urbanisation produced distinct patterns of spatial division. For instance, the Hader district in Hama, which emerged due to the arrival of rural migrants from the eastern periphery, maintains social and economic ties to their tribal networks. This pattern emphasised the socio-spatial division within the city between the southwestern (Souk) and northeastern part (Hader). In Daraa, a similar socio-spatial distinction has emerged between the southern part (Daraa Balad), containing the native city's tribes and characterised by traditional urban fabric, and the northern part (Daraa Mahatta), which is the newer part that hosts the administrative buildings and mixed population that reflects a different pattern of intra-city and rural-urban migration. In Deir-ez-Zor, while the Euphrates River and Therdeh Mountain function as natural barriers between the city and its rural surroundings, new internal residential quarters emerged as a result of tribal migration that cross-cut rural-urban divisions and maintained geographic and social connections between residents and their tribal affiliations (Barout, 2011; Talab, 2022).

That said, we should not risk portraying an unrealistic image of the Syrian or Mashreq city, shaped by misconceptions of sharp social and spatial cleavages. Particularly in mid-sized and smaller cities such as Hama, Daraa, and Deir-ez-Zor, the sharp spatial and social divisions seen in larger metropolises did not always manifest in the same way. Although these cities passed through the same overarching phases of Islamic, modern and neoliberal restructuring, and their

morphologies were shaped accordingly, they did not necessarily produce antagonistic or polarised social groups. The divide between traditional and modern urban life was never fully crystallised. City residents continued to move across social and spatial boundaries in pursuit of economic opportunity, social mobility, and other routines of everyday life. Urban typology, social structures, and economic activities should be regarded as shaping perceptions of individual or collective interests and demands, rather than fixed identities .Yaacobi and Shechter (2005) capture this hybridity of spaces, describing Mashreq cities as spaces where old and new, and global and local built environments intersect. The resulting urban fragmentation—rooted in economic, political, and social processes—manifests as spatial inequality and insecurity (Koonings & Kruijt, 2009).

In more recent decades, particularly after 2000, Syria's urban transformation became embedded in broader neoliberal dynamics. Malkawi (2008) argues that the city's embeddedness in global social, economic, and political networks has become another crucial factor characterising its development trajectory. This integration was orchestrated by repressive regimes that manipulated urban development in ways that deepened inequality. Neoliberal urbanism exacerbated the gap between rich and poor people and dismantled the safety net of the working class, who already lack any political representation. As Goulden (2011) demonstrates, the housing crisis in Syria exemplifies this paradox: on the one hand, a long-standing shortage of affordable housing drove the rapid expansion of informal settlements; on the other hand, a surge in luxury real estate projects symbolised the state's profit-driven development policy (Vignal, 2012). All government efforts to eliminate informal housing failed because they never addressed the root of the crisis, namely, the lack of affordable housing. As a result, spatial inequality and marginalisation have become increasingly visible within the urban landscape.

It must be noted that patterns of spatial inequality are not merely socio-economic but also political, feeding the state's security and service provision strategies in informal areas, which Ismail (2018) calls the "police project of government". Residents of these neighbourhoods were simultaneously marginalised and hyper-visible to the security apparatus. This relationship between neoliberalism and the state is also evident in Beirut's periphery, as demonstrated by Fawaz (2009), where residents of low-income neighbourhoods were unable to participate in city decision-making due to neoliberal policies that included the privatisation of public spaces at the expense of affordable housing projects. These spatial legacies of neoliberal urbanism, encompassing the socio-economic marginalisation, combined with the absence of meaningful

political representation, created the political structural opportunities for collective action during the Syrian uprising (Azmeh, 2016).

In sum, the consecutive urban typologies that emerged in the Syrian city, including the old city, regulated neighbourhoods, informal areas, public housing, and urbanised villages, are not only descriptive categories, but will also play an analytical role as configurations and conditions that shape mobilisation capacities. Each one of these layers generated a specific territorial logic that lies at the intersection of several factors, such as building density, social ties density, and the state's governance and security footprint.

### 1.3.3 Mid-Sized Cities as a Distinct Analytical Category

The methodological choice to focus analytically on the mid-sized cities raises a broader theoretical question: what different roles are attributed to these cities when analysing collective actions compared to capitals and megacities? The former often receive primary scholarly attention, with large metropolitan centres, such as Cairo, Beirut, and Damascus, serving as the central focus at the expense of smaller and mid-size centres (Elsheshtawy, 2004). In his work on comparative urbanism, Robinson (2022) argues that these "ordinary" urban formations, which fall outside the conventional purview of urban theory, should be approached as singular trajectories rather than residual cases. Although sharing some episodes of urbanisation with larger cities and capitals, mid-sized cities follow their own path, shaped by what Zérah and Denis (2017) describe as "subaltern urbanisation," governed by local bricolage of financing and governance.

This distinct path manifests in several ways crucial to the study of collective action. First, state-society relations are mediated by proximity: in mid-sized cities, municipal leaders and local notables maintain closer relationships with residents than in larger cities governed by fragmented bureaucracies (Harb & Atallah, 2015; Bradlow, 2024). This proximity may facilitate grassroots mobilisation and coordination through local and trusted intermediaries, but it can also be co-opted by the state to penetrate local networks, demobilise or repress mobilised groups or individuals. Second, the development of informal areas in these cities, including Hama, Daraa, and Deir-ez-Zor, was more related to rural-urban migration, specific political events, or local housing needs, rather than to integration into the urban economy and global capital flows, or to the management of specific sectors such as transportation and construction. Third, the dynamics of ruralisation followed a different spatial logic. In large metropolises, it is often a result of urban expansion that swallows the surrounding countryside, transforming

rural networks into urban peripheries (Beissinger, 2022). Although this pattern is also found in mid-sized Syrian cities such as Deir-ez-Zor and Homs, the boundary between the rural and urban is more blurred socially and economically, with the urban integration of migrants shaped by tribal affiliation and kinship rather than the labour market (Zérah & Denis, 2017).

These distinct patterns also have implications for the dynamics of collective action across the different types of cities. Unlike major cities across the Arab world, where protestors succeeded in gathering massive crowds in Cairo's Tahrir Square or Tunisa's Avenue Bourguiba (Beissinger, 2022), in secondary cities in Syria, mobilisation followed a more dynamic spatial logic, where activists alternated between central squares and neighbourhood streets. As will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, this distinction gave the micro-spatial characteristics of individual neighbourhoods, including their social and urban density, and proximity of main facilities, a decisive analytical role (Pearlman, 2018; Volpi & Jasper, 2018). The rescaling of the analysis of contentious politics in the Middle East to the local and micro level has also been pursued in recent scholarship. Ismail (2018) analyses the infrastructures of action within informal neighbourhoods, such as local and work solidarity networks, and neighbourhood coordination committees, which are shaped by everyday life practices to generate informal political organisation. Furthermore, the generative power of co-presence in specific urban sites varies across the different material and social characteristics of those sites, based on the willingness to act and types of collective identities, including their learned scripts and routines (Said, 2023; Schwedler, 2022).

# CHAPTER 2. PLACING ACTIONS IN CONTEXT

This chapter proposes a theoretical framework to explore how political collective actions interacted with the surrounding social and physical structures during the Syrian protest movement between 2011 and 2013. The framework explains collective human behaviour within a specific spatial and temporal context while accounting for the heterogeneous outcomes of collective actions across seemingly comparable places. Unlike other popular uprisings that occupied central squares, as in Egypt and Tunisia (Galián, 2018), the Syrian Revolution was mainly localised, occurring in the narrow streets and small squares of neighbourhoods. As central public squares remained inaccessible, most protests were pushed into the city's micro-urban areas, making local social, spatial, and political settings crucial to understanding protest patterns. The framework aims to answer two main questions: how did some neighbourhoods successfully mobilise while others did not? And how did mobilisation capacities change across neighbourhoods and over time? In other words, this framework investigates how the characteristics of a place (including social, urban, and political makeup) enabled or constrained political action during different phases of the uprising. Mobilisation is therefore treated not as a static or uniform event, but as a phased process, initiated, consolidated and eventually terminated, rooted in place-specific conditions and temporal dynamics.

However, this study does not argue in favour of architectural determinism: places with similar social or physical structures will not necessarily exhibit identical political dynamics, nor will individuals living in the same locale share similar interests and, thus, actions. Rather, spatial differentiation implies inequality between places, offering advantages and disadvantages for those who inhabit or are connected with these places (Bosco, 2001). Whether local actors leverage these advantages or mitigate spatial disadvantages depends on other processes of socialisation, mobilisation, and repression. Areas with different patterns of urban configuration, spatial planning, and demographic composition can encourage or discourage social interaction and engagement, ultimately influencing the likelihood and form of collective political actions.

To comprehensively explain the role of geography in shaping the various manifestations of the uprising across different localities and time periods, the spatial component should not be viewed merely as a container of action but also as a factor capable of moulding imaginaries, practices, and trajectories of contentious politics (Leitner et al., 2008). It can enable or disable the capacities of both challengers and incumbents (Schwedler & King, 2014) or even become

the subject of the struggle itself (Castells, 1983). The interaction between space and action is therefore examined as an interactive process that begins before the eruption of protest and extends beyond its immediate aftermath. This analysis regards both the site and the event as an interconnected nexus that goes beyond inherent structures to include their interaction, whilst considering the politics of power embedded within the site (Allegra et al., 2013).

This chapter begins by establishing the epistemological and ontological foundations of the framework to align it with the study's research questions, objectives, and analytical scope. The theoretical framework proposed in this research will be developed in the second section, theorising the interaction between the site and the event as co-produced at the intersection of the organisational capacity of challengers and the repressive capacity of the state, while both are facilitated or constrained by the neighbourhood's socio-spatial characteristics.

## 2.1 Theoretical Considerations

At its most abstract level, this research examines the interaction between the material world and physical environments such as the built fabric and the social world of structures, social networks, and discourses, both of which influence human action in different yet interlocking ways. Given the complexity of this inquiry, the research adopts a pragmatic-critical realist position. Ontologically, the material and social worlds exist independently of human cognition. The urban environment, demographic composition, and state infrastructure of Syrian neighbourhoods are objective conditions predating any individual interpretation. Integrating a constructivist epistemology, our understanding of these conditions is socially constructed and only partially knowable, but reality remains objective (external to the human mind) (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The pragmatic strand of this position is inherently pluralistic, prioritising practical utility over epistemological purity, allowing flexible selection of theoretical and methodological tools to suit the study's context (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Rather than seeking to uncover universal laws and unchanging causes that can explain all instances, this research aims to identify the conditions that facilitate the development of specific outcomes and the mechanisms that connect those conditions to outcomes. Conditions are understood as the socio-spatial characteristics of neighbourhoods, such as urban density, social cohesion, and security infrastructure. The analytical logic proceeds in two stages: identifying the necessary and sufficient conditions for mobilisation through Qualitative Comparative

Analysis (QCA), helping us identify the factors or conditions that must be present for an event to occur (necessary conditions) or those that, when present together, are adequate for the event to transpire (sufficient conditions) (Elster, 1989; Della Porta, 2016). The second stage uses in-depth case studies to trace the mechanisms by which these configurational pathways operated in specific neighbourhoods.

This research draws on Post-Structuration Theory (Archer, 1995) to explore how agency and structure interact to shape human activities. This interaction centres on the relationship between structural constraints and individual agency, where individuals are both influenced by these constraints and, at the same time, help reproduce and transform them through their actions. This reciprocal and dynamic relationship is what Archer (1995) describes as the dualism of structure and agency. Moreover, the dimensions of time and scale are crucial in any social analysis. Three dimensions of Archer's framework are directly connected with the study. First, structure precedes agency: the socio-spatial configuration of a neighbourhood precedes and conditions the actions of its residents during the contentious episodes, framing the opportunities and constraints for the action. Second, structures operate at various scales, encompassing high-level socioeconomic stratification (such as social classes), mid-range scales (social networks and institutions, including religious and family structures), and micro-level scales present at the community level. This multi-scalar logic allows the framework to perceive mobilisation as shaped simultaneously by neighbourhood-level conditions, city-wide diffusion dynamics, and national-level repression. Third, structures and agents are involved in a reciprocal dynamic: when the agents act, they are not only influenced by pre-existing structures but also reshape them through the process of contention. This explains why similar places might exhibit different mobilisation outcomes across phases of the event, as the structures that produced certain outcomes during the initial phase were altered by the mobilisation and repression, creating different conditions for the subsequent phase.

In sum, spatial behaviour is not mechanically determined by structural conditions. Rather, it is influenced by the constraints and opportunities presented by these conditions and equally influenced by people's resources, needs, desires, and obligations. Consequently, causal knowledge is not deterministic but rather probabilistic in nature. Since both structures and agents possess distinct properties and capabilities, it becomes possible to analytically separate them to investigate their respective influences and interactions (Archer, 2000).

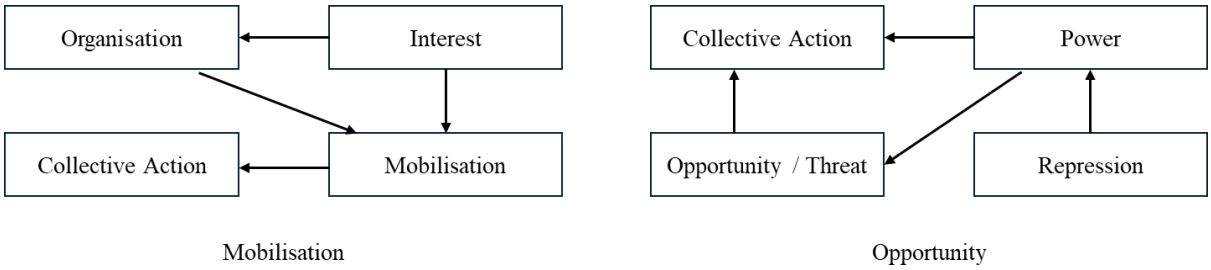
## 2.2 The Theoretical Framework: The Nexus of Site and Action

The framework proposed here aims to explain how residents of different neighbourhoods in Daraa, Deir-ez-Zor, and Hama initiated and sustained mobilisation during the 2011 uprising, or failed to do so, under conditions of severe authoritarian repression. It rests on two foundational premises. First, divergent mobilisation outcomes across neighbourhoods cannot be attributed to any single causal factor; they emerge from the intersection of multiple conditions and mechanisms that combine differently across locations. Second, mobilisation is a phased process rather than a discrete event: it is initiated, rises, and eventually declines across temporally distinct periods. Taken together, these premises frame mobilisation as an Event-Site Nexus: the contingent product of the interaction between the location's socio-spatial characteristics and the evolving phases of the contention. The framework draws on two theoretical traditions: Charles Tilly's work on Mobilisation (Tilly, 1978; Tilly, 2001; Tilly, 2008; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015) that explains how mobilisation unfolds, and John Agnew's Theory of Place and Politics (1987; 2011; 2015) that spatially accounts for the place-based structures under which contention operates. Both are situated within recent debates on the temporality of mobilisation and revolutionary urbanism, most notably Beissinger (2022).

Tilly's (1978) model provides a foundational framework for analysing how people act together in pursuit of shared interests. It defines mobilisation as the process of transforming organisational capacity into collective action and power under changing opportunities and threats. The model consists of four elements: interest, organisation, mobilisation, and repression/facilitation and opportunity/threat (Figure 3), through which the group's internal structure and capacity for action interact with the external incentives, opportunities, and repression structures imposed by the state and other contenders. The model remains foundational for identifying elements of contention, although Tilly, together with McAdam and Tarrow, later developed it to account for the "dynamic interactions through which contention actually unfolds" (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 17). Its earlier static nature was rearticulated through relational vocabularies, particularly the causal mechanisms such as brokerage, diffusion, and scale shift (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Within this approach, social interactions and ties are treated as active sites of political change, and mobilisation is explained not through covering laws but through mechanisms that alter relations among social elements in the same way across contexts, forming processes by their regular combinations (McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly, 2003). Similarly, identities are relational constructions that emerge, consolidate, and

decline over the course of contention (Tilly, 2005). In the Syrian case, neighbourhood-level collective identities are not treated as pre-existing but as actively shaped, consolidated, and dissolved by the dynamics of mobilisation and repression.

***Figure 3. Model of Mobilisation's Elements***




Source: Tilly (1978)

Critically, embedding this model into geographical thinking requires more than appending a spatial variable; it requires immersing the concept of place into each component of the mobilisation process. Every mechanism has a spatial precondition that is too often assumed rather than systematically investigated. For instance, brokerage is shaped by the physical settings in which face-to-face interaction occurs, diffusion depends on proximity and on communicative infrastructures that may facilitate or restrict it, and boundary activation draws on the territorial making of social differences. This must also operate at a more foundational level, by reconceptualising "mobilisation," "organisation," and "opportunity" when situated in a specific socio-spatial context: in this case, a neighbourhood of a Mashreq city under an authoritarian state. In this framing, mobilisation is co-produced by challengers' organisational capacity and the site's material, social, and political properties. This is where John Agnew's theory of place and politics becomes central.

Agnew's main argument is that political behaviour is intrinsically geographical and cannot be comprehended without a place-based perspective, thus giving equal attention to local political differences even under consolidated modern states. For him, the place is a setting for social interaction that encompasses three interrelated components: *location*, the macro-order of power and economy, manifested by the position of a place within a broader spatial and economic networks, including connectivity and accessibility; *locale*, the micro-sociological and physical setting of everyday life where social relationships are embedded; and *sense of place*, the subjective orientation and structure of feeling produced by living in a place. However, people do not experience these dimensions separately; they are simultaneously embedded in structural

conditions, engaging in daily social routines, and influenced by symbolic attachments to their surroundings. Thus, a place is not only a site of social interaction but also where physical environments are created and used.

Embedding the place into the analytical framework is oriented towards three shifts: relational, interactional, and scale-based. Relationally, social interaction or locale is shaped by location and simultaneously generates its own sense of place. Therefore, place is reconceptualised as a relational entity, constituted through its position within broader networks of power and its connections to other sites (Agnew, 2002; 2011). Interactionally, places are dynamic and historically contingent processes, shaped through the ongoing interaction between people and physical structures, or structuration. As the constellations of power that shape this interaction shift, the political significance of places is reconfigured accordingly (Agnew, 2011). In scalar terms, places are constituted across multiple geographical scales (Agnew, 2015), meaning that neighbourhood-level mobilisation can be shaped simultaneously by local structures, city-wide, and national dynamics of diffusion and repression. In sum, places are geographical contexts in which human agency shapes, and is shaped by, social and physical structures, so that political action becomes legible as the product of active socialisation at the local level.

To operationalise the Tilly-Agnew framework, it is placed in conversation with Beissinger's (2022) theory of urban civic revolutions. His logic of revolutionary cascades demonstrates that the outcomes of early mobilisation episodes shape the conditions of the subsequent ones. When initial mobilisation efforts succeed, they reveal regime vulnerabilities and growing social support for protest, lowering the cost of participation in adjacent areas and scaling up mobilisation through "positive feedback loops". In contrast, escalating regime coercion can produce the reverse, negative tipping dynamics, deterring mobilisation in surrounding areas and generating geographically uneven patterns of demobilisation. While Beissinger's framework operates mainly on the city level, this research extends the logic to a finer analytical scale, asking how place-specific configurations enable or hinder cascading dynamics within and across neighbourhoods. Factors such as communicative infrastructure, urban density and the geographical distribution of coercive power are reconceptualised here as spatial preconditions, encompassing neighbourhoods' micro-spatial characteristics: street layouts, the density and cohesion of social networks, the distribution of gathering sites, and the proximity of state security and governance infrastructure.

The Event-Site Nexus intersects Tilly's mechanism-based approach to analyse how mobilisation operates, Agnew's spatial vocabulary, which explains how mechanisms operate across the three dimensions of place, and Beissinger's temporal account of phased, path-dependent process in which spatial successes continually reproduce the opportunities and constraints of mobilisation. Where Tilly explains how certain repertoires of action are familiar to certain populations, Agnew suggests that such repertoires and capacities are not universal but contextual, shaped by the specific historical characteristics of a place. Agnew theorises the place's dimensions, and Tilly explains how political actors leverage or are constrained by those dimensions. Place, in this framework, is the infrastructure through which the mechanisms of mobilisation operate, making the two theorists mutually reinforcing for this account of contention. For instance, Agnew's locale is the material terrain on which Tilly's mechanisms of brokerage and social appropriation are activated. Urban properties such as street connectivity, urban density, and location of gathering spaces (mosques and squares) enhance or restrict the organisational capacity and tactical power of contenders. Agnew's sense of place, the relational dimension rooted in shared meanings and identities, supplies the substrate for boundary activation and attribution, generating the solidarity needed to maintain organisation and resist state repressive power. Finally, Agnew's location, the macro-order mapped onto the neighbourhood through state infrastructure, determines the state's direct and indirect coercive capacity, shaping the cost of mobilisation.

Within this framework, mobilisation is co-produced by the organisational capacity of challengers and the repressive capacity of the state, both of which are facilitated or constrained by the three components of the site. The site is defined as the measurable socio-spatial structures under which mobilisation occurs. The organisational capacity of contenders influences the rise, consolidation, and fall of mobilisation, while the state's repressive capacity and the leverage or constraints offered by place shape those trajectories. The site is conceptualised through three components:

1. Urban factors: the physical characteristics of the neighbourhood, such as streets, gathering sites, and coercive infrastructure. They combine Agnew's locale with the spatial preconditions for Tilly's mechanisms of brokerage and diffusion.
2. Social structures: Agnew's sense of place and the social foundations of Tilly's organisation. They include population density, social cohesion, and the networks through which solidarity and trust are produced and sustained.

3. State/political presence: Agnew's location as the macro-order of power encompasses the proximity of security infrastructure and government buildings that shape the state's capacity for surveillance and repression.

That said, repression in this research will be conceptualised as a structural condition that modulates the relationship between socio-spatial configurations and mobilisation outcomes, rather than an independent outcome. The repression-mobilisation relationship is also spatially and temporally contingent, and its intensity and form vary across places and episodes of contention (Schwedler & King, 2014).

Framed chronologically, the analysis begins with the emergence and growth of the area's different components prior to the uprising. This involves examining the structural conditioning prior to the uprising: how the socio-spatial organisation of a city and the clustering of residents into distinct neighbourhoods shaped life choices, access to resources, and forms of social organisation. These structural conditions influence the creation of collective identities, daily interactions, and the organisational infrastructure available for collective action. In this context, the combination of these socio-spatial conditions either enables or hinders the emergence of social actors who can mobilise their local communities and initiate collective actions. Simultaneously, the same conditions impact the state's ability to control, monitor, and suppress dissent, or to employ counter-mobilisation tactics. Therefore, mobilisation outcomes stem from the interplay between event phases and site-specific characteristics.

The framework identifies three analytically distinct phases of the event. First, mobilisation driven by opportunity, spatial diffusion, and information cascades. Positive feedback loops are activated across dense, trusted social networks and spatial channels of urban infrastructure, as well as digital, intra-, and inter-neighbourhood networks. The second phase is consolidation, driven by resilience under high-risk activism rather than by opportunity alone. Unlike classical staging of social movements, which consists of emergence, coalescence, bureaucratisation, and decline (Christiansen, 2011), the Syrian case lacked bureaucratisation. Instead, mobilisation efforts in certain areas were consolidated by semi-structured revolutionary groups that overcame security challenges to organise focused, strategic, and demand-oriented activities in dedicated protest squares over a sustained period. The third phase, demobilisation, represents the decline of mobilisation, whether due to participant fatigue, fragmentation of the activist network, or escalating repression that exceeds the neighbourhood's resilience.

In sum, mobilisation is theorised as a contingent product of the interaction between socio-spatial characteristics of place and the evolving phases of action. Variation across neighbourhoods in urban fabric, social structures, and state presence generates different combinations of opportunities and constraints, generating uneven capacities for both mobilisation and repression. These variations determine whether a neighbourhood will mobilise and consolidate its mobilisation or become demobilised through state intervention. It is very important to note that these phases are not linear or automatic. The transition from one to another is not mechanistic, but a contingent outcome of the interaction between political actors and their socio-spatial environment, mediated by the evolving intensity and form of state repression. The core analytical objective of this framework is to identify the conditions that enable or obstruct the transition from one phase to another. This is represented schematically as follows:

*Socio-spatial structures (X)→ Mobilisation (Y1) → Consolidation of mobilisation (Y2)*
*← Demobilisation (Z)*

The following section will explore how each of these socio-spatial conditions (urban, social and state presence factors) contributes to the transition across the phases. It investigates how same-level variables matter differently across these phases. The goal is to identify the main mechanisms that drive or prevent these transitions. These periods and socio-spatial structures will be operationalised as structured phases and measurable variables in Chapter 5, drawing on the case knowledge developed in Chapter 4.

### 2.2.1 From Social Groups to Social Organisations (Socio-spatial structures)

The first transition in this framework concerns the phase prior to the outbreak of the uprising: how dispersed individuals, co-residing in a neighbourhood, become organised into social groups capable of carrying out collective action. In other words, examining how place-specific conditions influence the formation of social groups and their transformation into social organisations. This stage does not yet represent the political mobilisation, but rather the formation of organisational substrate, such as dense social networks, urban layouts, and shared identities, on which the mobilisation will be later built. Central to this inquiry is understanding how these variables foster a sense of unity among individuals, leading them to perceive themselves as members of a group with shared identities, interests, and worldviews. This transition is driven by two main mechanisms: boundary activation, which creates the sense of a group that distinguishes between “us” and “them” along spatial, kinship, or socio-economic

lines, and attribution of similarity, in which people living in a place come to perceive their identities, interests, and worldviews as shared (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

Two primary social conditions underpin this transition: CATNESS and NETNESS (Tilly, 1978). CATNESS refers to categorical identities shared by individuals who share common characteristics, such as religion, ethnicity, occupation (e.g., workers), or geographic location (residents of a specific city or neighbourhood). These shared attributes provide the raw material for collective identification. NETNESS pertains to the network of interpersonal connections, either directly or indirectly, whether familial, social, or community-based. These networks constitute the structural foundation for communication, coordination, and mobilisation. The intersection of CATNESS and NETNESS results in the formation of stronger collective types, as individuals with a shared identity and strong social bonds are more likely to coordinate, share risks, and act collectively. In Syria, Mazur (2021) suggests three factors to assess the social density in Syria: tribal identity that shapes social relations and hierarchy; the intra-family marriage that preserves wealth and solidifies relations within the extended family that often lives in close proximity; and the physical structure of the neighbourhoods which, if it is shaped by narrow streets and spontaneous layout, increases social interactions. While social networks are created by people, once established, they possess the ability to shape individuals' thoughts and perspectives (Lazer et al., 2008). Just as people who talk together tend to converge socially and politically, they also gravitate toward those who share their interests. The more homogeneous the social group is and the denser its network of social ties, the more likely its members are to share a unified identity, common interests, and exclusive sources of information, which will eventually result in a unified interpretation and response to actions taking place around them.

These social processes always take place and are constituted through material properties. Urbanised social groups are typically identified as geographically bounded social networks, typically concentrated within neighbourhoods or districts (Grannis, 2009). These communities are composed of residents who share not only demographic and psychological profiles but also frequent face-to-face interactions within a delimited spatial context — including streets, mosques, and markets — which become critical sites to produce identification, social capital, and collective efficacy. The physical characteristics, including density and layout, of their urban environment shape the frequency and intensity of interactions through which boundary activation and the attribution of similarity operate. Denser communities, measured by social ties and street networks, often foster regular interactions and trust among residents, and shape

conditions for coordination and surveillance. Beyond physical proximity, shared socio-economic status also plays a central role in identity formation and social grouping. The micro-geography of everyday life, such as housing, education, and employment, defines the local contexts in which social interaction takes place (Agnew, 1996). These micro settings impact even individuals with weak connections to the major social group in a community, as long as their life chances and emotional well-being are intertwined with the larger community's prospects (Agnew, 1987).

The threshold of social organisation can be influenced by specific state-level conditions, primarily the state's presence or absence, and the impact of its policies. Cities in the Global South are often characterised by spatial and social dualism, appearing as a division between formal and informal urban sectors (Koonings & Kruijt, 2009). Informal areas are usually less visible to state authorities and lack essential urban services, political recognition, and legal property rights (Goldstein, 2003). Urban marginality can originate from economic status, social identity, or both. In this context, urban marginality becomes a complex interaction of social relations with spatial effects, commonly seen in the clustering of impoverished populations in areas that may be stigmatised as ghettos or slums. These dynamics produce two conditions for mobilisation. First, socio-economic exclusion—such as poverty, unemployment, and urban degradation—generates community grievances (Soja, 2010). Second, in the absence of state institutions, alternative actors and local leaders arise to address gaps in service provision and security, leading to non-state forms of sovereignty (Davis, 2016; Harb & Atallah, 2015). As a result, residents of marginalised areas not only share collective grievances but also tend to be less reliant on the state for their livelihoods, thereby lowering the cost of rebellion. In contrast, a heavy state footprint, whether directly through security infrastructure or indirectly through employment and services, increases the state's capacity for surveillance, co-optation, and control, thereby increasing the cost of forming social groups.

In sum, the transition from social groups to social organisations produces the preconditions for collective action, which forms the foundation for political mobilisation. Local and dense areas, characterised by spatially cohesive with a low state footprint, generate social organisations with governance capacity, shared identity, and communicative networks through the mechanism of boundary activation and attribution of similarity. However, the conversion towards political contention is not automatic but is conditioned by a trigger that activates this latent organisational capacity.

### 2.2.2 From Social Actors to Political Actors (mobilisation)

The second transition represents the moment when social actors become political actors engaging in contentious collective action. Socio-spatial conditions play a formative role in shaping collective identity, assessing risks and opportunities, and shaping the perceptions of people living under them. These conditions provide both material opportunities and constraints, as well as collective identities. Together, these elements shape the way social groups interpret their environment, assess risks and opportunities, and perceive threats and collective grievances. Yet these conditions do not alone produce mobilisation; they are necessary but not sufficient. Mobilisation requires a triggering process, which in our case, could be driven by two mechanisms: brokerage, the connection of previously unconnected social sites into shared mobilisation frames, and social appropriation, the repurposing of social and urban settings, such as mosques and markets, or regular social gatherings, such as funeral processions, into vehicles for collective claim-making (McAdam et.al, 2001; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). To operate effectively, both mechanisms depend on the availability, distribution, and accessibility of physical sites.

In localised environments such as neighbourhoods, mobilisation involves the capacity of social groups to assemble a critical mass willing to engage in high-risk activities, potentially escalating until large segments of the community become politically active, a threshold that depends on the degree of shared interests, the group intensity, and the number of resources the group can mobilise. Two processes may lower this threshold. First, trust and solidarity building. Dense, sustained interaction within a cohesive community generates strong bonds of trust, a sense of belonging, and a duty to support peers' struggles within the social group (Granovetter, 1983; Nicholls et al., 2013). Trust reduces uncertainty and risk, strengthening both emotional commitment and the willingness to dedicate time and resources to collective action. This sense of obligation may also be further supported by mechanisms of social surveillance and mutual accountability within the group (Coleman, 1988). Second, information circulation and frame convergence. Neighbourhoods characterised by strong social ties facilitate the efficient exchange of information and reinforce the influence of the community's shared framing and interpretations. Conversely, communities with fragmented or weaker social connections are more apt to display multiple, often conflicting, interpretive frames. These two processes lay the social preconditions for brokerage, allowing the initial mobiliser, operating through strong social ties, to connect with disparate groups within the community through weak ties.

The physical environment provides the spatial infrastructure where the mechanisms operate. Urban density, the distribution and composition of built elements (such as street and building layouts), scale, and geographic positioning factors influence both a neighbourhood's capacity to mobilise and withstand state repression (Zhao, 1998). The physical layout of urban environments influences the routes that protestors take through streets, public spaces, and state facilities (Zhao, 1998). For instance, mosques' role extends beyond their religious sphere to operate as sites, especially during Friday prayer, where brokerage (the connection of individuals across various social networks), social appropriation (transforming regular prayer activities into a protest-launching site), and diffusion take place. Furthermore, the presence of public squares, parks, or neighbourhood junctions can facilitate the congregation of protesters—particularly if these are located in densely populated or less accessible areas for state security forces. The clustering of such buildings and open spaces, or the presence of peripheral neighbourhoods connected to rural areas, can create favourable conditions for sustained mobilisation.

As discussed earlier, the rescaling of protest in Syria presents both analytical and theoretical points of scrutiny. As the Assad regime blocked city-level cascade, mobilisation was pushed into the city's micro-urban areas—inner streets, neighbourhood squares, and residential zones. Theoretically, different scales affect framing, continuity, and the nature of state response (Davis & Raman, 2013). City-level protests or sit-ins in central public spaces are highly visible and economically disruptive, occurring at major traffic intersections and crowded urban hubs, and they may catalyse negotiations between citizens and the state (Galián, 2018; Beissinger, 2022). By contrast, protests unfolding in local streets and underground spaces typically adopt a more radical, even revolutionary character, often going beyond any possibility for negotiation with the state. They are less visible and have a lower capacity to disrupt power dynamics, often more challenging for the state to suppress due to their decentralised nature and the difficulty of monitoring underground activities. Such protests are often more embedded in local identities and grievances, shaped by the specific socio-spatial characteristics of the area in which they occur. Analytically, spatial preconditions suggested by Beissinger (2022), such as positive feedback loops, should be reconceptualised on the neighbourhood level. Cascading mobilisation, whether upward or downward, operates through granular infrastructure such as mosques, dense street fabrics, and cohesive social structures on the local level.

The same spatial properties that offer variant capacities for mobilisation also shape the state's capacity for repression. The state's coercive toolkit operates through location-specific

strategies, varying from restricting groups' resources, de-recruiting members, eliminating organisational leadership, or creating unfavourable images for the movement organisation (Della Porta, 1999). Increasing the cost of mobilisation not only depends on the state's capacity to deploy security apparatuses to repress protestors in a certain neighbourhood, but also on the state's physical presence and infiltration capacity in that neighbourhood, through service provision, public institutions, and security buildings. A larger state footprint in a neighbourhood means that its residents are more likely to rely on the state for services and public employment, which also means the more the state can leverage this dependency to discipline protest activity, either by withholding services or by transforming state facilities into instruments of surveillance and coercion. Moreover, in socially heterogeneous neighbourhoods, the presence of social groups with political ties or economic ties to the state presents another layer of complexity. These actors might be mobilised by the state to repress protestors, infiltrate activist networks, or carry out counter-mobilisation campaigns. Thus, the state's varying capacity, rooted in the uneven spatial distribution of state presence, produces, when interacting with social and urban conditions, an uneven geography of initial protest.

### 2.2.3 From Mobilisation to Consolidated Mobilisation or Demobilisation

The third transition represents the phased logic of the framework: the same socio-spatial conditions that facilitated or hindered initial mobilisation might have different effects across phases. While initial phases are opportunity-driven, consolidated mobilisation is resilience-driven, sustained by the capacity of social and spatial structures to maintain high-risk mobilisation under escalating repression. Critically, the relationship between site and event is reconfigured. The spatial conditions that were decisive during the initial phase, such as visibility and gathering capacity, might become counterproductive under intensified repression, prioritising other factors, such as the cohesion of social networks and the defensibility of the urban environment (Beissinger, 2022) instead.

Here, the consolidation of mobilisation refers to political actors' capacity to sustain a critical mass of participants and maintain collective action over time, even under continuous state repression. Protest organisations work to build and extend grassroots networks capable of mobilising participants, and the state, in turn, seeks to demobilise them through direct repression or through the infiltration of movement organisations. The mechanisms that operate during consolidation differ from those that drove initial mobilisation. Mobilisation is more likely to be consolidated within dense, informal social networks operating through private and

kinship circles that are impenetrable to the state. Conversely, formal institutions are more easily identifiable and more easily suppressed. Local ties are also crucial in fostering a sense of solidarity. For instance, in small urban settings such as neighbourhoods, long-term emotional commitment (sense of place) tends to generate stronger communal bonds. This sense of solidarity reinforces collective resolve and makes participants more willing to undertake higher-risk activism (Jasper, 1998; McAdam, 1986). Significantly, this solidarity can extend even to reluctant community members, who might contribute resources and take part in the movement despite initial reluctance.

An important mechanism during the consolidation phase is the role of dense social ties in in-group policing and network defence. The same dense network that facilitated the circulation of information during the initial phase now functions as a security apparatus, monitoring group members and deterring potential informants from sharing intelligence with the state or engaging in counter-mobilisation activities. Deterrence can vary from public shaming to physical assault or expulsion of suspected collaborators. This mechanism primarily raises the cost of repression for the state.

The urban environment also shifts in function between phases. During the early phases, dense urban areas and gathering spaces served mainly as logistical enablers, providing spaces for convergence, escape routes, and protection from security raids. During the consolidation period, they played a different role as defensive infrastructures. Informal or high-density neighbourhoods with narrow, less-regulated streets pose significant challenges for state apparatuses seeking to crack down, disperse, and arrest participants and activists. This is because the state has limited access points, while protesters can disperse quickly within the maze of street networks (Zhao, 1998). This tactical advantage has a class and geographic dimension: the state is generally less tolerant of protests closer to centres of power and affluent neighbourhoods that host the upper classes, foreigners, and embassies, compared to poorer and informal areas where protests are less visible and pose less of a threat to regime stability (Schwedler & King, 2014). As the protests became more localised, the logistical management and protection of protest squares became a collaborative effort carried out by neighbourhood coordination groups, which depend on the site's physical defensibility as much as on social cohesion and cooperation among local residents.

Demobilisation is the reverse process, in which collective action declines until it eventually ceases. It can result from state repression, participation fatigue, or the fragmentation of activist

networks (Tarrow, 2011; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). States may employ a combination of policing tactics, such as selectively targeting the radical or violent elements of a movement while attempting to integrate or isolate moderate factions from the state (Della Porta, 1999). When coercion exceeds a certain threshold, a negative tipping point is reached (Beissinger, 2022). High-visibility repression in one neighbourhood might have spillover effects in surrounding areas, raising the cost of continued action. Therefore, state proximity infrastructures have a direct repression effect and an indirect effect on the cost-benefit calculations of potential participants across the neighbourhood's social network.

Depending on the mobilisation trajectory in an area, whether consolidated or suppressed, a secondary spatial dynamic emerges, in which individuals in the less active or repressed areas may relocate to areas with higher activism. A spillover effect across neighbourhoods emphasises the relational character of the framework, in which mobilisation trajectories in neighbourhoods are influenced by adjacent and connected sites.

## 2.3 Constructing Conditions and Variables

The framework developed in this chapter conceptualises mobilisation through the intersection of site and event, exploring how socio-spatial conditions enable or constrain transitions between phases of political mobilisation through the intersection with specific mechanisms, such as brokerage, diffusion, boundary activation, and their repressive counterparts. This intersection was grounded by a re-conceptualisation of the site as social, urban, and political conditions, and the event as phased periods of mobilisation, consolidated mobilisation, and demobilisation. The previous section discussed the theoretical mechanisms linking place-specific characteristics to the event's various periods. The next step is to translate both socio-spatial structures and event outcomes into measurable conditions and variables suitable for the QCA. The logic of QCA aligns with the framework's core premise: no single factor operates in isolation; rather, combinations of conditions constitute the causal pathways that produce or hinder mobilisation at each phase.

Social structures represent Agnew's sense of place, which influences socialisation, trust, and solidarity within neighbourhood communities. The mechanisms of boundary activation and attribution of similarity operate through the social substrate provided by social structures. Social conditions are captured through two main variables: population density (POPULATION), which measures the concentration of residents within neighbourhoods'

boundaries. In theory, higher population density is expected to increase the chances of direct social interactions and safe networking, within which the processes of trust, solidarity, and information exchange operate. Social homogeneity (SOCALST) captures categorical attributes defined by shared tribal identity, extended family connections, similar socioeconomic backgrounds, or ethnic ties that underpin collective identification, social bonds, and a sense of unity. While cohesion produced by tribal kinship differs from that produced by shared socio-economic marginalisation or ethno-sectarian composition, they are treated as one analytical indicator because of their shared functional effect: strengthening in-group trust and shared interpretive frames.

Urban structures approximate Agnew's locale, constituting physical infrastructure where brokerage, social appropriation, and diffusion operate. Urban conditions are operationalised through four variables. Streets density (STREETS) measures the connectivity and compactness of the neighbourhood's street network. Building density (FOOTPRINT) captures the compactness of the built environment, reflecting socio-economic activities and the physical conditions of everyday life. Denser areas and less regular streets serve two functions: during initial mobilisation, they facilitate social interaction through which mobilisation diffuses, while during consolidation, they function as defensive infrastructure, limiting state capacity to penetrate protesting neighbourhoods. Proximity to central public spaces (SQUARES) measures the neighbourhood's spatial relation to the city's centre and main gathering areas. It captures the centrality and visibility of the neighbourhood, a primary condition in Beissinger's positive feedback dynamics, as well as its proximity to the state's power symbols and, thus, repression dynamics. The spatial network of mosques (MOSQUES) measures the spatial density and clustering of mosques within and around the neighbourhood. The mosque functions as a site of social appropriation, serving as a natural gathering point for residents to share information during Friday prayers.

State presence approximates Agnew's location, the macro-order of power. It captures the spatial infrastructure of repression. State footprint is accounted for by two variables. Proximity to government buildings (GOV). The role of public institutions can serve dual functions: they may be used to co-opt public servants into supporting the state's narrative or be occupied by security forces and repurposed as security and military sites for attacking protestors. Proximity to security headquarters (SECURITY) captures the neighbourhood's distance from the primary coercive structures. Proximity to security infrastructure increases the state's surveillance capacity and the deployment of security forces into protest sites.

Table 1 presents the mechanism and conditions under each set of the site's components.

***Table 1. Site's components, conditions and mechanisms***

| Site component | Condition | Mechanism | QCA code |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Social Structures** | Population density | Trust-building, information circulation, routine co-presence | POPULATION |
| | Social homogeneity | Boundary activation, attribution of similarity, and in-group policing | SOCALST |
| **Urban Structures** | Street density | Diffusion, tactical advantage, defensive infrastructure | STREETS |
| | Building density | Social encounter, sheltering capacity | FOOTPRINT |
| | Proximity to the central square | Positive feedback (visibility, congregation) | SQUARES |
| | Proximity to mosque networks | Social appropriation, brokerage, gathering capacity | MOSQUE |
| **State Presence** | Government buildings | Co-optation, service politicisation, repurposing | GOV |
| | Security Headquarters | Repressive constraint, negative tipping signal | SECURITY |

Source: Author's own elaboration

# CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

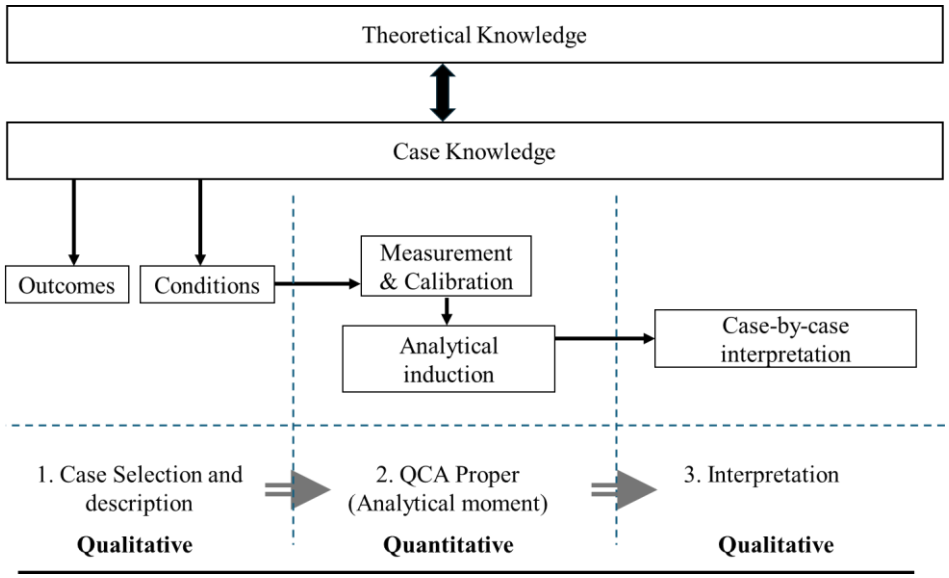
This chapter outlines the research design and methodology employed in this study. Given the complexity of the analysis, particularly the interaction between protest events and spatial configurations across multiple cities and time periods, a mixed-methods approach is adopted, namely Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). This approach integrates qualitative and quantitative logics to explore causal relationships through the systematic comparison of multiple cases, while balancing between quantitatively analysing a large number of cases (breadth) and establishing a degree of intimacy with some individual cases (depth) (Rihoux & Lobe, 2009).

The overall research design is guided by the sequential explanatory design model (Creswell & Clark, 2017), which is grounded in the principle of complementarity: each stage of the research framework is intended to build upon, refine, and clarify the insights derived from the preceding stages (Greene et al., 1989). QCA, as a configurational comparative method, examines conjunctural causation, identifying combinations of conditions, or causal pathways, that produce an outcome.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the QCA process encompasses three main steps:

1. A qualitative case knowledge stage, involving the theoretical and historical knowledge about conditions (the neighbourhoods of the three cities) and outcomes (phased patterns of protest mobilisation);
2. A quantitative QCA stage, in which conditions and outcomes are measured, calibrated, and tested for necessity and sufficiency using FsQCA software;
3. A return to qualitative analysis through case studies, in which selected neighbourhoods are examined in depth to trace how causal pathways identified by QCA operated in practice.

***Figure 4. Steps of QCA***




Source: Adapted from Rihoux and Lobe (2009)

The theoretical knowledge of conditions and outcomes is established in the previous chapter, intended to complement the subsequent case-specific knowledge in Chapter 4. The case knowledge phase involves a detailed socio-spatial analysis of three cities. This analysis aims to map key socio-spatial structures and define the internal boundaries of neighbourhoods, which serve as the primary units of analysis for the research. Empirical data on neighbourhood characteristics and the history of political activism were collected through a triangulation of in-depth interviews with residents and local activists, as well as secondary sources. The outcome variable (protest events) is disaggregated both temporally and spatially and analysed using event data obtained from the Syrian Memory Institute (SMI, 2024), which documented protests and non-violent activities between 2011 and 2013 (n=10,767 events). Non-violent activities, such as sit-ins, strikes, and funeral processions, were part of this analysis's repertoire of action, while armed activities were excluded, even though they coincided with peaceful actions within the broader political environment. These data were also cross-referenced with the in-depth interviews.

The QCA proper analysis begins with the quantification and operationalisation of both the site and the event, converting them into conditions and outcomes (variables). These data are summarised in numerical scores. After building data tables for both conditions and outcomes, the data are calibrated and tested for necessity and sufficiency to identify causal configurations,

corresponding to distinct phases of mobilisation: initial protest emergence, mobilisation consolidation, and demobilisation.

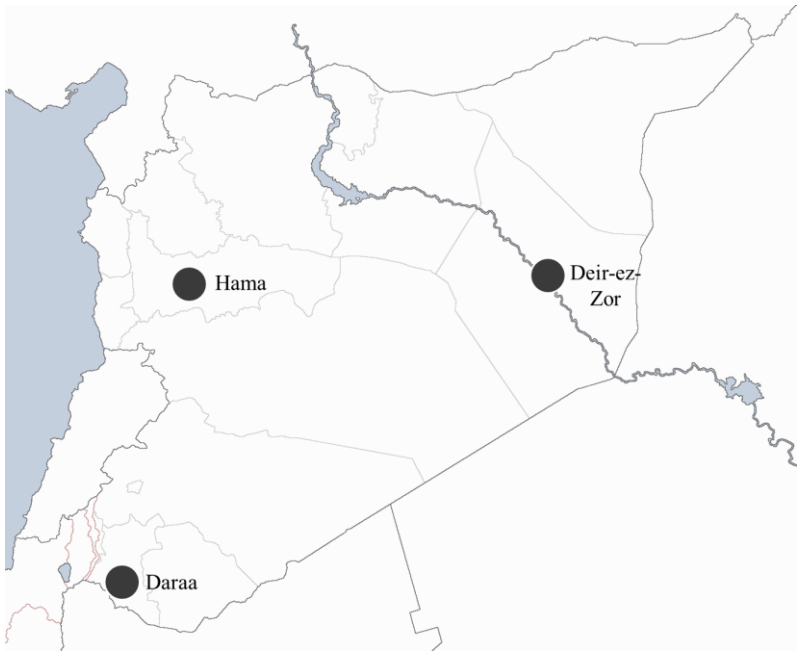
Finally, the QCA result table serves a dual purpose: identifying recurring causal pathways and helping to select representative case studies that illustrate each pathway. Case studies are examined thoroughly in the final empirical chapter 6, which seeks to explore how specific combinations of conditions influenced patterns of mobilisation in the neighbourhood in question.

## 3.1 Areas of Study

The research focuses on three mid-sized cities: Hama, Daraa, and Deir-ez-Zor, located in the central, southern, and northeastern regions of the country, respectively (Map 1). The selection of these cities was guided by several criteria to ensure achieving both diversity and analytical feasibility with respect to geographic, socio-political, and urban characteristics. These criteria encompass:

1. Administrative Significance: Each city functions as an administrative centre within its respective governorate, offering a variation in neighbourhoods, urban typologies, and social backgrounds, and ensuring a visible state footprint that encompasses institutions and public services.
2. Medium Size: Preference is given to mid-sized cities. This ensures a balance between social heterogeneity and the manageability of detailed, neighbourhood-level analysis.
3. Protest History: All three cities experienced persistent protest activity during the first two years of the Syrian Revolution (2011–2013), making them empirically relevant and analytically comparable cases.
4. Territorial and Political Division: Throughout the uprising and the subsequent conflict, the selected cities were divided politically and/or territorially based on the revolutionary turnout or direct military control by different armed groups. This variation in control and affiliation among neighbourhoods enables comparative analysis within and between cities.

***Map 1. Geographic Location of Selected Cities***




Source: Author's own elaboration

Beyond these criteria, selected cities exhibit various levels of social diversity, structures and urban typologies:

1. Daraa: Historically divided into two districts—the old part (al-Balad), predominantly inhabited by the city's tribes and characterised by traditional urban fabric, and the newer part (al-Mahata), which hosts a mixed population and accommodates most of the state's institutions.
2. Deir-ez-Zor: Situated along the Euphrates River, the city combines tribal-based social structures with spatial divisions that reflect common urban dichotomies such as working-class versus middle-class and old city versus new city.
3. Hama: Situated on the Orontes River, Hama is historically divided into two districts: one inhabited by the city's original families (al-Souq) and the other by newcomers from the surrounding rural areas (al-Hader). Hama also experienced a major military campaign by the Assad regime in the 1980s, which caused extensive destruction and the long-term depopulation of several neighbourhoods.

*Table 2. Socio-Spatial Characteristics and Protest Histories of Selected Cities*

| | Area (sq. km) | Population (as of 2004) | Number of Neighbour hoods | Social division | Number of Protests (2011-2013) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Daraa** | 15 | 146,481 | 23 | Tribal & old-new | 2,602 |
| **Deir-ez-Zor** | 41 | 239,196 | 26 | Tribal & socio-economic | 2,953 |
| **Hama** | 56 | 467,807 | 55 | Urban-Rural | 5,212 |

Source: Data compiled from Central Bureau of Statistics (2004) and Syrian Memory Institute (2024)

## 3.2 Case Knowledge

Case knowledge, or case description, develops an in-depth understanding of both site and event. For the site, this phase assembles historical information on key urban and social developments, focusing on three core sets of conditions: (1) the evolution of distinct urban forms and typologies; (2) the composition and spatial distribution of social groups; (3) and the spatial imprint of the state across the city's neighbourhoods. For the event, case knowledge provides a chronological account of the rise and the fall of mobilisation across the three phases of the uprising: mobilisation, mobilisation consolidation, and demobilisation, in each of the three cities.

### 3.2.1 Defining the Conditions: Socio-spatial Mapping

The initial phase of constructing case knowledge involves a detailed socio-spatial mapping of the three cities at the neighbourhood level, encompassing 104 neighbourhoods. This phase aims to generate spatial and social data for each city by delineating neighbourhood boundaries, identifying socio-economic characteristics, and mapping the distribution of state security and government buildings. The mapping process relied on a combination of secondary and primary data sources. Information on social structures and urban history was derived from in-depth interviews with residents and activists in each city, then triangulated with secondary sources, such as academic literature, local newspapers, and government or NGO reports. Demographic indicators were gathered from both official census materials and unofficial databases, while spatial features, including the geographic location of landmarks, urban facilities, and street

networks, were collected using crowdsource mapping services such as Google Maps, OpenStreetMap, and Wikimapia. Gaps that appeared during the mapping exercise were filled through follow-up interviews with original participants.

The integration of interviews into the mapping process is a crucial component of this approach, aligning with some principles of the participatory and narrative cartographic traditions. This approach prioritises combining top-down and bottom-up approaches to advance experiential and narrative mapping practices and to illuminate the role of space in people's lives (Crampton & Krygier, 2006). The approach also merges visual representations, such as digital maps, with verbal expressions derived from interviews. This hybrid methodology facilitates the production of alternative spatial imaginaries that may challenge or diverge from official state statistics or maps (Crampton & Krygier, 2006).

Such an approach is particularly necessary in the Mashreq region due to the scarcity, unreliability, and politicisation of official data at the local level, the lack of transparent urban planning frameworks, and the complex interplay of historical, social, and sectarian forces. These challenges make it extremely difficult to comprehend the city without engaging deeply with inhabitants' perceptions, perspectives, experiences, and spatial knowledge.

The mapping process began with desk-based historical research, examining patterns of urbanisation, rural-urban connections, and sectarian dynamics in each city. Data derived from secondary sources were triangulated with spatial data extracted from semi-structured interviews conducted with residents of the three cities. This historical context is crucial for comprehending how these cities have evolved and been stratified over time. Lines of socio-spatial stratification will be translated into intra-city boundary lines, classifying neighbourhoods based on shared urban, social, and economic characteristics.

The delineation of neighbourhood boundaries was guided by multiple factors that historically influenced urban development within each city. These include topographical and natural factors, such as rivers and mountains, the city's infrastructure and main roads, and different urban typologies. These factors served as layers intersected with official and nonofficial neighbourhood maps and triangulated with residents' perception of the boundaries of their neighbourhoods. Among the secondary sources to be utilised are Census data from the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics (2004); historical maps tracing patterns of urban expansion, obtained from open sources; existing urban profiling and mapping initiatives, such as the Urban

Syria Project (Urban-S) and UN-Habitat reports; and crowdsourced mapping platforms like Google Maps, OpenStreetMap, and Wikimapia.

Crowd-mapping services occupy an intermediate position in this model, which is located between the top-down and bottom-up approaches, helping to include both spatial and social dimensions on the map. While the top-down offers a structural view of buildings and roads, the bottom-up perspective provides insights into social meaning and lived functions of urban space, including relationships, functions, and names associated with these elements.

After completing the socio-spatial mapping, a detailed dataset is compiled at the neighbourhood level. This dataset includes three main categories of conditions: (1) urban conditions (urban density, street density, mosque networks, and proximity to main squares); (2) social conditions (population density and social homogeneity); and (3) state conditions (governmental buildings and security headquarters).

Between March 2020 and November 2023, the author conducted 27 semi-structured interviews with residents or former residents of Hama (9 interviews), Daraa (8) or Deir-ez-Zor (9). Due to security risks and travel restrictions, all interviews were conducted remotely via WhatsApp calls. The aim was to reconstruct the socio-economic landscape and key political events that unfolded there between 2011 and 2013. Achieving a geographical balance guided the selection of interviewees to ensure that most neighbourhoods (or at least urban typologies) would be represented. Of the 27 participants, at least 22 interviewees had been directly involved in the uprising as civilian participants, governance actors, or revolutionary activists, including two women. Several had lived, worked or been active in more than one neighbourhood, enabling comparative insights and cross-validation across areas.

The decision to focus on political activists as the primary group of interviewees stems from their capacity to provide insights into the interaction between residents, political actors, and the urban fabric during the Syrian uprising. This choice is not only useful for analysing the history of mobilisation and protests across the three cities, but also during the socio-spatial process, leveraging activists' critical understanding of public spaces, practices of state power, and the spatial dynamics of security and service provision.

One interviewee fled Hama during the Eighties Events and has not returned since, offering a unique perspective on the city's historical urban composition, neighbourhood development, and boundary reconfigurations over time. Another interviewee is a retired public servant who lives

in rural Hama and commuted daily into the city until 2013. Two others were civilian activists who later joined local Free Syrian Army (FSA) groups in Daraa and Deir-ez-Zor after the militarisation of the uprising.

Interviewees were identified through a combination of personal networks and local collaborators. Moreover, the researcher collaborated with a key informant in each city to construct a timeline of critical protest and conflict-related events; review and adapt city-specific questions; and propose additional interviewees based on location, experience, and neighbourhood coverage. Whenever certain neighbourhoods remained underrepresented in the sample, a snowball strategy was applied whereby previous interviewees were asked to recommend additional contacts.

A major limitation was the inability to achieve gender balance. This was mainly due to the researcher's difficulty in securing contacts with female participants through his network, partly because of the social constraints on women's public political involvement in the cities under study. To address this issue, the researcher relied on past interviews and publicly available testimonies from female activists. Another challenge was the decline in interview requests from some activists, who feared the psychological burden of revisiting traumatic memories, while others found it hard to recall precise details of events that took place 10 to 13 years ago.

The research ensured compliance with ethical standards throughout all stages of design, data collection, analysis, and dissemination. It adhered to the *Regolamento in materia di protezione dei dati personali dell'Università di Trento* (Rectoral Decree n. 281/2021), as well as to the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and applicable Italian legislation. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and political environments, only adults were interviewed; their participation was fully informed and voluntary. Because of logistical and security constraints, written consent forms could not be used. Instead, the researcher obtained verbal consent from all participants at the start of the interview, which was recorded in the transcript.

Participants were clearly informed of the research's aim, methods, and long-term purpose. They were told that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without providing a justification. Confidentiality and the anonymity of personal information were assured, and participants were granted the right to revise or request the removal of any interview content afterwards—especially if their personal circumstances changed. They were also encouraged not to disclose any sensitive or traumatic information unless they felt it was essential for the discussion. Additionally, due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the

potential risk of revisiting traumatic events, participants were advised to pause, skip questions, or end the interview at any time if they experienced emotional discomfort.

All personal data and information were handled with strict confidentiality and in accordance with the principles of purpose limitation, data minimisation, and storage limitation. Only data essential for the research aims were collected. Identifying information was removed from the transcripts and replaced with pseudonyms. In publications and outputs, any information that could reveal the participants' identities will not be disclosed. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored in the University of Trento's encrypted Google Drive environment, protected by passwords, and accessible only to the researcher. Additionally, any sensitive information concerning the participants or third parties was anonymised in the transcripts. Upon completion of the project, all interview materials will be permanently deleted or anonymised in accordance with UniTrento's data-retention policies.

The researcher's positionality, including his background and prior involvement in the events under study, was considered throughout the research process. It influenced access to participants and interactions with them during conversations. Reflexive practices were implemented to minimise potential biases, such as awareness of power imbalances, shared experiences, and cultural assumptions that could influence how participants' narratives are interpreted or represented. During the interviews, the researcher maintained a neutral and non-directive stance, avoiding attempts to contradict or sway participants' narration or interpretation of events.

The semi-structured interviews were mainly categorised into three main sets:

1. The socio-economic and governance structures in the neighbourhood where interviewees lived, worked, or frequently visited. They were asked to describe the living conditions, social composition, economic activities, and state footprint (in terms of services and institutions) in their areas. This line of questions followed principles of participatory mapping, in which participants were asked to delineate neighbourhood boundaries, identify key landmarks and facilities, and describe both the physical and social infrastructures of their area. Preliminary maps drawn by the researcher were regularly shared with the interviewees for feedback, validation, and correction.
2. The dynamics of mobilisation during the first two years of the uprising, focusing on the emergence and evolution of protest activity, the formation of local coordination committees, and the state's response during each phase of contention.

3. The dynamics of territorial division, focusing on changes in social and governance structures during years of fragmentation and armed conflict.

### 3.2.2 Defining the Outcome: Chronological Empirical Observation of Protest Activities

The second step of establishing case knowledge involves a chronological analysis of protest mobilisation at the neighbourhood level across the three selected cities. Protests and mobilisation dynamics were analysed across the three outcome phases examined in the QCA framework: mobilisation, mobilisation consolidation, and demobilisation. These stages serve as the core outcomes to be explained through the QCA.

Data on protests were sourced from the SMI protest database, which records 10,767 protest events in Daraa, Hama, and Deir-ez-Zor between 2011 and 2013. From 2019 to 2023, the researcher led the SMI team responsible for gathering, coding, and categorising this dataset. The protests database was created through a systematic visual analysis of protest videos uploaded on YouTube by local activists and media channels. The data collection involved scraping and filtering approximately 2.2 million Syria-related videos from YouTube using a set of keywords associated with events in Syria since 2011. These keywords were matched against video metadata, including titles, upload channels, and other textual information.

Initial codes were assigned automatically using Sinatool, a Python package for Arabic Natural Language Processing (NLP) (Hammouda et al., 2024). Protest events were filtered out using a predefined set of Arabic keywords, including synonyms for protest actions, revolutionary activities, state violence events, and geographic location names, fed into Sinatool. From this larger dataset, approximately 180,000 videos were identified as containing protest-related content, from which 10,767 distinct protest events were located within the three cities under study. To construct the protest dataset, several codes were assigned to each protest point, including:

- Date of the event;
- Location (coded at the neighbourhood level);
- Type of place (e.g., main square, street, university, neighbourhood, cemetery);
- Type of action (e.g., protest, sit-in, strike, or funeral procession);
- Time of protest (daytime or nighttime);
- Type of participants (e.g., students, women, children, or fighters);
- Friday name (symbolic titles often given to the protest day);

- Whether the protest was met with state violence.

The precise neighbourhood-level geolocation of 1,445 protest events (about 13.2% of the dataset) could not be determined. This was due to insufficient information in both the metadata and the video's visual and audio content, such as the absence of identifiable landmarks and geographic references in chants or banners. Therefore, the city name was used as the spatial identifier for these clips. They were included in the city-level analysis of protest frequency and state violence but were excluded from any neighbourhood-level analysis, including the QCA.

The SMI video archive was also used to triangulate and visually verify protest narratives and critical events mentioned by activists. Examples of critical events include the first protest in each city, major square occupations, massacres, and military and security operations carried out by regime forces. Visual comparison of protests allowed for the identification of key changes in the physical and organisational dynamics of protests across different phases of mobilisation. These changes included shifts in protest locations, crowd size, banners, flags, and the visibility of security forces. To document these transformations, screenshots were regularly captured from selected videos across different phases and locations, with particular focus on major squares and high-mobilisation neighbourhoods.

The number of protest events is considered the main indicator of mobilisation capacity. However, an associated limitation must also be addressed: uneven coverage across neighbourhoods and the risk of excluding everyday forms of resistance. While the data collection methodology partially addressed this challenge by drawing on a large pool of videos and comparing events recorded across multiple sources, the researcher further mitigated this risk by triangulating event data with accounts from activists who described the mechanisms and dynamics of everyday protest practices.

The numerical analysis of protest was systematically complemented by findings from in-depth interviews. As mentioned in the previous section, interviewee activists were intentionally selected from among those who resided and demonstrated in key mobilised neighbourhoods. The main goal of these interviews was to contextualise protest dynamics, including organisational structures, locations, and activist networks. Particular attention was given to the personal experience of participation in the demonstrations across different urban settings, encountering state repression, and living under different zones of control during the militarisation period. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using the thematic approach.

Key themes were identified and cross-referenced across accounts, particularly when multiple interviewees referred to the same events, actors, or neighbourhoods.

Participants were asked to provide spatial and organisational details about the protest organisation, how mobilisations were coordinated and communicated within their neighbourhood, the relationship between activists and local residents, and the repression tactics applied by the security apparatus. Moreover, interviewees were prompted to compare these elements across the phases, including initial mobilisation, consolidation of mobilisation, and demobilisation. For those who remained in the city during the militarisation phase, follow-up questions focused on the interaction between activist groups and military factions, including how the presence of armed actors influenced both the security landscape and local mobilisation capacities.

In addition to the original interviews, the researcher used 9 unpublished interview transcripts obtained from the SMI. These interviews were carried out between 2020 and 2021 by SMI researchers via WhatsApp calls. The SMI had obtained written informed consent from all participants to make their testimonies publicly accessible. However, since the transcripts were not yet public at the time of writing, all participants' names were anonymised, and pseudonyms were assigned to prevent traceability. The transcripts were securely stored on the University of Trento's encrypted Google Drive, protected by a password, and accessible only to the researcher. Once the project is complete, all interview materials will be either permanently deleted or anonymised in accordance with UniTrento's data-retention policies.

The interviews were unstructured, primarily consisting of testimonials from prominent activists across Syria, who shared their experiences and memories of mobilisation, state violence, and the early stages of militarisation. These materials improved understanding of protest networks and spatial dynamics and were used to verify the interview findings against the author's data and the quantitative protest dataset. On several occasions, the researcher contacted some of the SMI interviewees for follow-up interviews to gather additional details about specific events or mobilisation processes. These follow-up interviews were conducted under the same ethical protocols as the original interviews.

## 3.3 Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)

Having established theoretical and empirical knowledge about the site and the event, and operationalised both at the neighbourhood level, the research proceeds to the QCA to explore

how urban, social, and political conditions interact to create different patterns of mobilisation. The analysis was conducted with FsQCA 4.1. The selection of QCA as the principal method aligns with the main inquiry of this research concerning how a combination of conditions produces various outcomes across neighbourhoods. Rather than asking whether a single variable increases or decreases protest intensity, QCA asks in which combination this condition contributes to mobilisation, and how this contribution changes over time and contexts. This conjunctural logic cannot be captured by standard multivariable linear regression (Ragin, 1987; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012; Gerring, 2007). Qualitative methods are effective at tracing mechanisms within individual cases but fall short when systematically comparing large numbers of cases across diverse contexts. QCA balances two approaches: preserving the configurational and case-sensitive logic of qualitative research while enabling cross-case comparison through Boolean algebra (Goertz, 2017; Rihoux & Lobe, 2009). Moreover, QCA captures equifinality (the same outcome can result from different combinations of conditions), allowing us to understand how different conditions might lead to various outcomes. To grasp the main logic of QCA, rather than asking how population density affects protest intensity, QCA asks in which combination of other neighbourhood features population density contributes to mobilisation and how does the impact of population density alter under different conditions?

Due to the complexity of the research context, which includes urban, social, and political factors intertwined with highly dynamic protest activities, a mixed methods approach was preferred over a conventional qualitative approach or traditional statistical models. This choice is based on QCA's ability to examine how multiple conditions can work together to produce an outcome, explain equifinality—where different combinations of conditions can lead to the same outcome—and highlight asymmetries, whereby the presence and absence of a condition can have different effects on the outcome (Rihoux & Lobe, 2009).

QCA is especially suitable for systematic comparisons involving medium-N cases (roughly between 10 and 200) (Ragin, 1987). It primarily focuses on explaining outcomes, conducting case study analysis, and modelling causal complexity (Oana et al., 2021). It aims to identify the sufficient and necessary conditions for the occurrence of an outcome, while also exploring interactions among these individual conditions (Wagemann, 2014). This is achieved by combining a comparative method based on Boolean algebra with a case-based approach (Goertz, 2017). This allows the method to reconcile two seemingly contradictory goals: gaining in-depth insights and intimacy with different cases, while producing some level of

generalisation based on computer-aided numerical analysis (Ragin, 1987; Rihoux & Lobe, 2009).

The QCA procedure (the analytical phase) unfolds in several steps: (1) Measurement and Calibration, where raw data are converted into condition and outcome sets and then calibrated into fuzzy-set scores between 0 and 1; (2) analysis of necessity and sufficiency to identify which combinations of conditions are necessary or sufficient for the occurrence of the event under investigation; (3) and case study analysis to incorporate within-case insights into the analysis of causal mechanisms (Goertz, 2017).

### 3.3.1 Measurement and Calibration

Measurement refers to the empirical process of observing and quantifying both conditions and outcomes in the real world. This involves the systematic collection and organisation of qualitative and quantitative empirical information that reflects the characteristics of the selected cases. Multiple secondary datasets were obtained from open sources, including street networks, building footprints, population data, and urban facilities. Due to the unavailability of urban data at the neighbourhood level in Syria, the researcher utilised a series of spatial and statistical formulas to reconstruct and measure each condition at the neighbourhood scale. Table 3 provides an overview of datasets used in the analysis, while the actual measurement and data construction process is fully elaborated in Chapter 5.

***Table 3. Conditions Description and Source***

| Condition | QCA Code | Description | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| Building footprint density | FOOTPRINT | The building's layout area is divided by the neighbourhood area | Global ML Building Footprint Dataset (2023). Gaps in the data were filled using the Mapflow plugin in QGIS, based on 2011 satellite imagery. |
| Streets vertex density | STREETS | The number of street vertices divided by the neighbourhood area | OpenStreetMap (2024). Gaps in the data were filled manually by the researcher, relying on 2024 satellite images |
| Distance to Mosques | MOSQUE | The average distance from the neighbourhood centroid to all mosques within an 850-metre | Google Maps (2024), cross-referenced with interviews |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | radius | |
| Distance to main square(s) | SQUARE | The distance from each neighbourhood centroid to the nearest main square in the city. | Google Maps (2024) |
| Social density | POPULATION | The population in the neighbourhood divided by the neighbourhood area | Central Bureau of Statistics (2004) |
| Social Structures Homogeneity | SOCALST | The density of social ties and the ethno-sectarian homogeneity. | Interviews and cross-referencing of multiple secondary sources |
| Security Building Distance | SECURITY | The average distance of all security headquarters within a 1,500-metre radius from the neighbourhood's centroid. | Google Maps (2024), cross-referenced with interviews |
| Government Buildings Distance | GOV | The average distance of all governmental buildings within an 850-metre radius from the neighbourhood's centroid. | Google Maps (2024), cross-referenced with interviews |

Source: Author's own elaboration

Since QCA relies on Boolean algebra, it necessitates reducing each case to a series of variables, each summarised by numerical scores, a crucial step known as calibration. Calibration involves converting collected data into set-membership scores to assess whether and to what extent they belong to a specific set (Oana et al., 2021). Two types of sets are commonly used: crisp sets (binary, 0 or 1) and fuzzy sets (scores ranging between 0 and 1). Because the process involves numerical conditions and outcomes and requires assessing partial memberships (rather than binary membership), both continuous and multi-value fuzzy sets are employed. Each fuzzy set is calibrated using three anchor points: the minimum, mean, and maximum. Calibration is performed with the "calibrate (x, n1, n2, n3)" function in the FsQCA 4.1 software.

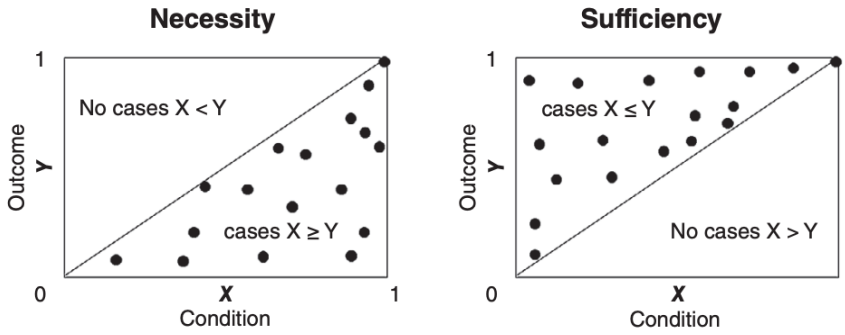
### 3.3.2 Analyses of Necessity and Sufficiency

Before analysing the configurational paths toward mobilisation, it is crucial to test whether some conditions are necessary for the outcome to occur. The analysis of necessity examines whether a condition or a combination of conditions constitutes a subset of an outcome. In

theory, a condition is necessary for the outcome when it is present in all instances where the outcome happens.

It is important to note that while the analysis of necessity and sufficiency for crisp sets deals with binary conditions (occurrence or non-occurrence), fuzzy sets allow for gradations in set membership. Fuzzy sets provide a more nuanced understanding of how conditions relate to the outcome, offering insights into whether a condition is "greater than" (necessity) or "smaller than" (sufficiency) the outcome set (Oana et al., 2021). In a fuzzy-set QCA, a condition is considered necessary if its membership score is consistently greater than or equal to a threshold of 0.90, as usually recommended in QCA methodological literature (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012).

***Figure 5. Necessity and sufficiency for fuzzy sets***




Source: Oana et al. (2021)

In contrast, sufficiency analysis examines whether specific configurations of conditions are sufficient to produce the outcome. The combination of conditions in QCA is represented using three operators: AND (*), OR (+), and NOT (~), which refers to the absence of the condition for the outcome, while the analysis of sufficiency is expressed by the arrow (→). These operators allow for the formulation of logical expressions that describe the relationships between conditions and the occurrence of outcomes. For instance, the following formula can be interpreted as follows:

$$A * B + \sim A * C \rightarrow Y$$

This reads: "The combination of presence of the conditions A and B, OR the com-bination of the absence of A and the presence of C, is a sufficient condition for Y" (Wagemann, 2014, p. 52). That is, either configuration (A*B) and (~A*C) is sufficient to produce Y, and neither needs the other.

Causal pathways are typically displayed in a Truth Table, where each row represents a specific combination of conditions. Together, the rows map all combinations that lead to the outcome. The Truth Table supports a process of logical minimisation, helping the researcher to detect regularities, identify deviant cases, and derive simplified causal formulas. However, as the analysis comprises a large number of conditions (8) and highly heterogeneous cases (104), the truth table analysis tends to provide complex solutions with low consistency and coverage scores. The researcher, therefore, used the Analytic Induction Tool instead.

The Analytic Induction Tool follows the same logical structure as the truth table but allows the researcher to make theoretically informed and subjective decisions about the status of conditions (present or absent) and the outcome cut-off (the value at which the outcome is coded as 1). These decisions are grounded primarily in the study's theoretical framework and the researcher's substantive knowledge of the cases.

The threshold for outcome inclusion is defined as follows:

- For the occurrence of the event, the outcome cut-off was set to > 0.75 to only consider neighbourhoods that exhibit high and consistent mobilisation.
- For the negated outcome (i.e., cases with minimal or no mobilisation), the threshold was set to < 0.25, focusing on neighbourhoods located in the lowest quartile of mobilisation.

### 3.3.3 Robustness Tests

Robustness tests address potential limitations arising from the data: the large and heterogeneous cases (104 neighbourhoods), the number of conditions (8), and the skewed distribution of protest data. The sensitivity and robustness tests ensure that these expected limitations do not affect the models' stability or interpretability. These tests involve modifying any dominant cases or conditions and rerunning the QCA model to verify whether it remains consistent and significant.

## 3.4 Case Studies Analysis

A second output of the QCA process is the identification of representative cases corresponding to specific configurations of conditions deemed necessary or sufficient for mobilisation. From each distinct combination of conditions generated by the Analytic Induction process, one representative neighbourhood is selected for in-depth qualitative case-study analysis. Case

study analysis seeks to produce a richer and engaging interpretation of the outcomes, including their causal narratives. More focused causal questions were asked during this phase, moving beyond pattern identification to explore the underlying mechanisms that enabled or constrained mobilisation in particular spatial and social contexts (Rihoux & Lobe, 2009).

The aim is to understand how specific combinations of conditions interact to either enable or prevent the event. This involves tracking the inclusion or exclusion of each chosen neighbourhood across different phases of the uprising. This will be achieved by analysing the results of semi-structured interviews with activists from the selected neighbourhood, direct visual observations of protest videos archived by the SMI, and secondary sources such as local online newspapers and social media platforms that documented key events in the relevant areas.

There are three ways of interpretation (Rihoux & Lobe, 2009):

- Case-by-case interpretation: It involves translating the various conditions indicated by the minimal QCA path into a causal narrative specific to each case. This approach allows the exact configuration of conditions to be understood in multiple ways, which is useful when similar conditions lead to divergent outcomes.
- Cross-case interpretation: In addition to the thick interpretation of individual cases, it also seeks to identify common mechanisms, patterns, and contrasts.
- 'Limited historical' generalisation: although generalisation is not a primary aim of QCA, it allows for hypothesis-like insights that offer a limited historical generalisation beyond individual cases. These generalisations are confined in scope, but their propositions can be partly applied to other cases sharing key features with the studied cases.

The selection of case studies follows the logic of causal pathways (Beach & Pedersen, 2013; Gerring, 2007). Each chosen case represents one causal pathway identified through the Analytical Induction process. The selection approach also aims to maximise variation across cities and phases, while prioritising in-depth analysis within each case to examine temporal sequences, adaptive strategies, and individual agency.

The decision to combine configurational analysis with mechanism-based case study analysis aims primarily to maximise the strength of QCA and minimise its shortcomings. While QCA identifies combinations of conditions associated with an outcome, it falls short in capturing three crucial dimensions: the temporal sequencing within a phase, the tactical innovation and

agency, and repression as a temporally varying structural condition. By deploying mechanisms developed theoretically in Chapter 2, including diffusion, brokerage, social appropriation, boundary activation, and negative tipping dynamics, the aforementioned limitations could be compensated for. In sum, the configurational approach identifies which neighbourhood possess the spatial preconditions for the mechanisms to operate, while the case studies inform the research on whether and how they operate.

# CHAPTER 4. CASE KNOWLEDGE: UNDERSTANDING THE SITE AND THE EVENT

This chapter provides detailed case knowledge of both the site and the event under investigation: the neighbourhoods of the three mid-sized Syrian cities: Hama, Daraa, and Deir-ez-Zor, during the non-violent protest mobilisation between 2011 and 2013, which unfolded with escalating regime repression and anti-regime armed rebellion. Case knowledge is a foundational step in Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), as it guides the selection of analytical conditions, outcomes, and cases. As in previous chapters, the site and the event are examined separately. The chapter draws on original data from 27 in-depth interviews conducted between 2020 and 2023 with residents and activists from neighbourhoods across the three selected cities, who witnessed substantial episodes of the revolution both within their own neighbourhoods and across the wider city. This qualitative material is triangulated with secondary sources to validate the socio-spatial characteristics of the neighbourhoods and the main events that unfolded within them. Data on protests are drawn from the Syrian Memory Institute (SMI) visual archive, which documents 10,767 protest events across the three cities between 2011 and 2013.

The chapter is organised into two main parts. The first section offers a historical overview of the evolution of three cities by examining their socio-spatial stratification and its influence on their political participation during the Syrian Revolution. The historical analysis primarily aims to trace the urban growth and socio-spatial organisation of these cities through exploring the interaction between social structures and natural environments. The evolution of these cities is conceptualised in three distinct yet overlapping phases: the rise of the old city, the rise of the modern city, and the rise of the informal city. In each phase, multiple social, urban, and political factors are considered—such as topography, migration patterns, urban-rural relationships, and politico-economic development—to analyse their roles in shaping urban forms, social fabrics, and the state's presence across the city. As discussed in previous chapters, this historical background not only provides context but also establishes the socio-spatial conditions that form the core of QCA analysis.

The second section provides an in-depth analysis of protests and non-violent activities in the three cities under study. It specifically describes how mobilisation has evolved in each city, including the start of the first protest, the expansion of protests from main squares to

neighbourhoods, and within neighbourhoods. It also covers the decline of mobilisation due to state repression, mobilisation fatigue, and militarisation of the conflict. Because spatial and temporal dimensions are central to this analysis, a thorough descriptive account illustrates the distribution of protests over time and across neighbourhoods, urban types, and spatial scales. Empirical data on protests are drawn from the SMI's Protest Dataset.

## 4.1. Urban Development of Mid-sized Cities in Syria: Hama, Daraa and Deir-ez-Zor

The three cities developed in overlapping layers of urbanisation linked to a specific pattern of growth and socio-spatial configuration. Due to urban policies enacted by successive governing authorities, these layers developed almost independently and remained spatially separate. Little has been done to bridge these divides, thereby perpetuating disparities in wealth distribution, access to urban services, and relationships between the state and residents. This chapter explores these three phases of urban development that correspond to the triadic structure of these cities: the old city, the modern city, and the informal city.

1. **The old city**: dense, unregulated urban environments, with stable, extended family networks, minimal state presence, and traditional economic activities dominate.
2. **The modern city**: planned neighbourhoods constructed under state supervision, hosting most governmental institutions, receiving better services, but with less homogeneous social structures than the old city.
3. **The informal city**: newer but morphologically similar to the old city in terms of high density and irregular street layouts, self-built by residents in response to failed housing policies and persistently underserved by the state.

### 4.1.1 The Rise of the Old City

Hama, Daraa, and Deir-ez-Zor are among Syria's ancient cities, each serving as a regional administrative and urban centre in their respective governorates—central, southern, and northeastern Syria. Like many old cities, they were initially formed around vital water sources, primarily rivers. The importance of these rivers went beyond providing water to urban communities; they also shaped the social, urban, and environmental landscapes. The river played a crucial role in forming local identity, becoming embedded in the history and development of each city. The spatial organisation of these urban centres, especially during the early Islamic era, was influenced by environmental, geographic, and socio-political factors.

Their integration into broader networks of trade, transportation, and production, along with the influence of specific social structures, legal frameworks, and political systems, led to distinct urban forms (Abu-Lughod, 1987).

The strategic placement of these cities, along rivers, in valleys, and across fertile plains, attracted populations from diverse social, tribal, and ethno-sectarian backgrounds, drawn by economic opportunity and shaped by evolving governance strategies. A mixture of topographic features, social composition, economic activity, and political authority, including rural-urban relations and state policy, interacted to shape the internal division lines. The historical development of these cities was not linear but layered: each phase added a new layer without necessarily erasing what came before. Internal divisions, therefore, came to reflect the long-running tensions and interactions between geography, governance, and demography.

Topography and environmental factors

The city of Hama draws much of its identity from the Orontes River, which continues to shape the city's parks, farmlands, and open spaces (Alsumsam, 2017). The ancient wooden wheels, or Norias, built along both sides of the river during the Roman and Byzantine periods to supply drinking and irrigation water (Alkilani, 1969), remain among the city's most iconic symbols. Hama is sandwiched between the Syrian Desert to the east and the Alawite Mountain range to the west. The Orontes effectively divides Hama into two historically and socially distinct areas: the southwestern part, known as Souk, and the northeastern part, called Hader. Geographically, the western bank, generally the Souk, connects to the agricultural countryside and was the first inhabited area, housing the central market and native Hamawi families (Lutfi, 2017). Conversely, the eastern side, Hader, became home to migrants from rural regions, who maintained some of their rural customs and lifestyle. The city's topography, characterised by hills, valleys, staircases, steep inclines, and retaining walls, further defines the layout of the urban landscape.

Similarly, Deir-ez-Zor is divided by the Euphrates River into two parts: Shamiyah and Jazeera. These two banks are connected by five bridges, most notably the Deir-ez-Zor Suspension Bridge, which has become one of the city's key monuments and symbols. The city's expansion has been naturally limited by Therdeh Mountain to the south and the Euphrates River to the north, guiding its growth mainly toward the east and west. Originally built on a hill next to the Euphrates, known as Old Deir, the city expanded throughout the early 20th century (Elaph, 2019). Topographical features have also influenced the names of various neighbourhoods, such

as Joubeleh (small mountain) and Jourah (hole), which were shaped by their physical landscapes—built on hills and lowlands, respectively.

Daraa, located on the southern side of the Zaidi Valley, benefited from the valley's water supply and natural defence along its northern and eastern edges. The initial settlement was established on a small hill, now known as the Karak neighbourhood, chosen for its elevated position, which provides increased security for its residents (Miqdad, 2024). Over the centuries, the city expanded northward, forming a natural divide between the southern, older part, Daraa Balad (the town), and the newer northern section, called Daraa Mahatta (the station).

These natural geographical divisions have, over time, transcended their geographic characteristics to shape social and economic patterns within these cities. Neighbourhoods developed unique physical shapes, social makeup, and economic activities based on their proximity to rivers, valleys, and the surrounding countryside. Such factors have not only affected their social standing within the urban hierarchy but also shaped their relationship with the state and the broader urban population.

Social and economic factors

As discussed earlier, the historical development of the classical Mashreq societies during the early Islamic period was deeply rooted in tribe, sect, or class affiliations. These forms of social stratification were not only evident in interpersonal interactions but also manifested spatially, with people tending to cluster in specific urban quarters based on these affiliations. To some extent, belonging to a particular social group or residing in a specific city quarter often influenced individuals' economic activities, access to material resources, and relationships with the ruling elite (Ibrahim, 1996). For instance, people from the same tribe or sect frequently engaged in similar economic pursuits, reinforcing social cohesion and a shared identity within their neighbourhoods. In subsequent decades, urban expansion became increasingly influenced by extended family structures and the principles of family-owned private property. Neighbours played a significant role in approving building decisions (Wind & Ibrahim, 2020), emphasising two characteristics: ensuring the presence of the same families in the same neighbourhoods and houses for generations; and maintaining social homogeneity within each quarter, as neighbours possessed a certain authority over building decisions, enabling them to select individuals with similar social and economic status.

These dynamics were particularly clear in Hama, where local identity was shaped by religion, ethnicity, and economic factors. Although the city was mainly Arab Sunni, it also housed several minority groups such as Turkmens, Kurds, Christians, and Jews (Lutfi, 2017). These groups often lived in separate neighbourhoods named after them. Economic stratification also significantly influenced the city's layout, as people engaged in the same craft usually lived in the same quarters. Craft guilds, led by the Sheikh al-Kar, served as governing bodies for the working class, establishing an economically based system of segregation (Reilly, 2002; Ibrahim, 1996).

In Daraa and Deir-ez-Zor, social structures showed slightly different patterns, heavily influenced by tribal makeup. Daraa's neighbourhoods are mainly divided among major tribes, each mainly occupying specific areas. The presence of families outside these prominent tribes, or of non-native families, in Daraa Balad has remained minimal. Intra-family marriages and shared economic activities, especially farming, further strengthened social bonds within these neighbourhoods (Abu Fakhir, 2005). Notably, the concept of the tribe in Daraa differs from that in other regions of Syria, aligning more with the idea of an extended family than with the Bedouin tribes common in the northeast Syrian desert (Heydemann & Leenders, 2012).

Similarly, Deir-ez-Zor had a distinct tribal-based social structure, mainly made up of Arab Sunni tribes that settled in the city during the 18th and 19th centuries, along with some Kurdish tribes and Armenian families. In the mid-19th century, the Ottoman Empire made Deir-ez-Zor an administrative centre, which at that time consisted of a single neighbourhood, the Old Deir, divided into three districts: Eastern, Central, and Western. Within each district, new coalitions formed, comprising a mix of tribes, with neighbourhoods often named after tribal leaders, such as Baqget Abdelaziz and Sheikh Mandeel (Salameh, 2017). However, these coalitions also caused tension and social division in the city, leading prominent families to dissolve them in the 1930s. This shift led to a more unified urban identity based on neighbouring proximity, economic, and marital ties, giving Deir-ez-Zor a unique character compared to other tribal-based towns in Syria.

State policies and early patterns of urban expansion

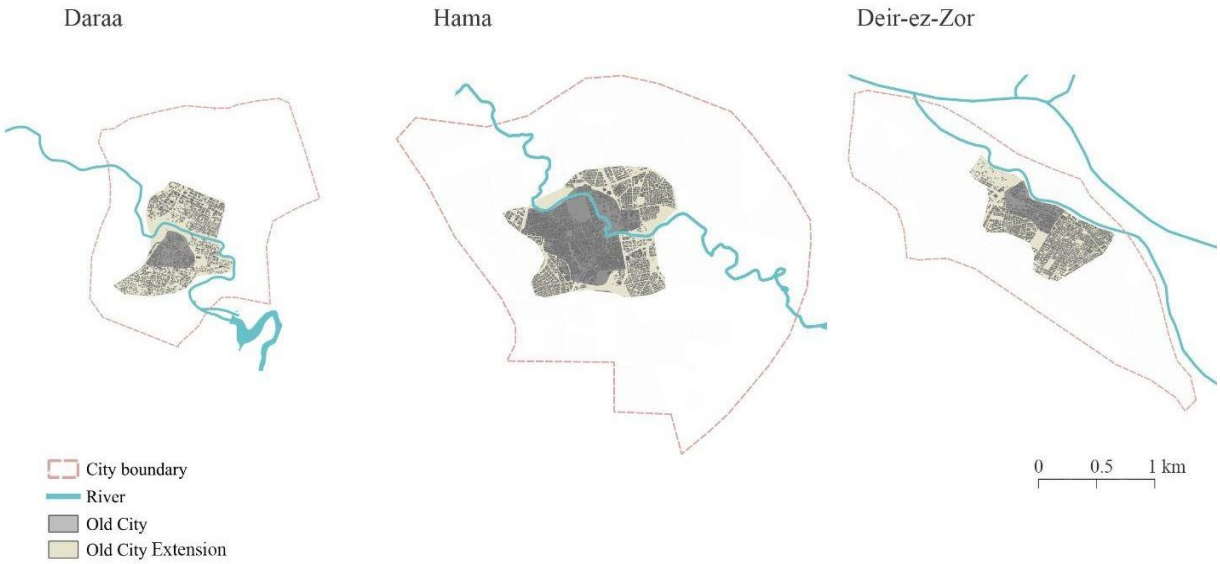
By the first decade of the 20th century, Daraa consisted solely of its southern part, Daraa Balad, until the construction of the train station and the municipal palace (Saraya) as part of the Ottomans' broader modernisation agenda. These two developments served as the nucleus for the city's expansion northward, which came to be called Daraa Mahatta. The Saraya became a

symbol of the urban centre, in contrast to the Qaraya (rural areas), while Mahatta represented the modern city in contrast to the old city core (Balad). Soon after the station and the Saraya were built, a commercial hub arose between them, housing government buildings and triggering a shift of administrative and commercial functions towards Mahatta (Miqdad, 2024). The development of new neighbourhoods such as Shamal al-Khat and Mataar accompanied this shift.

A similar pattern occurred in Deir-ez-Zor, where urban expansion started in the late 19th century after the city was designated as an Ottoman administrative centre. The first ruling palace (Saraya) was constructed, and many tribal leaders, key figures in maintaining the safety of transportation routes, settled in the city. Several new neighbourhoods, including Hamidiyeh, Sheikh Yassin, Rushdiyeh, and Aradi, expanded beyond the old city limits to the east and west. By the second half of the 19th century, Deir-ez-Zor experienced rapid growth, with the construction of several urban facilities, such as schools and mosques, as well as bridges connecting the two banks of the Euphrates River, including the iconic Deir-ez-Zor Suspension Bridge, completed in 1920 (Mousa, 1993).

In Hama, the period of French Mandate governance (1920–1946) marked a significant acceleration in urban development. The city was engaged in extensive new infrastructure projects, including public buildings, palaces, and plazas. The old city consisted of five residential quarters, distributed across the Souk and Hader districts. These districts and quarters laid the groundwork for Hama's subsequent expansion. Because of the strong, socially cohesive nature of older neighbourhoods, the city's growth developed organically at the neighbourhood level, with each gradually expanding into adjacent lands while often maintaining its social structure.

***Map 2. Old City and Extension in Hama, Daraa and Deir-ez-Zor***




Source: Generated by the author using QGIS

### 4.1.2 The Rise of the Modern City

As previously explained, the Ottomans implemented major modernisation plans that established administrative and residential districts separate from the old city. These new urban divisions reinforced existing class and economic distinctions, deepening the spatial divide between the historic and new parts of the cities (Arnaud, 2008). The arrival of colonialism further transformed the demographic and urban landscapes of cities to serve colonial objectives, such as the extraction of natural resources and their transportation to Europe, as well as the integration of colonies into the global capitalist system (Ibrahim, 1996).

As Daniel Neep (2012) explains, urban planning policies implemented during the French Mandate and later adopted by post-independent governments were driven by political and social engineering goals. The construction of distinct modern quarters outside the old city was not only intended to expand state infrastructure but also to distance the state's presence from the dense, cohesive fabric of the historic urban centre. This was also aimed at containing potential political contention within the old city and preventing its spread to other parts of the city. Additionally, the introduction of highways leading to and cutting through the old city served two purposes: to ensure the state's physical accessibility and to transform the old city's layout. This transformation involved demolishing and replacing existing structures with modern infrastructure or transferring some buildings into museums and heritage sites (Neep,

2012). These interventions directly impacted the social fabric of the area, particularly targeting the influence and cohesion of clan-based networks.

State policies of urban development

During the independence era, Hama's urban development was systematised through the implementation of successive master plans. In 1944, the French engineer Michel Ecochard proposed the first master plan, which introduced several public spaces, main roads, and bridges, such as Saeed bin Al Aas Street, Al Alameen Street, and Al Quatly Streets. These infrastructural interventions became defining elements of the city's spatial organisation, creating new axes of connectivity across different parts of the city (Alsumsam, 2017), often cutting into its old and organic neighbourhoods and agricultural lands on both banks of the river. A new city centre emerged east of the river, centred around Asi Square, attracting most governmental and public institutions and becoming a central hub from which key streets radiated (Almgarbi, 1969).

Over the following decades, Hama's urban growth sped up. The government introduced more organised building regulations and land-use policies to control the rapid expansion (Alkilani, 2002). Two more master plans were introduced in 1960 and 1985. These expansions stretched the city eastwards, westwards, and northwards, fostering the development of new residential neighbourhoods characterised by two- to three-storey buildings (Alsumsam, 2017). While seemingly aimed at improving mobility and facilitating urban growth, these infrastructure policies also had significant political effects. By dividing some neighbourhoods and enhancing the government's access to the old city, they strengthened government control and surveillance, especially after the violent conflicts of the 1980s—a strategy also used in other cities, such as Damascus (see Neep, 2012).

Deir-ez-Zor was among the fastest-growing cities in Syria during the second half of the twentieth century. Its urbanisation rate rose from 26% in 1960 to 30% in 1980 (Mousa, 1993), and it recorded one of the highest annual population growth rates, at 4.3% (CBS, 2004). From the 1950s, the city expanded with the construction of new wide streets running parallel and perpendicular to the Euphrates River, linking various districts. By the 1990s, Deir-ez-Zor comprised 14 distinct neighbourhoods (Mousa, 1993), and five additional zones were incorporated into the city's 2009 Regulatory Plan.

Unlike other Syrian cities, Deir-ez-Zor lacks a well-preserved heritage old city, with only small, confined areas such as the historical markets in Sheikh Yassin, Ali Bek, and Hamidiyeh. The reason dates back to 1968, when the city council, under the pretext of removing abandoned and unregulated buildings, demolished the old urban centre and built a new government quarter in its place (Khafaji, 2018). This approach clearly diverged from that of subsequent Syrian governments, which generally avoided constructing government buildings in old city centres. Many residents attribute this decision to political tensions between rural-origin bureaucrats and urban elites who had traditionally inhabited the area (Interviewee#14).

On a social level, the state adopted a strategy to attract rural leaders aligned with the regime to Deir-ez-Zor by using land reform regulations and agricultural cooperatives. These individuals were incorporated into bureaucratic and political institutions, thereby reducing the power of traditional urban tribal leaders. This resulted in the emergence of a new class of regime-aligned individuals who assumed leading roles within syndicates, labour unions, and parliament (Awwad, 2021).

In the built environment, most of Deir-ez-Zor's buildings are apartment blocks ranging from two to four storeys, except in Hawiqa, where soil conditions restrict construction to single-storey buildings at lower densities. The city's outskirts are home to low-income neighbourhoods such as Jourah, Mowazafien, Oumal, and Hamidiyeh. These areas are characterised by cement-brick buildings, with fewer stone structures (Mousa, 1993). Neighbourhoods such as Oumal (Labourers), Mowazafien (Employees), Rasafeh, Arafi, and Sina'a (Industrial), all developed after the 1960s, reflect the state-driven effort to accommodate labourers migrating to the city. However, most residents in these areas migrated from surrounding rural regions, seeking employment or educational opportunities as agricultural conditions declined in their communities. The newest neighbourhoods in the city, Qusur and Villat, have attracted upper-middle- and high-income residents, including skilled workers, traders, and public officials.

Political events

Local and regional political events in the decades leading up to 2011 played a formative role in shaping the urban landscape and social dynamics of many Syrian cities, both directly and indirectly. In Hama, these events led to waves of destruction and subsequent reconstruction, while in Daraa, they triggered mass refugee influx into the city.

Two major waves of migration impacted Daraa and Hama, both prompted by regional crises: the 1948 Palestinian Nakba and the 1973 Arab Israeli War, which led to the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights. These upheavals caused a significant influx of Palestinians and internally displaced Syrians from the Golan who sought refuge in various urban centres such as Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, and Daraa. In Daraa, two camps were set up in the eastern part of Daraa Mahatta, one for Palestinian refugees and another for displaced Syrians. Likewise, in Hama, al-Aa'deen Camp was established in 1950 to house Palestinian refugees.

By the 1960s and 1980s, Hama became a key site for significant political unrest, marked by armed confrontations between Islamic militants affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Syrian government. The deadliest episode of the conflict occurred in February 1982 when dozens of army units advanced towards the city, besieging and shelling it for three weeks and ultimately suppressing the rebellion. The fighting was particularly fierce in the Baroudyeh and Kaylanyeeh neighbourhoods, where most buildings were destroyed, including historic landmarks such as mosques, public baths, palaces, and museums like the 'Azm Palace Museum (Seale, 1989). These areas were later redeveloped with government complexes, public parks, and hotels. Other neighbourhoods, such as Baroudyeh, Amirieh, Dabbaghah, Bashoura, and Hamidiyeh, experienced partial damage (SNHR, 2022).

The traumatic legacy of the massacre together with the imposition of security measures on the Hamawi population and rising sectarian tensions between Hama's Sunni majority and surrounding Alawi communities, made the city less attractive to other Syrians for living or working. As a result, rural-urban migration in Hama remained low compared with other major cities such as Homs and Aleppo. Instead, urban growth in Hama came mainly from internal expansion, with older neighbourhoods gradually spreading into nearby vacant land. Socially, the Syrian regime undertook strategic efforts to reshape Hama's cohesive local society. A key tactic was building ring roads that cut through the historic city, breaking up cohesive neighbourhoods and enabling the rapid deployment of security forces. Additionally, several developments were built on the city's western and southern outskirts, including Taawuneyeh, Abe al-Feda, Ba'ath Youth Housing, and Thi Qar, intended to house various social groups, including public servants, military personnel, low-income residents, and wealthier populations.

Rural-urban relations

Deir-ez-Zor experienced notable population growth, increasing from under 30,000 in 1947 to 111,000 in 1987, and reaching 269,000 by 2010. Two major waves of rural migration

contributed to this expansion. The first occurred after the discovery of oil in the governorate, transforming the city into a major administrative and services centre, which attracted job seekers. The second wave, between 2003 and 2010, was driven by a severe drought that devastated agriculture and livestock, forcing many rural residents to migrate to cities (Barout, 2011). Additionally, the Ba'ath regime's populist policies, such as land reforms, the creation of farmer cooperatives, and the co-optation of rural elites into the state bureaucracy, further strengthened the influence of rural populations in urban areas and diminished the traditional urban elites (Awwad, 2021).

Newcomers to Deir-ez-Zor often settled in the newly built neighbourhoods on the city's southern and eastern peripheries, such as Oumal and Mowazafien, where the government implemented programmes allocating newly parcelled plots of land to low-income families and public servants. A large percentage of them belonged to tribes with geographic connections to these neighbourhoods. For instance, families from Bukhabour in Eastern Rural Deir-ez-Zor predominantly settled in the eastern neighbourhoods of Old Mataar, Sina'a, and Harabish. Meanwhile, the Busaraya tribe, originally from Southern Rural Deir-ez-Zor, settled in southern neighbourhoods such as Arafi and Mowazafien. In contrast, the Bushalhoum tribe, from Husainiyah in Northern Rural Deir-ez-Zor, established a presence in the northern Hawiqa neighbourhood.

Like Deir-ez-Zor, Daraa experienced a similar pattern of rapid population growth in the decades prior to 2011, driven by increased urbanisation. Between 1970 and 2010, the governorate's urbanisation rate rose from 13% to 41% (Rabdawi, 2014). By 2004, the city's population had reached 146,000, accounting for about 15% of the governorate's total population, yet still among the lowest urban proportions compared to other major cities in Syria. Since its inception, Daraa Mahatta has served as a commercial and administrative centre for neighbouring rural areas. The organic interdependence between Daraa and its rural hinterland extended beyond commerce, with rural residents often investing their agricultural profits into the city's trade and construction sectors. These investments played a key role in Daraa's urban expansion and the emergence of new neighbourhoods such as Kashif, Qusur, and Sabeel.

Hama, however, had a complex relationship with its countryside. Historically, Hama served as a commercial hub, leveraging its strategic location between the "desert and the sown" to facilitate trade in livestock, agricultural products, and small-scale manufacturing, such as

cotton, leather, and cheese production (Lawson, 1982; Reilly, 2002). The Hader district thrived due to its geographic connection to the desert. In the 19th century, Hama's economy further integrated into global trade networks, with the silk textile industry gaining prominence. Rural residents frequently travelled to Hama for trade and work, and many eventually settled in the eastern part of the city. In turn, urban merchants invested in rural economic activities (Lutfi, 2017; Reilly, 2002). The rise of the Ba'ath Party in the 1960s profoundly altered Hama's social, political, and economic landscape. The city's economy, traditionally driven by small manufacturers and traders who were closely linked to rural agricultural production, was destabilised by the regime's emphasis on large-scale state-led industrialisation.

### 4.1.3 The Rise of the 'Informal City'

The continuous growth of urban populations, driven by both natural increase and rural-urban migration, consistently exceeded the state's capacity to provide adequate housing. This demographic pressure produced a new urban typology beyond the officially regulated zones—informal areas. Unlicensed and unplanned urban expansion became a mass social phenomenon, especially after the 1960s, coinciding with the rise of the Ba'ath Party and its populist policies to reverse colonial legacies through land reform and rural development. When those policies largely failed to develop rural regions, migration to cities surged at a rate that surpassed the cities' ability to accommodate newcomers, particularly in the absence of sufficient state-led affordable housing projects (Rodríguez-Pose & Griffiths, 2021). Informal housing became the primary alternative for low-income households unable to afford the rising market rates (Goulden, 2011). During this period, informal areas not only housed rural migrants but also urban residents who could not secure or afford regulated housing.

The distinction between formal and informal housing has become increasingly apparent over time (Elsheshtawy, 2008), highlighting intra-city socio-economic inequalities and uneven distribution of wealth and services. This formal-informal divide intersects with the old-modern duality already present. Although all informal areas are relatively recent, they often resemble traditional neighbourhoods in their built form, social structures, and infrastructure. Typically, informal areas are characterised by high-density residential clusters arranged in irregular layouts with narrow, unplanned streets. These spatial patterns often create inaccessible open spaces and increase the internal density of social structures. Additionally, urban informality frequently intersects with ethno-sectarian and regional dimensions. Newcomers from specific regions tend to settle together, forming cohesive communities. This pattern of spatial

distribution has remained relatively stable over time due to low residential mobility and the influence of state employment and housing allocation policies.

Urban sprawl involves not only the influx of rural migrants into cities but also the physical expansion of cities into surrounding rural territories. This unplanned growth led to the creation of informal zones outside municipal planning frameworks, with some neighbouring villages being incorporated into the urban fabric without becoming fully urbanised. Notable examples include Jourah and Harabish in Deir-ez-Zor, and Sawaeq and Kazo in Hama. These neighbourhoods have maintained their rural social links and informal characteristics, and apart from Jourah, they continue to be regarded by city residents as part of the countryside.

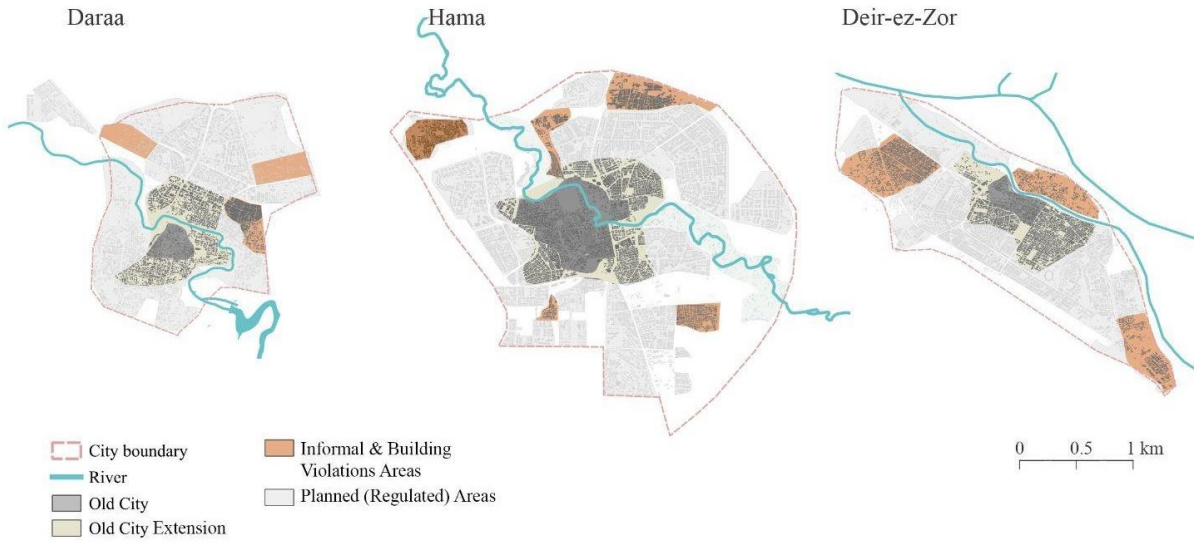
In Hama, in 1975, the Syrian state stopped the allocation of new land parcels and temporarily suspended regulatory planning (Syria Report, 2021). This scarcity, combined with increasing urban demand, left few regulated areas to accommodate the growing population. As a result, housing prices soared, and informal housing units expanded on the city's outskirts. Emerging neighbourhoods such as Mashaa Arbaeen and Mashaa Jouz were inhabited by migrants from rural areas, who recreated their own social structures, including tribal systems, while also mixing with urban residents seeking affordable housing alternatives.

In Deir-ez-Zor, informal settlements appeared across both the western and eastern parts of the city, mainly inhabited by rural migrants from surrounding regions or rural communities overtaken by urban expansion. As they gathered in groups, they preserved their original tribal and social structures within their neighbourhoods. By 2009, about 23% of the housing stock was classified as informal, with most built on private land and a smaller portion (around 5%) built through squatting on public lands (Urban-S, 2021). High densities of informal dwellings were observed in neighbourhoods such as Hawiqa, Jourah, Sina'a, Tahtouh, and Harabish.

Daraa is an exception, with a notably low percentage of informal housing. The city's main informal area, Daraa Camp, originated from successive waves of displacement from Palestine and later from the Golan Heights. Unlike most informal areas, many of the camp's units, especially in the western and older parts, were built on state-expropriated land. Over time, tents transformed into clay houses and then cement structures. Families expanded vertically by adding floors to accommodate growing households, making it one of the densest neighbourhoods in the city (Jalabi, 2024). Daraa's limited economic and employment opportunities compared to other governorates, along with the socio-economic and spatial

similarities between the city and its surrounding countryside, likely explain the low migration to the city, which in turn limited the growth of informal settlements (UN-Habitat, 2014).

***Map 3. Urban Typologies in Daraa, Hama and Deir-ez-Zor***




Source: Generated by the Author using QGIS

## 4.2 Syrian Cities Revolting

This section provides a detailed historical analysis of protests in Hama, Deir-ez-Zor and Daraa. Building on the socio-spatial mapping of the previous section, it traces how patterns of mobilisation varied across different urban types and neighbourhoods within each city, and how these differences changed throughout the uprising. These variations were closely linked to the ongoing process of rescaling the mobilisation effort: shifting from nationwide calls for demonstrations in the initial weeks to city-wide mobilisation, and ultimately to more localised, neighbourhood-level protests. To better understand the trajectories of mobilisation and demobilisation, the period of non-violent uprising is divided into three overarching phases: the initial mobilisation phase, the subsequent consolidation, and the eventual demobilisation phase. The intersection of protest patterns and scales defined these phases. Within each phase, several distinct protest cycles are identified, each marked by specific demands, objectives, grievances, and repertoires of contention. Cycles were often interrupted by the regime's increasing repression, which was associated with fluctuations in participation and marked the boundaries between one cycle and the next.

The periodisation employed in this analysis was shaped by two factors: the scale of mobilisation and the turning points created by the regime's coercive interventions at the city level. The transition from mobilisation to consolidated mobilisation was marked by large military campaigns that ended city-wide protests in central squares (late April 2011 in Daraa, and early August 2011 in Hama and Deir-ez-Zor). The transition from consolidation to demobilisation is identified by the week when protests peaked in each city, after which they steadily declined (May 2012 in Hama, March 2012 in Deir-ez-Zor, and June 2012 in Daraa). Assigning a different periodisation system to each city aims to capture intra-city dynamics that a uniform national breakpoints model cannot capture. Neighbourhood dynamics of mobilisation and demobilisation were more affected by intra-city events than by national turning points. Therefore, city-specific periodisation represents the neighbourhood-level analytical unit.

### 4.2.1 The Road to the Revolution

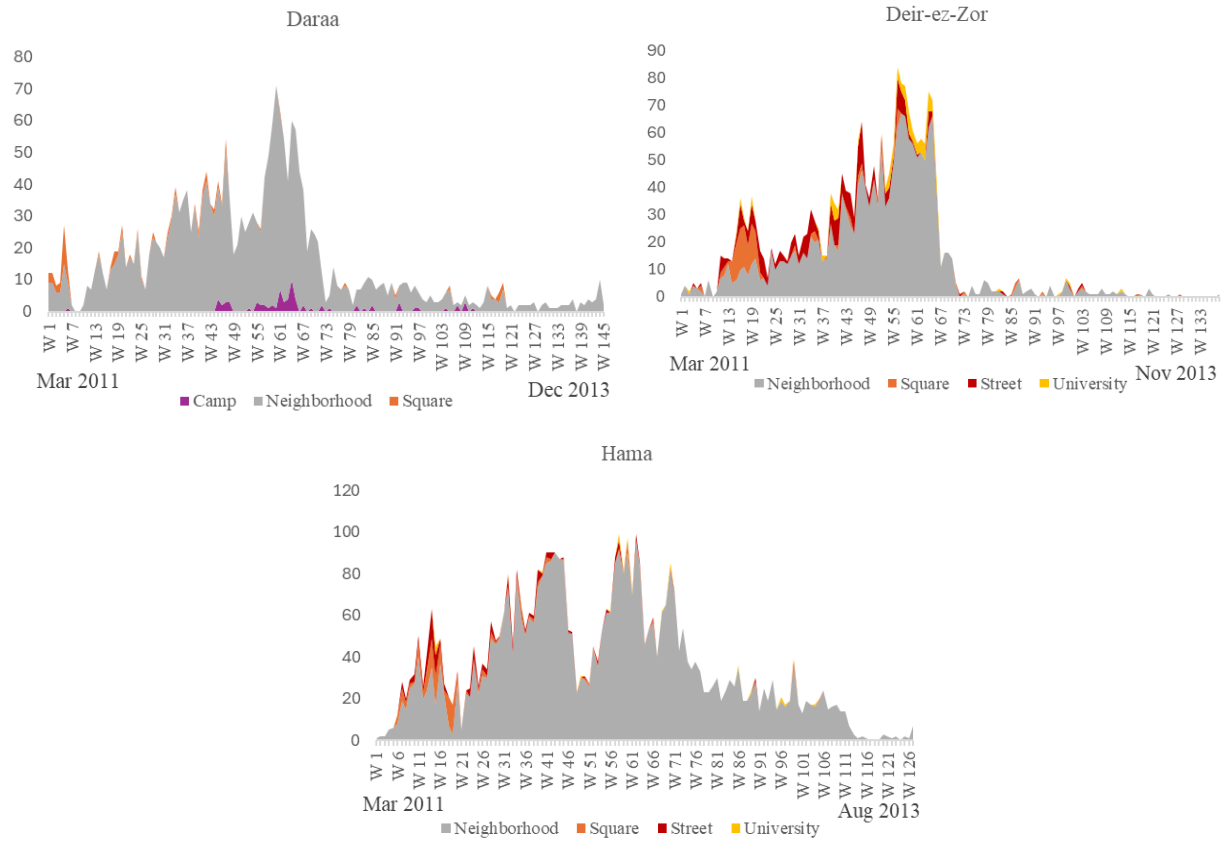
The onset of the Syrian Revolution in March 2011 was deeply inspired by the wider Arab Spring uprisings sweeping through the region, especially in Egypt and Tunisia (Bishara, 2013). These movements presented Syrians with an unprecedented historic chance for change. However, this political opening was viewed with mixed feelings. For many, it was an inspiring call for those who had long waited for democratic reform in their country. For others, it brought back painful memories of the regime's brutal suppression of previous uprisings, particularly in Hama and Aleppo during the 1980s, serving as a harsh reminder of the high cost of a failed revolution. Planning the first protests was therefore extraordinarily difficult and complex.

Inspired by the mobilisation strategies used in Tunisia and Egypt, Syrian activists sought to replicate them by occupying central squares to paralyse the government and increase visibility. However, the Syrian regime, having learned lessons from other Arab Spring states, employed a mix of conflict management tactics and violence to contain and suppress protesters (Tokmajyan, 2023). In key symbolic sites such as central squares and areas near state institutions, the regime consistently deployed overwhelming force. During the early months of the uprising, the scale of protests shifted multiple times between the city's central squares and inner neighbourhood streets. This fluctuation was mainly driven by the struggle between state repression and protestors' adaptive resistance strategies. When the regime's coercive apparatus used overwhelming violence, demonstrators were forced to operate secretly within trusted

circles, limiting their activities to local familiar streets, mosques, and plazas. Yet, the desire for mass mobilisation remained strong, re-emerging whenever the regime's security grip loosened.

This spatial rescaling of protest activities is a key feature of the Syrian Revolution, setting it apart from other Arab uprisings that mainly focused on iconic squares. It also highlights the importance of local urban and social environments in shaping patterns of mobilisation and repression. Activists found more security and organisational effectiveness in spaces linked to family, neighbourhood, and friendship circles, areas where state surveillance and penetration were comparatively limited (Leenders, 2013).

***Figure 6. Place of Protest per Week in Hama, Deir-ez-Zor and Daraa (2011 - 2013)***




Source: Author's own illustrations based on data from SMI (2024)

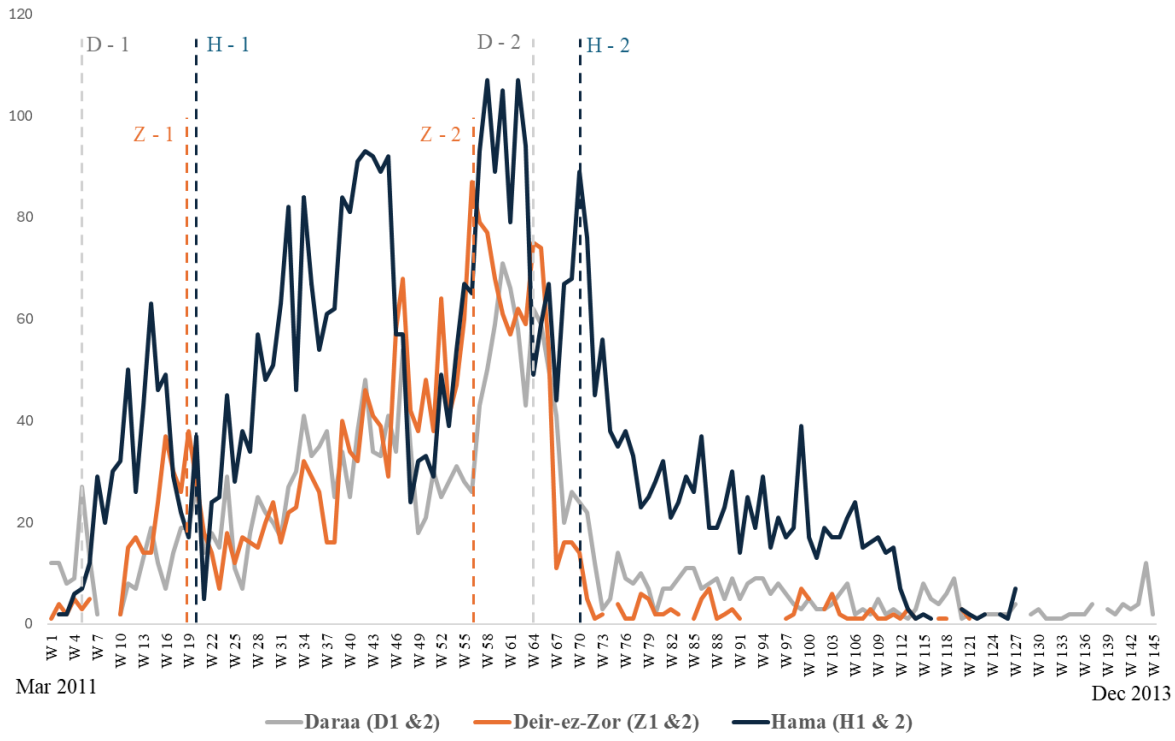
According to the Syrian Memory Institute's Protests Dataset, between 2011 and 2013, there were 10,767 protests in Daraa, Deir-ez-Zor and Hama combined, distributed as follows:

***Table 4. Number of protests in Hama, Daraa, Deir-ez-Zor per quarter (2011 - 2013)***

| | 2011 | | | | 2012 | | | | 2013 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Qtr1 | Qtr2 | Qtr3 | Qtr4 | Qtr1 | Qtr2 | Qtr3 | Qtr4 | Qtr1 | Qtr2 | Qtr3 | Qtr4 | Total |
| Daraa | 58 | 208 | 271 | 448 | 451 | 681 | 170 | 114 | 67 | 65 | 24 | 45 | 2,602 |
| Deir-ez-Zor | 9 | 172 | 386 | 441 | 714 | 921 | 99 | 60 | 74 | 49 | 20 | 8 | 2,953 |
| Hama | 4 | 527 | 550 | 948 | 769 | 1,080 | 626 | 332 | 266 | 87 | 22 | 1 | 5,212 |
| **Total** | **71** | **907** | **1,207** | **1,837** | **1,934** | **2,682** | **895** | **506** | **407** | **201** | **66** | **54** | **10,767** |

Source: Data compiled from SMI (2024)

***Figure 7. Protests in Hama (H), Daraa (D), Deir-ez-Zor (Z) per Week (March 2011 - December 2013)***




Source: Author's own illustration based on data from SMI (2024); D1, H1 and Z1 refer to the end of the first uprising period (mobilisation), and D2, H2, and Z2 refer to the end of the second period (mobilisation consolidation)

The following section provides a historical narrative of the uprising in the three cities. The period of non-violent protest mobilisation is analytically divided into three distinct phases.

Each period is defined by a dominant spatial scale and bounded by identifiable city-specific turning points:

1. **Mobilisation Period:** extends between the outbreak of the revolution in March 2011 and the regime's first large-scale military campaigns: Daraa (April 2011: D1), Hama (August 2011: H1), and Deir-ez-Zor (August 2011: Z1). The protesters' primary goal was to occupy central squares and sustain citywide mobilisation.
2. **Consolidated Mobilisation Period:** extends from the first military campaign until protest peaked and began to decline, lasting between 35 and 56 weeks across the three cities. As the regime deployed security personnel, military forces, and dozens of checkpoints across the cities, citywide protests in central areas became unsustainable. As a result, secondary streets and inner neighbourhood squares emerged as the main sites of protest, and the primary goal shifted to maintaining neighbourhood-level networks of resistance.
3. **Demobilisation Period:** extended between the peak-and-decline decline turning point in each city: Deir-ez-Zor, March 2012: Z2; Hama, May 2012: H2; and Daraa, June 2012: D2. By mid-2012, mobilisation fatigue, the persistent crackdown by regime forces, and the accelerating militarisation of the uprising combined to produce a sustained decline in non-violent activity; by the end of 2013, such activity had sharply declined across the country.

*Table 5. Cycles of Mobilisation in the Syrian Revolution between 2011 and 2013*

| Phase | Cycle | Event | Period | Scale | Political framing | Main actor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Mobilisation | **Cycle 1** | National-level mobilisation | Feb - Mar 2011 | National | Political reform and improving collective consumption | Political activists |
| | Limited popular participation | | | | | |
| | **Cycle 2** | Spontaneous local demonstrations | March-June 2011 | City | Solidarity, expression of contention and occupying main squares | Local social networks |
| | Security forces crackdown (April - June 2011) | | | | | |
| | **Cycle 3** | Occupying the main squares | July - August 2011 | City | Controlling the city | Neighbourhood activists |
| **Military campaigns (April and August 2011)** | | | | | | |
| 2 Mobilisation Consolidation | **Cycle 4** | Simultaneously protesting in neighbourhoods | September 2011 - March 2013 | Neighbourhood | Enduring the mobilisation | Local coordination committees |
| **Militarisation and mobilisation fatigue (March 2013 - onward)** | | | | | | |
| 3 Demobilisation | **Cycle 5** | Confining protests to specific neighbourhoods | March 2013 - December 2013 | Neighbourhood | Enduring the mobilisation | Local coordination committees |

Source: Author's own elaboration

### 4.2.2 Mobilisation Period

Between February and March 2011, early calls for protests were shared on social media, most notably Facebook (Rodineliussen, 2019). These calls were mainly driven by Syrian diaspora activists aiming to spark nationwide protests. However, due to low public trust in the internet at that time, limited access to digital platforms within Syria, and swift pre-emptive measures by state security forces, only a few demonstrations occurred in the capital, Damascus. Several attempts between February and mid-March attracted little popular participation, attended mainly by political and human rights activists. Their proximity to central state institutions made them easy for security forces to contain. Meanwhile, behind closed doors in private salons

across the country, quieter forms of political discussion unfolded among trusted circles of family members, neighbours, and close friends, who debated the feasibility of organising protests in their own cities and the most suitable timing and locations for such actions (Interviewee#1).

The first protest

In contrast to the limited, highly contained demonstrations in Damascus, the first protest drawing broad popular participation occurred in southern Syria, in the city of Daraa. On 18 March, a day named the 'Friday of Dignity', hundreds of people took to the streets to protest the arrest and torture of 18 children accused of writing anti-regime slogans on their school's wall. Following Friday prayers, demonstrators gathered around the Hamzeh and Abbas Mosques in Daraa Balad, marched towards the Omari Mosque, intending to stage a sit-in, and then advanced on Saraya Square in Daraa Mahatta. The plan was thwarted as security forces blocked the bridges connecting the two parts of the city and opened fire on the crowd, killing two protesters. While the detention of children served as the immediate trigger for the first protest in Daraa, activists in Hama and Deir-ez-Zor had to adopt different strategies to organise their initial demonstrations. Their initial plan was to provoke anti-regime protests by leveraging local sporting events. Anticipating this, the regime cancelled a football match scheduled in Hama that week, likely drawing lessons from a similar unrest in Deir-ez-Zor on March 18 (Interviewee#5).

Protests in Daraa continued throughout the following week, fuelled by widespread outrage over the killing of demonstrators by security forces. Funerals became occasions for even larger protests. Meanwhile, activists in Hama and Deir-ez-Zor coordinated protests for Friday, March 25, to show solidarity with Daraa. They designated specific mosques as gathering points, aiming to use the routine Friday prayer assembly. The plan involved activists positioning themselves in the back rows of the mosques during prayers, initiating the protest by chanting anti-regime slogans or shouting "Allah Akbar" immediately after prayers ended, in the hope of inspiring others to join.

During that day, a protest successfully materialised in Deir-ez-Zor at the Othman bin Affan Mosque in the Old Mataar neighbourhood. However, as demonstrators attempted to advance towards the nearby main street, they were quickly suppressed by security forces. Pro-regime individuals also assisted in quelling protests, particularly around the Safa Mosque in the Oumal

neighbourhood (Interviewee#17). Similarly, in Hama, most attempts to organise demonstrations at the designated mosques largely failed, except for a brief protest at the Omar bin Khattab Mosque in the Hader neighbourhood. This protest, too, was quickly dispersed due to the heavy security presence.

Neighbourhoods that hosted early protests, along with their adjacent areas, soon emerged as focal points for subsequent demonstrations. In the following weeks, activists and participants instinctively moved towards these neighbourhoods for Friday prayers, while staying in contact with their networks to join any protests that arose nearby (Interviewee#3). The size of the protests grew progressively each week, as more participants became active and additional protests were successfully initiated. The initial centres of the uprising included the Omari Mosque in Daraa, Hader and Hamidiyeh in Hama, and Old Airport and Hamidiyeh in Deir-ez-Zor. These areas were mainly situated in the old city cores or their immediate surroundings, characterised by dense networks of mosques and strong social ties.

However, the locations of protests were far from static. Activists regularly adapted to shifting security dynamics by rotating the mosques from which protests originated. For example, as Old Mataar in Deir-ez-Zor became more difficult due to an increased security presence and urban morphology characterised by wide, easy-to-patrol streets, alternative hubs quickly emerged, such as the Hussain bin Ali Mosque in Hamidiyeh and the Farouq Mosque in Khasarat. Takaya Street also gained strategic significance, as it is situated between the densely populated neighbourhoods of Sheikh Yassin and Hamidiyeh. Its narrow, interconnected streets offered protestors a tactical advantage, enabling quick dispersal and regrouping (Interviewee#15).

Early demonstrations were mobile in nature. Protestors often moved through nearby local streets for several reasons: to avoid direct confrontation with security forces; to mobilise residents along their route; to increase visibility across the city; and to merge with other nearby protests to form larger demonstrations capable of overwhelming security forces. However, despite the focus on mosque-based mobilisation during the first weeks, the main goal was primarily to reach the city's key public squares: Sarayya Square in Daraa, General Square in Deir-ez-Zor, and Asi Square in Hama. Nonetheless, security forces, although initially refraining from extreme violence (except in Daraa), consistently prevented protesters from reaching these central symbolic and political squares and forming city-wide mass gatherings.

The relatively small number of participants in the early days of the protests allowed regime forces to confine demonstrations to their original locations.

Toward the Square

The early stages of the Syrian Revolution were characterised by micro-level mobilisation driven by local grievances and a strong sense of solidarity across communities. Nevertheless, occupying central squares remained a key aspiration for activists in most cities, such as Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Daraa. Between May and August 2011, protestors managed to assemble large crowds in central squares, but these moments were short-lived. Protests held near main squares or state buildings, especially those with limited turnout, were routinely suppressed by security forces using various degrees of coercion. The Syrian regime, aware of the risks posed by persistent mass gatherings in urban centres, swiftly deployed army units and established checkpoints across key cities to isolate neighbourhoods and prevent large-scale demonstrations.

A dynamic contest of adaptation unfolded between the regime and the protesters to scale up their strategies of mobilisation and counter-mobilisation. The regime initially experimented with a combination of Authoritarian Conflict Management (ACM) strategies (Tokmajyan, 2023), aimed at containing discontent before eventually resorting to extreme violence. These strategies included engaging local notables in rebellious communities, co-opting religious and local figures as intermediaries to demobilise their social bases, promising reforms, and mobilising pro-regime individuals to infiltrate anti-regime protests and raise images of Assad (Tokmajyan, 2023; Mazur, 2021). As these efforts to suppress the revolutionary movement failed, a more heavy-handed approach was adopted, including the use of tear gas, water cannons, and ultimately resorting to shoot-to-kill tactics.

To counter the regime's repression and maintain mobilisation, activists in various neighbourhoods established local coordination committees. These committees were responsible for organising protests, setting times and locations, and sharing this information within trusted networks (Abboud, 2016). Communication within and between these groups occurred in secret meetings and, later, through digital platforms such as Facebook and Skype. These coordination efforts facilitated a more collaborative and unified mobilisation across different areas.

One of the primary tactics developed by activists was to coordinate simultaneous gatherings in multiple neighbourhoods and head towards the central square to confuse and overwhelm security forces. This strategy proved effective in cities like Deir-ez-Zor and Hama, where protesters managed to reach central squares (Asi Square in Hama and General Square in Deir-ez-Zor) several times between May and July 2011. These mass demonstrations, often called *Mozaharat Millonyya* (protests involving a million or more people), usually took place on Fridays after prayer. For example, on April 22 (Great Friday), multiple protests in Deir-ez-Zor that started from different mosques (i.e., Othman bin Affan, Toubeh, Mufti, and Mus'ab bin Omair) converged in General Square, joined by groups from the nearby countryside. However, the regime maintained firm control over the more symbolically significant Seven Fountains Square, which houses the statue of Hafez al-Assad and is strategically located near major security branches, including the Security Intelligence, Air Force Intelligence, and the Seventh Division (Interviewee#13).

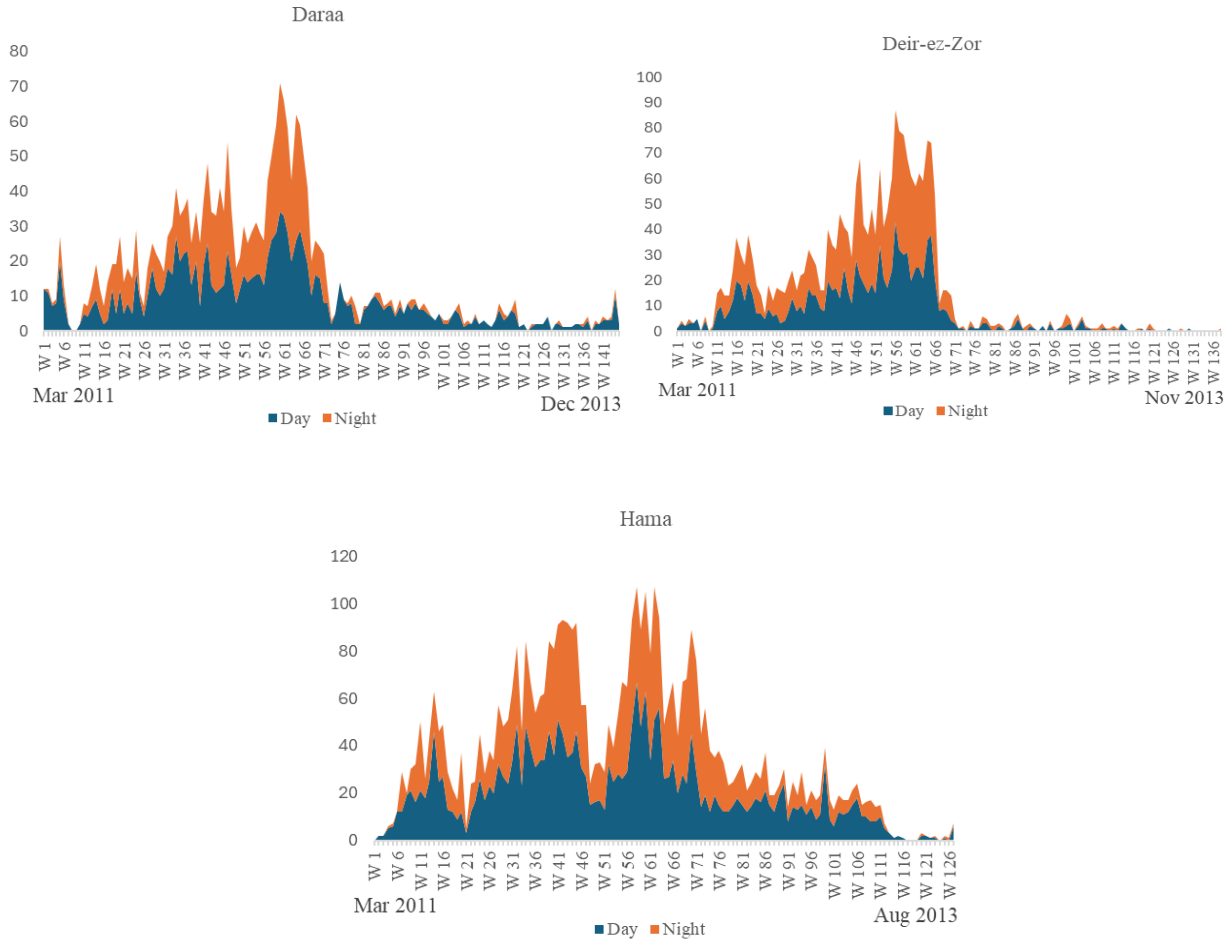
The regime's violence often served as a trigger for further mobilisation. The killing of protesters frequently provoked larger demonstrations, as public outrage and collective solidarity intensified across neighbourhoods, cities, and the country. For example, in Hama, an attempt to reach Asi Square on 22 April was met with lethal force. The deaths that day sparked even larger protests in both Hader and the Souk district (in Bab Qibli and Jarajmeh) in the following days, which were again met with gunfire, further fuelling public anger. This provoked even bigger demonstrations the next day, culminating in the first successful attempt to occupy the square during the funerals for those killed.

In Daraa, protesters reached Saraya Square earlier than in other cities, partly because the regime used extreme violence sooner. On 23 March, security forces shot at protesters heading to the square and raided the Omari Mosque to break up an ongoing sit-in. The events of that day, later called "Bloody Wednesday," caused over 20 deaths, the highest single-day toll recorded during the uprising to that point. Two days later, thousands of people from Daraa Balad, Daraa Mahatta, and nearby towns gathered at Saraya Square, destroying the Assad statue and storming the Governor's House after security forces temporarily withdrew from the city (Interviewee#25).

While security forces in Daraa temporarily withdrew as protests reached the central square, they maintained a heavy repression strategy in Hama and Deir-ez-Zor, effectively preventing the formation of any sit-ins. Nonetheless, as protests in these cities continued to grow in size

and frequency, particularly on Fridays, the regime responded with increasing violence. As the momentum of the protests built, so did the coordination among local groups, leading to daily protests that extended beyond the traditional Friday rallies. Night-time protests became an increasingly preferred tactic, as they allowed protesters to avoid the heavier daytime security presence and provided safer conditions and greater operational effectiveness for activists (Interviewee#2). By May 2011, night protests had become more common in neighbourhoods such as Bab Qibli, Manakh, and Hamidiyeh in Hama; Daraa Balad and Tareq Sadd in Daraa; and Old Mataar and Joubeleh in Deir-ez-Zor. These demonstrations were not only frequent but also increasingly organised, with coordinated chants, banners, and pre-planned escape routes. In some cases, night protests even attempted to reach central squares, further challenging the regime's control over public space.

***Figure 8. Protests per Week between day and night in Daraa, Deir-ez-Zor, and Hama (March 2011 - December 2013)***




Source: Author's own illustrations based on data from SMI (2024)

- Spiral of mobilisation and violence

Between the end of March and the end of April 2011, Daraa city experienced a brief period of civilian control after the withdrawal of regime forces, leaving the city without a security presence (Interviewee#20). Protesters effectively occupied public spaces, freely crossing between the two parts of the city to protest and organise public gatherings. Demonstrations became more structured, concentrating on the Souq area during the day due to its political and economic significance, and shifting to the Omari Mosque at night, thanks to its dense urban fabric and social networks that offered greater protection. In the absence of the state, activists filled the governance vacuum by forming local committees responsible for neighbourhood protection and traffic organisation.

However, the civilian control was short-lived. On April 25, regime forces launched a military assault on Daraa, besieging Daraa Balad, imposing a curfew on the rest of the city, and establishing a network of checkpoints to fragment the city. The regime's primary strategy was to isolate neighbourhoods from one another and from the city, and the city from its rural surroundings. In Daraa Balad, checkpoints were placed at neighbourhood entrances and near mosques to prevent gatherings, while in Daraa Mahatta, the focus was on securing government buildings and key intersections to maintain control over administrative and commercial areas.

In both Hama and Deir-ez-Zor, a similar pattern of civilian control emerged two months later, specifically after the "Friday of Children of Freedom" on 3 June. On that day, security forces killed over 200 demonstrators marching towards Asi Square in Hama, while in Deir-ez-Zor, a young protester was shot in the Jourah neighbourhood. These killings triggered widespread outrage, replacing fear with anger. In the days that followed, civilians took to the streets in large numbers and successfully occupied Asi Square in Hama and Seven Fountains Square in Deir-ez-Zor. As in Daraa, when confronted by overwhelming crowds, regime forces retreated to their headquarters. Notably, the regime pre-emptively removed statues of Hafez al-Assad from both cities to avoid the humiliation of having them toppled.

For several weeks, the lack of security apparatus allowed large-scale mobilisation, with hundreds of thousands of people taking part, according to activists' estimates. Both cities also experienced periods of civil disobedience, including general strikes and disruptions to government institutions. While Asi Square was the natural central hub in Hama, protest activity in Deir-ez-Zor was more spread out. As Seven Fountains (the actual centre of the city) remained

inaccessible, the General Square (later renamed Freedom Square) became a daytime protest hub due to its central location and proximity to the main river bridge connecting urban and rural areas. At night, protesters gathered in Medilji Square, situated further from security branches and surrounded by densely populated neighbourhoods, namely Joubeleh, Ba'ajin, and Mowazafien. The square is also linked to two parks, providing space for mass gatherings.

Although the regime withdrew from the streets and maintained a non-confrontational approach, it closely watched coordination groups to identify movement leaders and mobilisation tactics. Civilian control over the city encouraged many activists to operate openly and reveal their identities (Interviewee#10). Eventually, security forces conducted a series of raids to arrest key activists, often resisted by residents using stones and sticks. The need to defend neighbourhoods led to the creation of makeshift barricades at key entrances between June and July 2011, marking the early stages of quasi-territorial control by activists (Interviewee#12). While these checkpoints, managed by residents and a few armed individuals, provided a sense of local security, they also justified the regime's labelling of the movement as an armed rebellion, thus paving the way for a military response.

In early August 2011, regime troops, supported by dozens of tanks and artillery, launched two military offensives on Hama and Deir-ez-Zor (Aljazeera, 2011). These campaigns targeted key protest hubs. In Deir-ez-Zor, neighbourhoods such as Jourah, Joubeleh, Hamidiyeh, and Old Mataar were hit hardest. Regime forces deliberately damaged the minaret of the Othman bin Affan Mosque, a symbol of the revolution in the city. Hama suffered a similar fate; within six days, the regime stormed most of the city, easily overcoming the limited resistance of unarmed locals. Dozens of activists and civilians were arrested or killed.

Similar to Daraa, the regime then set up numerous checkpoints in both cities, especially at major intersections, to restrict movement, detain key activists, and block access to central squares (Interviewee#16). Consequently, protests significantly declined. Three main factors contributed to this drop: the heavy security presence and checkpoints that isolated neighbourhoods and streets from each other, the relocation of prominent activists to the outskirts of the cities, and the closure of mosques, along with the suspension of Friday prayers.

Despite these setbacks, within weeks, activists began regrouping and re-initiating protests. Conditions, however, reverted to those of the early uprising. Protests became spontaneous and swift, often happening at night, and coordinated within tightly trusted social circles. The main

aim during this phase was to revive the momentum of mobilisation and challenge the new status quo imposed by the regime.

Dynamics of mobilisation and demobilisation

During the early stages of the revolution, mobilisation mainly occurred through spontaneous actions driven by risk-mitigation strategies. These strategies shaped the dynamics of mobilisation along two dimensions: social and spatial. Socially, mobilisation was confined to trusted and dense social networks. Spatially, the lack of coordinated city-wide mobilisation naturally made mosques the key points for gatherings. Consequently, initial demonstrations were small, brief, and cautious, refraining from confrontation with security forces. As small, emergent groups formed larger and more powerful protests, they naturally moved towards prominent urban locations, including main streets and squares.

In response, the regime intensified its counter-mobilisation efforts, employing more aggressive tactics to control symbolic locations. Whenever the regime's violence intensified, activists adapted by shifting their activities away from highly visible sites towards local streets within neighbourhoods and protesting at night. Although reaching the main squares remained a primary goal during the initial phase of mobilisation, neighbourhoods near major squares and key traffic intersections—especially those characterised by strong social cohesion, dense urban layouts, and numerous mosques—quickly became preferred spaces for mobilisation. While these areas offer strategic proximity and accessibility to central squares when security conditions allow, they also serve as incubators for spontaneous demonstrations due to their dense urban and social networks. Overall, the scale of mobilisation during this phase depended on several factors, including protest size, the level of regime repression, and local outrage and revolutionary coordination.

### 4.2.3 Mobilisation Consolidation Period

From the square to the neighbourhood

Following the military offensive, activist groups adapted by rescaling mobilisation to local networks of families, neighbourhoods, and friendship ties. The so-called 'flying protests' (*mozaharat tayara*), brief, fast-moving demonstrations designed to evade security forces. These protests aimed to avoid confrontation with security forces by mobilising swiftly and dispersing before security forces could intervene. By staging multiple small protests

simultaneously across different neighbourhoods, activists disrupted the regime's security apparatus, preventing them from concentrating their forces in one location. These protests became shorter, smaller in scale, and more deeply embedded in the physical and social fabric of local communities. They typically lasted between 10 and 20 minutes, which corresponds to the estimated arrival time of the security forces (Interviewee#10).

This spatial and tactical shift from central urban spaces to neighbourhoods was linked to the rise of smaller mosques and local squares as key protest hubs. Families, neighbours, and trusted friends re-emerged as crucial actors in maintaining mobilisation and civic activity. In Daraa Balad, for example, protests were strategically rotated between neighbourhoods to avoid security forces. Smaller plazas, such as Arbaeen Mosque Plaza, Haj Zeid Plaza, and Qetaifan Mosque Plaza, replaced iconic sites like the Omari Mosque, which were avoided to minimise risk (Interviewee#22).

This shift to the micro-scale proved effective under increased repression and highlighted the importance of local urban and social factors in shaping both mobilisation and repression capabilities. Over time, neighbourhoods showed varying abilities to activate social ties, sustain organisational capacity, and foster local solidarity. As a result, some neighbourhoods experienced a decline in protest events, while others remained resilient, even drawing participants from less active areas. The regime's counterstrategies also differed by neighbourhood, influenced by their perceived strategic value and vulnerability to infiltration, whether physically or socially.

Mobilisation capacities diverted

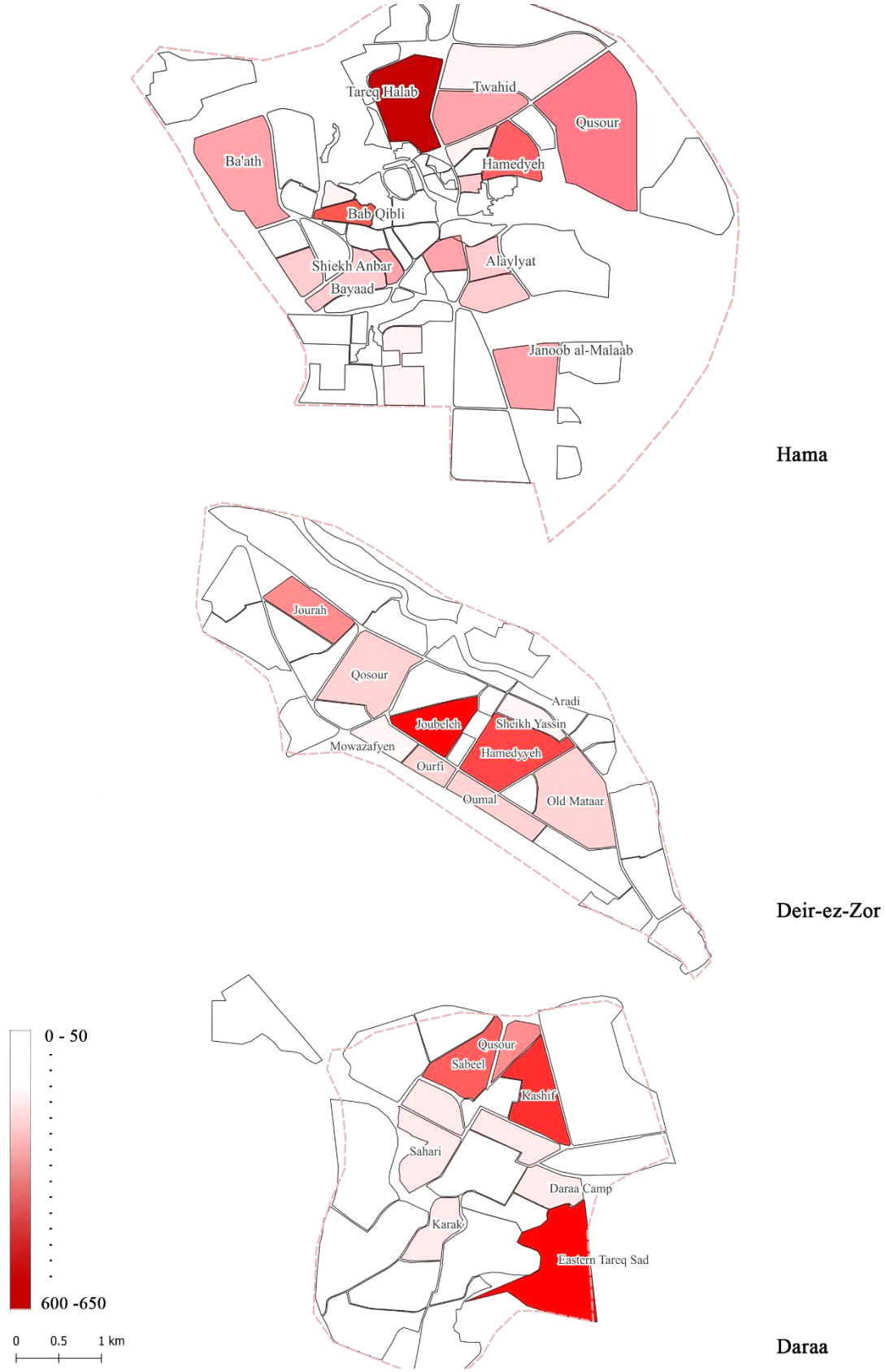
By September 2011, anti-regime protests had peaked nationwide. Facing reduced coercive power, the regime focused its control on areas deemed strategically vital, especially around central squares, government buildings, and wealthy neighbourhoods, while giving less priority to other areas. As a result, its security presence eased in neighbourhoods considered less accessible or symbolically significant. Nevertheless, the regime continued to prevent any city-wide mobilisation by setting up checkpoints at key neighbourhood entrances, major roads near city centres, and busy traffic junctions. Areas close to the central security headquarters remained under tight surveillance.

During this stage, neighbourhoods such as Bab Qibli, Tareq Halab, Dabbaggah, Arbaeen, and Hamidiyeh in Hama; Joubeleh, Hamidiyeh, and Jourah in Deir-ez-Zor; and Tareq Sadd, Kashif,

and Sabeel in Daraa emerged as centres of protest. Despite differences in urban form—ranging from old quarters to informal and planned areas—they share specific characteristics. Many of these areas were relatively distant from major security compounds or were marked by strong social cohesion, dense urban development, and irregular street patterns. These initial observations will be empirically tested in the following chapter.

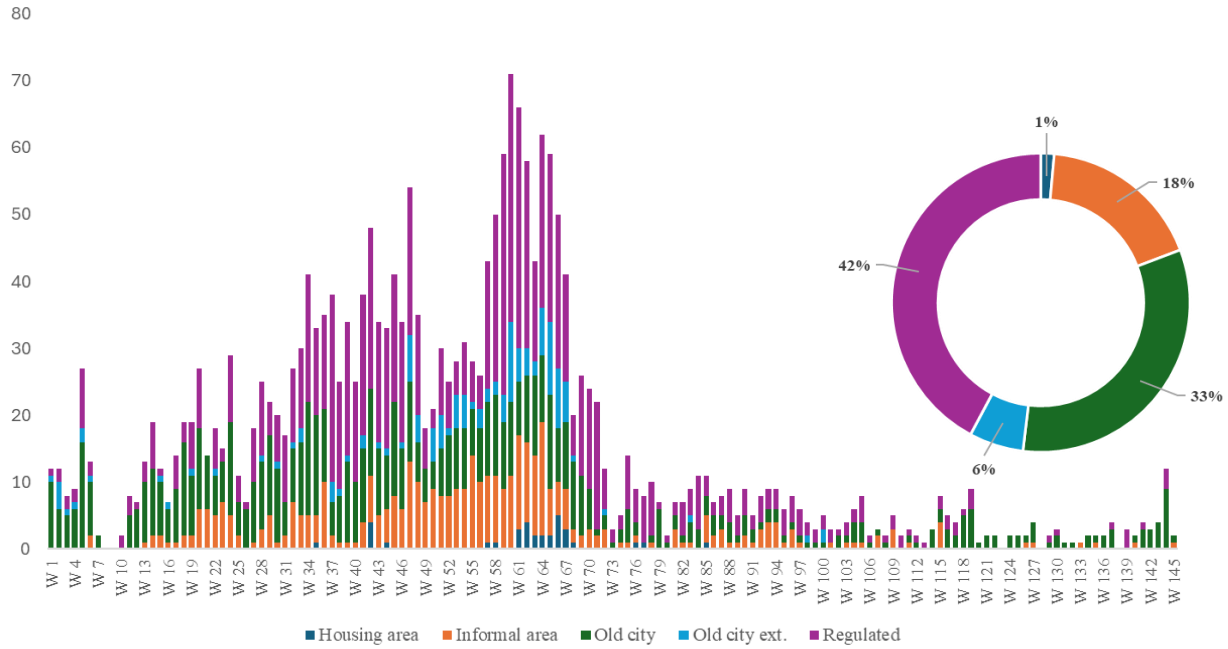
According to Figures (10 - 12), during the mobilisation period, protests were concentrated in old cities and their extensions. During the mobilisation consolidation period, the old centres, especially in Hama, remained significant, while informal and regulated areas became crucial sites for protests in Daraa and Deir-ez-Zor. Their urban form provided a safer environment for organising and sustaining protests under increasing surveillance. Conversely, at the peak of mobilisation, even formally regulated neighbourhoods, including those near security headquarters, saw a surge in protest activity. This shift may be attributed to the regime's limited coercive capacity to contain decentralised and simultaneous protests across multiple neighbourhoods.

***Figure 9. Protest distribution in Hama, Daraa, Deir-ez-Zor (2011 - 2013)***



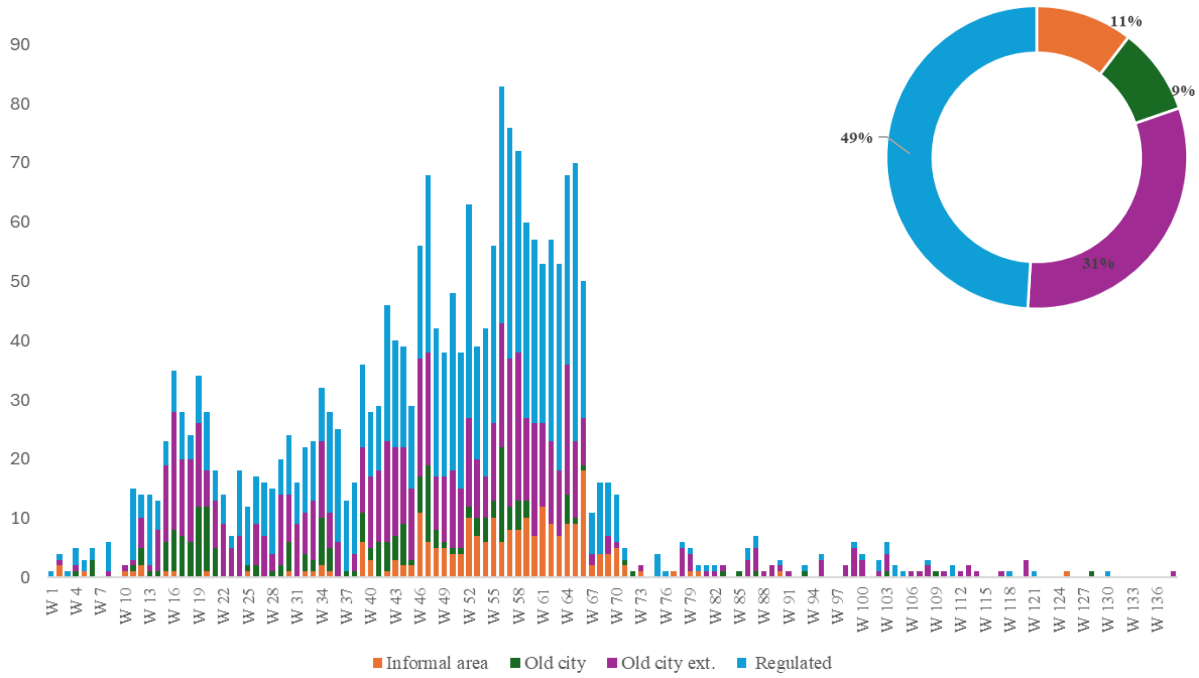

Source: Author's own illustration based on data from SMI (2024)

***Figure 10. Protests based on Urban Typology in Daraa (March 2011 - December 2013)***



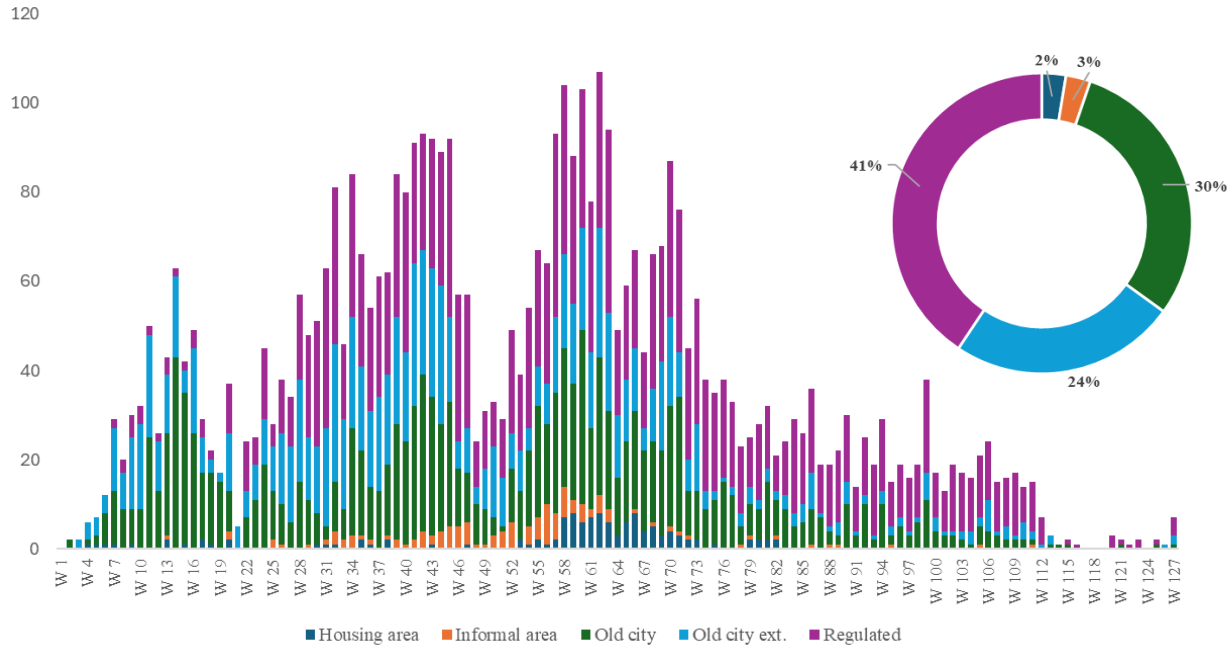

Source: Author's own illustration based on data from SMI (2024)

***Figure 11. Protests based on Urban Typology in Deir-ez-Zor (March 2011 - November 2013)***




Source: Author's own illustration based on data from SMI (2024)

***Figure 12. Protests based on Urban Typology in Hama (March 2011 - August 2013)***




Source: Author's own illustration based on data from SMI (2024)

Another significant factor in protest consolidation in certain areas was the defection of soldiers from the army. Often fleeing with light weaponry, these defectors sought refuge in mobilised neighbourhoods that already had favourable social and spatial conditions for military actions. In return, defectors provided some level of protection during demonstrations and prevented security forces' raids.

This divergence in mobilisation capacity across neighbourhoods allowed activists to develop more resilient protest structures in specific neighbourhoods. As the protests became more regular and prolonged, they improved their organisational capabilities by introducing visual and organisational elements like banners, flags, and sound systems. Coordination committees assumed more institutional roles and forged connections with other groups across the city, FSA units, and local residents. In cities like Hama, this development led to the creation of dedicated protest squares within neighbourhoods such as Bab Qibli, Tareq Halab, Sheikh Anbar, and Taawuneyeh, which became symbols of the revolution, resonating beyond their immediate local context.

Dynamics of mobilisation and demobilisation

In the second phase of the uprising, the mobilisation's goals shifted from establishing city-wide sit-ins to maintaining activities within specific nodes across the city. The organisation of

demonstrations immediately following the military campaigns resembles the early days of the uprising: mobilisation rooted in trusted social networks, taking place in densely built areas, often at night, and deliberately avoiding direct confrontations with security forces. However, unlike the initial phase, security forces' capacity to suppress activism was comparatively lower due to two factors: the numerous mobilisation nodes spread throughout the city and the emergence of protected neighbourhoods where FSA cells repelled security forces. Notably, neighbourhoods characterised by high urban density, social solidarity, and peripheral locations with connections to rural areas proved particularly favourable for FSA operations.

Although some neighbourhoods have become relatively safe for demonstrations, mobilisation has not been consolidated in all of them. The reason was not only security issues, such as regime raids and bombardments, but also organisational capacity. In certain neighbourhoods, activists formed effective coordination groups that maintained strong ties with residents and worked harmoniously to create an engaging, ceremonial atmosphere for protest events. The layout of the neighbourhoods played an important role: some areas provided urban spaces suitable for large gatherings while being shielded from the regime's snipers.

### 4.2.4 Demobilisation Period

The intensification of the Syrian Revolution fundamentally changed the dynamics of both protest and repression across the country. As the regime escalated its violent crackdown, local communities adopted self-defence as a key tactic to sustain mobilisation efforts. This growing need for protection led to new defensive strategies in rebellious neighbourhoods, with military defections playing a vital role. Individual defectors seeking refuge in these areas quickly organised themselves into local armed cells, which gradually developed into more organised FSA factions. They were also joined by civilians who had access to weapons before the uprising or acquired arms during attacks on local police stations.

Guarding the mobilisation and militarisation of the uprising

By September 2011, the adoption of self-defence tactics resulted in the creation of protected areas, effectively establishing a de facto territorial division between zones under regime control and those held by the FSA. Within FSA-controlled regions, protests became more frequent, visible, and regular, while they nearly vanished within regime-held zones. The presence of local armed cells provided a larger space for local revolutionary groups to expand their roles

in logistical planning, media documentation, and organising demonstrations (SMI_Interview#8).

However, as the FSA groups grew and military capacity increased, their strategic priorities shifted from protecting civilians and demonstration sites to territorial expansion. They increasingly engaged in offensive operations against regime forces, targeting checkpoints and security branches within and around their neighbourhoods. This escalation marked a new phase in the uprising, a transition from non-violent resistance to active armed confrontation, leading to the creation of militarised frontlines.

The regime, in response, adopted a strategy of securing key areas within the city, typically including commercial centres, government squares, military and security headquarters, and affluent neighbourhoods, while applying varying degrees of pressure on other areas. Between 2011 and 2012, in Daraa, the regime adopted a defensive strategy to protect vital nodes, such as Daraa Mahatta, from FSA advances. In contrast, it adopted a more offensive approach in Deir-ez-Zor by launching a major military campaign in September 2012 to maintain control over the Jourah and Qusur neighbourhoods, which remained under its control.

Unlike Deir-ez-Zor and Daraa, Hama did not experience large-scale military operations or extensive FSA territorial control, likely because of the traumatic legacy of the 1980s uprising. Instead, armed clashes remained confined to the northern and southern peripheries, such as Tareq Halab and Janoub Mal'ab, which maintained strong ties to the surrounding rural areas (Interviewee#9). Meanwhile, central neighbourhoods, such as Bab Qibli and Hamidiyeh, as well as informal districts such as Mashaa Arbaeen and Mashaa Tayar, witnessed repeated confrontations between opposition and regime forces. However, by 2013, the level of armed conflict in Hama had significantly decreased. This change was driven by several factors: orders from the Religious Committee, an influential local opposition body, instructing armed factions to withdraw from the city (Interviewee#9), and a general reluctance among residents to endorse full-scale militarisation (Interviewee#19). In some areas, such as Mashaa Arbaeen and Mashaa Jooz, the regime pursued a more severe strategy, depopulating and demolishing large parts of these neighbourhoods between 2012 and 2013.

Beyond military campaigns and bombardments, the regime used indirect strategies to destabilise opposition strongholds. These included cutting off essential services to rebellious neighbourhoods and relocating public institutions and service facilities to areas under regime

control. This tactic aimed not only to punish insurgent regions but also to increase suffering for residents, especially public sector employees, forcing many to move to areas controlled by the regime, thus weakening the protest movement. Over time, safety in opposition areas declined, and so did the security for their populations. In Hama, the absence of continuous territorial control by the FSA meant the city experienced relatively less destruction and lower levels of service politicisation compared to Deir-ez-Zor and Daraa.

However, in addition to militarisation, the increasing mobilisation fatigue after two years of the uprising, the overall decline in security, and the targeted assassination or forced displacement of key activists further contributed to the decrease in protest participation. The combined effects of militarisation, regime repression, and mobilisation fatigue resulted in a steady decline of civilian movements across the country.

Dynamics of mobilisation and demobilisation

As in earlier stages, both security and organisational factors remained vital in influencing the dynamics of mobilisation and consolidation. Mobilisation continued in neighbourhoods where urban and social conditions were conducive to the formation of local FSA groups and revolutionary committees. However, as the uprising fully transformed into armed conflict, the overall level of mobilisation dropped sharply, even in neighbourhoods that did not experience significant destruction or direct military confrontation. This decline was further exacerbated by the mass exodus of activists, many of whom fled out of fear of arrest or assassination.

Although the initial formation of the FSA provided a protective environment for the protest movement in several cities, the eventual shift towards full-scale armed confrontation undermined these advances. Key protest hubs, such as Sheikh Yassin, Old Mataar, and Joubeleh in Deir-ez-Zor, as well as Daraa Balad, became active battlefronts. These regions were heavily bombed by the regime, leading to substantial destruction of the built environment and severe disruption of the social fabric.

# CHAPTER 5. QUANTIFYING DATA AND RESEARCH ANALYSIS

This chapter details the development and results of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), including the quantification of variables (hereafter conditions and outcomes) that form the core of its information table. As discussed in previous chapters, the eight conditions are grouped into three categories: urban, social, and state footprint, each capturing essential neighbourhood characteristics as derived from the socio-spatial mapping and historical analysis process. The outcome variable is protesting intensity, operationalised across three phases of the uprising: mobilisation, mobilisation consolidation, and demobilisation. The second part of the chapter covers the actual QCA, including necessity and analytic induction tests. These analyses are conducted across five models: one for each of the three mobilisation periods, and two covering the entire study period (presence and absence). The results include 13 configurational pathways associated with the outcome and three pathways for its non-occurrence.

## 5.1 Building Case Data

### 5.1.1 Defining the Analytical Unit

Drawing on the conclusions from the case knowledge, both the neighbourhood and the urban typology emerged as the two key characteristics of the cities' socio-spatial stratification. Both serve as potential benchmarks for the empirical investigation in this chapter. Urban typologies reflect the historical and morphological evolution of the urban fabric and are classified into six categories: 1) old city; 2) old city extension; 3) informal areas; 4) regulated areas; 5) public housing areas; 6) and villages integrated within city boundaries. A total of 104 neighbourhoods were identified through the socio-spatial mapping process and categorised into the following typologies: 23 in Daraa, 26 in Deir-ez-Zor, and 55 in Hama (see Table 6). For empirical analysis, each neighbourhood is treated as a distinct analytical unit. Meanwhile, several clustering strategies were explored to evaluate the consistency of different approaches to the typological grouping of neighbourhoods. Three clustering approaches include:

1. Grouping all neighbourhoods that share one single typology across the city.
2. Grouping neighbourhoods that share a single typology across the city and are geographically contiguous.

3. Grouping neighbourhoods with shared urban typology, geographic connectivity, excluding those separated by natural infrastructural barriers (e.g., rivers and major roads).

By evaluating clustering approaches against the socio-spatial mapping results, the analysis aims to identify the most reliable and valid analytical unit for exploring the spatial dimensions of political activism. Cluster-level values for outcomes and conditions were recalculated for each clustering approach by averaging data from grouped neighbourhoods. The central criterion of clustering is to maximise internal homogeneity of socio-spatial characteristics. To achieve this, a standard deviation test was applied to both urban and protest data, and the results were compared with the baseline model (treating each neighbourhood independently).

The results supported the use of individual neighbourhoods as the primary analytical units. This method provides the highest representational accuracy for the populations studied and the lowest internal variance. Despite sharing characteristics such as urban and population density, architectural styles, and economic activities, the analysis showed that neighbourhoods or urban typologies are not inherently homogeneous within their designated geographical area. Variations in residents' backgrounds, locations, and construction periods contribute to intra-neighbourhood or cluster heterogeneity. However, the socio-spatial mapping process accounts for these differences by incorporating multiple layers, including urban form, topography, natural landscapes, infrastructure, and social configurations, that have shaped the urban environment in recent decades.

A key limitation of employing neighbourhoods in intra-city comparative analysis is the fluid and contested nature of their boundaries. While these boundaries shape resident identity and everyday spatial practices, social action often transcends them. For example, a protest may originate in a confined spot in one neighbourhood and spill into adjacent neighbourhoods. To address this, neighbourhoods are treated as both polygons (bounded areas) and centroids (spatial points), depending on the analytical task. This approach allows the analysis to capture the influence of urban features that extend beyond official boundaries. In addition, characteristics such as population and building density are normalised by area to remove scale-related biases introduced by variation in neighbourhood size.

*Table 6. Urban typologies and neighbourhoods in Hama, Daraa, and Deir-ez-Zor*

| Typology | Hama | Deir-ez-Zor | Daraa |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Old City** | **Souk District:** Bashoura, Dabaghah, Madinah, Bab Qibli, Jarajmeh, Wadi Hawarneh, Souk Shajarah, Mhalbeh, Masharqa, Farrayeh, Jouret Hawwa, Marabet, 'Awlylyat. **Hader District:** Bayn Hayren, Shamalyyeh, Sakhaneh, Asedeh, Zanbaqi, Jourah, Baroudyyeh, Sharqiyah, Manakh. | AbuAbed, Rushdyyeh | **Daraa Balad:** Abbasyyeh, Arba'en, Bihaar, Karak, Souq Sweidan |
| **Old City Extension** | Bayad, Shareah, Mahatah, Hamedyyeh, Janoub Thakaneh, Souk Hal, Karm Hourani, Sabounyyeh, Tareq Halab. | Aradi, Ba'ajeen, GhaziAyyash, Hamedyyeh, SheikhYassin | **Daraa Mahatta:** Shmaal Khat, Governmental Square, Sahari, Souq Daraa |
| **Informal areas** | Masha' Arbaeen, Masha' Jouz, Masha' Fourousyeh, Masha' Tayyar, Sawa'eq, Masha' Tab. | Alwadi, Jourah, Tab Jourah | Daraa Camp, Eastern Tareq Sadd, Western Tareq Sad |
| **Regulated areas** | Qusur, Tawheed, Tishreen, Bernawi, Ba'ath, Andalus, Nasir, Gharb al-Mashtal, and Ein Louzeh. | Eastern Hawyeqah, Industrial Area, Jam'yyat, Joubeleh, Kanamat, Khasarat, Mowazafyen, Old Mataar, Oumal, Ourfi, Qosour, Rasafeh, Villat, Western Hawyeqah | Ba'ath, Industrial Area, Kashif, Manshyyeh, Mataar, Miftara Qusur, Sabeel, Sajneh, Tareq Tafas |
| **Public housing** | Ta'awnyeh, Tareq Mesyaf, Officers Houses, and Dahyet Abi Feda'. | - | Dahyyet Daraa |
| **Villages within city boundaries** | Kazo, Dahiryyeh, and Jibreen. | Harabish, Tahtouh | - |

Source: Author's own elaboration

### 5.1.2 Quantifying Conditions and Outcomes

This section outlines the formulas used to quantify the eight conditions applied in the QCA framework. The decision to create the data table was pragmatic, given the absence of comprehensive datasets on urban characteristics in Syrian cities or on protest activity at the

neighbourhood level; these data were reconstructed using a mix of publicly available sources and original spatial analysis.

A. Urban conditions:

The four urban conditions are building footprint density, street vertex density, proximity to central squares, and the mosque distance matrix.

*Building footprint density (FOOTPRINT)*

Urban density, measured here by the footprint area of buildings, serves as an indicator of socio-economic status and urban typology. It affects social interaction and, consequently, social bonds and cohesion. Denser areas are more likely to foster stronger social ties and offer a safer urban environment for protests and protection from security forces. Data on building footprints were obtained from the Global ML Building Footprint Dataset (2023) and imported into QGIS. A key limitation of this dataset is its incompleteness in neighbourhoods affected by conflict-related destruction. Missing data were reconstructed using high-resolution satellite imagery from the 2009–2011 period, accessed via Google Earth. Building layouts were delineated in QGIS using the Mapflow plugin, with manual verification and correction carried out by the researcher.

The building footprint density, which accounts for the spatial concentration of built structures within each neighbourhood, is calculated using the following formula:

$$fd = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} af}{an}$$

- *fd = Building footprint density*
- *af = Area of individual building footprint*
- *n = Number of buildings in the neighbourhood*
- *an = Total area of the neighbourhood*
- *i= Each individual building*

*Streets vertex density (STREETS)*

Street networks are a critical dimension of urban morphology, shaping the mobility and accessibility of a neighbourhood for both residents and security agencies. Street density determines the accessibility of protest squares to demonstrators and to security personnel alike, as well as the routes available to protestors escaping repression. Data on street networks were

obtained as shapefiles from OpenStreetMap, validated in QGIS, and refined through direct visual interpretation of recent satellite imagery.

Similar to building footprint data, the accuracy and coverage vary across urban typologies, with greater limitations in old city centres, informal zones, and heavily damaged areas. Streets (represented as vector lines) were converted into vertices using QGIS's Extract Vertices tool, enabling the capture of both intersections and directional changes in the street network. As shown in Figure 13, the street vertex density method captures street irregularity: irregular, curved streets produce higher vertex counts, whereas straighter, more organised streets have fewer vertices. Roundabouts and boundary streets were excluded, while pedestrian pathways were included.

***Figure 13. Variation Street Vertex Density Across Different Street Shapes***

***Bab Qibli and Jarajmeh in Hama*** ***Qusur in Hama***

Source: Author's own illustration based on data from SMI (2024)

Street density is calculated based on the number of vertices rather than the length of the streets, prioritising street form over street coverage or intensity. The formula used is:

$$sd = \frac{v}{a}$$

- *sd = Street vertex density*
- *v = Number of street vertices (angular changes or intersections)*
- *a = Area of the neighbourhood*

*Mosques Distance Matrix (MOSQUE)*

The role of mosques was central during the first weeks of the uprising; activists followed a strategy of spontaneously heading towards mosques in areas where they anticipated protests to take place after Friday prayers. If a protest was prevented in the mosque they gathered at, they would relocate to one of the surrounding mosques. Therefore, being in a neighbourhood with a number of mosques that are easily accessible increases the likelihood that protests will be held and attended by more activists.

To assess the proximity and connectivity of mosques to each neighbourhood, the average distance from the neighbourhood centroid to mosques within an 850-metre radius (approximately 10 minutes of walking) was calculated using QGIS's distance matrix tool. The distance is then divided by the number of mosques within this radius. This metric captures both spatial closeness and mosque density within a defined radius. Rather than simply counting the number of mosques within the neighbourhood's boundaries, the number of mosques within a radius from the neighbourhood's centroid was considered. This approach places less emphasis on the boundaries of the neighbourhoods on the ground, prioritising the actual spatial connectivity across these boundaries instead. The distance matrix was measured according to the following formula:

$$dm = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} di\,,\ di < 850m}{n} * \frac{1}{n}$$

- *dm = Mosque distance matrix value*
- *di = Distance to mosque i from the neighbourhood centroid*
- *n = Number of mosques within an 850-metre radius*

*Proximity to main square(s) (SQUARE)*

Proximity to central squares was a key determinant of protest intensity, as these squares served as a primary hotspot for mobilisation. Across the different phases of the uprising, proximity to central squares also indicated a neighbourhood's centrality and the visibility of its protests. The distance between each neighbourhood centroid and the main square(s) was calculated using QGIS's distance matrix tool. The selection of the reference square was shaped by the city's specific context. In Hama, Asi Square functioned as both the city's main square and its principal protest hub, at least during the mobilisation phase. In Deir-ez-Zor, Freedom Square was selected over the larger but less accessible Seven Fountains Square. In cities with multiple

protest squares, such as Daraa (Sarayya Square and the Omari Mosque), and Deir-ez-Zor (Freedom Square and Medilji Square) the shortest distance to any recognised protest square was used.

B. Social conditions

Urban typologies within the city exhibit considerable variation, reflecting not only differences in physical characteristics but also in social cohesion, demographic history, and residential stability. For instance, old city centres are often characterised by dense and homogeneous social networks, whereas social ties are more diffuse and less concentrated as the city expanded and underwent state regulation. The substantial migration from the surrounding countryside further reshaped the social landscape of the city, particularly in informal areas that became densely populated but not necessarily socially homogeneous. To capture this dimension, two variables were used: population density and social homogeneity.

*Social density (POPULATION)*

Population data were obtained from the official 2004 census conducted by the Central Statistical Bureau (CBS, 2004). Despite being relatively old, it remains the most recent available dataset and offers comprehensive demographic coverage at the sub-city level. However, two key limitations were addressed:

First, official administrative boundaries and neighbourhood names recorded in the census often do not fully align with the socio-spatial mapping used in this research. To address this, aggregated clusters were created by combining areas with shared characteristics, as defined by the census data. Population density was then calculated at the cluster level and applied uniformly to all neighbourhoods within each cluster. For example, in Hama, the census's Mohafaza neighbourhood encompasses both Barnawi and Janoub Thakaneh, while Mahalbeh and Jala' were grouped to include Sheikh Anbar, Bayad, and Karm Hourani. In Deir-ez-Zor, the census-defined Thawra neighbourhood includes Jourah and Wadi, which share similar urban and social traits.

The second limitation concerns the exclusion of some informal areas, such as Wadi al-Jawz and Haret Alsamak in Hama, in the 2004 census data. However, since these areas did not witness notable protest events during the uprising, they were excluded from the analysis.

The population density is calculated according to the following formula:

$$pd = \frac{p}{a}$$

- *pd = Population density*
- *p = Population (2004 census)*
- *a = Area of the neighbourhood*

*Social Structures Homogeneity (SOCALST)*

The typology and density of social structures in Syrian cities have shifted across decades of urban expansion and demographic changes. Historically, urban populations clustered in districts defined by ethnic, professional, familial, and religious affiliations (Alsumsam, 2017; Alkilani, 2002), producing dense and socially homogeneous communities often led by extended families or tribal groups. Over time, as cities grew and absorbed more diverse populations, this social landscape evolved: some older neighbourhoods came to accommodate families of different social backgrounds, while newer neighbourhoods typically hosted less homogeneous populations in both social and economic terms. Although Arab Muslims inhabit most neighbourhoods in Hama, Daraa, and Deir-ez-Zor, some areas, such as Shamal al-Khat in Daraa, Madineh, Sheikh Anbar, and Bab Qibli in Hama, and Ba'ajeen and Rushdiyeh in Deir-ez-Zor, have a mixed population of Christians, Shiites, and Alawites.

To assess social structures, including the density of social ties and ethno-sectarian homogeneity, a four-value fuzzy set was created from the results of in-depth interviews. Interviewees were asked to characterise the social structures of the neighbourhoods where they lived or had detailed knowledge. Answers were cross-validated among participants from the same city. Neighbourhoods were then assigned scores based on the following calibration scheme.

- *non-residential areas ……..0*
- *empty areas ……..0*
- *mixed ethno-sectarian areas……0.25*
- *modern neighbourhoods with low density.……0.25*
- *homogeneous with high population density……0.75*
- *tribal, familial or unified identity…….. 1*

The choice to design the proposed four-value scheme is ordinal, representing degrees of socially binding mechanisms that reinforce one another. The lowest value (0) captures non-

residential or empty areas. The 0.25 value combines two empirically different but functionally comparable cases: ethno-sectarian neighbourhoods, where heterogeneity of background weakens shared categorical identities, and low-density, regulated neighbourhoods, where the physical layout limited everyday interaction even among a socially homogeneous population. Although these configurations express different social dynamics, they are functionally equivalent with respect to the mechanism captured by this condition: the joint presence of dense interpersonal networks (NETNESS) and a strong shared categorical identity (CATNESS). The 0.75 value identifies neighbourhoods where high population produces frequent interaction, and the population is socially homogeneous, that is not organised around tribal or familial structures. The 1.0 value identifies another aspect of unifying identity, such as tribal, familial or political-religious identification, that tracks the accumulation and mutually reinforcing presence of CATNESS and NETNESS.

In Syrian cities, neighbourhoods organised around tribal or familial networks consistently produced the most coherent interpersonal trust and sense of solidarity. Given the organisational nature of mid-sized Syrian cities and constraints imposed by authoritarian rule, other forms of social organisations, such as religious associations or professional networks, were not included in this condition. SOCALST should therefore be understood as a composite indicator of the joint presence of dense interpersonal networks and unified categorical identity. This choice aligns with the double categorisation of social structures in terms of networks and identities, while also reflecting a pragmatic decision to limit the number of QCA conditions to what the case base can support.

C. State footprint conditions

In the early phases of modernisation and urban development, government complexes were strategically constructed in the extensions of the old city districts. As urban growth continued in later decades, many government buildings, especially security headquarters, moved to newer neighbourhoods, often in less densely populated areas near highways. Informal areas remained largely excluded from public services and government infrastructure. The state footprint is captured here through the spatial distribution of government and security buildings, assessed with a distance-matrix tool. Both SECURITY and GOV are therefore operationalised as distance measures: high values indicate that the neighbourhood is far from regime infrastructure, and vice versa. A distance measure is preferred over an absolute count because it prioritises the spatial relationship between neighbourhoods and repressive infrastructure.

*Security Building Distance Matrix (SECURITY)*

The security headquarters included in this analysis consist of main police stations, intelligence branches, permanent security checkpoints, and branches of adjacent military units. Using QGIS's Distance Matrix Tool, the average distance of all security headquarters within a 1,500-metre radius, roughly the time it takes security forces to drive to the location in urban traffic (estimated by interviewees as 10 mins), was calculated and then divided by the number of these headquarters within the same radius. This radius indicates the typical response time for security forces to local protest activity, as estimated by interviewees. Proximity to these security buildings is hypothesised to negatively influence neighbourhood mobilisation due to the increased likelihood of surveillance, intervention, and repression.

The distance matrix is calculated according to the following formula:

$$Ds = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} d\,,\ d\ < 1500m}{n} * \frac{1}{n}$$

- *ds = Security distance matrix value*
- *di = Distance to the i security installation*
- *n = Number of security installations within a 1.5 km radius*

*Government Buildings Distance Matrix (GOV)*

Government buildings played a multifaceted role during the uprising. In the early months, regime forces converted some governmental buildings into security centres by directly occupying them, deploying snipers on their rooftops, or establishing checkpoints around them. Beyond that, these buildings also held socio-economic importance. A considerable number of the city's residents were employed in the public sector, making them economically dependent on the regime and spatially connected with these buildings. These individuals, many of whom resided in newly developed areas and public housing projects, became increasingly susceptible to the regime's strategy of politicising access to public services and employment. As military division lines solidified, revolutionary activities declined in areas with a higher state footprint, compounded by the relocation of regime-dependent households to these zones.

As with security forces, the connectivity of neighbourhoods to governmental buildings was calculated by dividing the average distance of governmental buildings located within an 850-metre radius by their number. This formula explains how neighbourhoods are connected with governmental buildings. The distance matrix is calculated as follows:

$$Dg = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} d,\ d\ >\ 850m}{n} * \frac{1}{n}$$

- *dg = Government building distance matrix*
- *di = Distance from the neighbourhood centroid to the i governmental building*
- *n = Number of governmental buildings within the 850-metre radius*

D. Protest outcomes

The protest intensity is assessed across the three main phases: mobilisation, mobilisation consolidation and demobilisation. These phases were interrupted by critical turning points: major military campaigns, sustained security crackdowns, militarisation of the uprising, and mobilisation fatigue. Table 7 presents an overview of the number of protests and the duration (in weeks) of each phase.

The Mobilisation Period (FIRST) began in mid-to-late March 2011 in all three cities and lasted until the regime launched military campaigns in April (Daraa) and August (Deir-ez-Zor and Hama). It must be noted that participation during this period often extended beyond neighbourhood boundaries, as activists from across the city converged on specific spots linked to local mosques, which served as informal coordination hubs. The Mobilisation Consolidation Period (SECOND) followed the military crackdown and lasted between 35 and 56 weeks. In this phase, protest activity became increasingly localised within specific neighbourhoods rather than spanning the city. The Demobilisation Period (THIRD) marked a sharp decline in protest activity across all three cities until it ceased entirely between August and December 2013. The researcher identifies the onset of demobilisation as the last week in which protest events peaked before entering a sustained decline: May 2012 in Hama, June 2012 in Daraa, and March 2012 in Deir-ez-Zor. Demobilisation is considered a separate phase to highlight the role of place-specific configuration dynamics during demobilisation, as opposed to mobilisation and consolidation periods. Finally, in addition to analysing each period individually, two categories, (ALL) and (~ALL), were created to represent mobilisation and non-mobilisation activities across the entire period (2011–2013).

Protest intensity was calculated for each neighbourhood across the three protest periods (FIRST, SECOND, THIRD) and for the total protest duration (ALL). To capture the diverse protest dynamics, it is essential not only to assess the frequency of protests within each neighbourhood but also to assess the consistency of mobilisation across various political and security conditions.

Protests were aggregated on a weekly basis across all periods. Friday, a national weekend in Syria and the day of communal prayers, served as the primary day for weekly mobilisation. Each Friday was symbolically titled by activists at the national level, which often shaped the political messages and activities carried out throughout that week. For this reason, protests were organised and analysed weekly, with Friday as the start of each week.

***Table 7. Chronological Categorisation of the Protest Periods in Hama, Daraa, and Deir-ez-Zor***

| City | First Period Dates (FIRST) | N. weeks | N. protests | Neigh. turnout (%) | Second Period Dates (SECOND) | N. weeks | N. protest | Neigh. turnout (%) | Third Period Dates (THIRD) | N. weeks | N. protests | Neigh. turnout (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Hama** | 25/3/2011<br>4/8/2011 | 18 | 755 | 86% | 5/8/2011<br>17/5/2012 | 42 | 3,288 | 90% | 18/5/2012<br>22/8/2013 | 62 | 1,169 | 81% |
| **Deir-ez-Zor** | 18/3/2011<br>28/7/2011 | 16 | 368 | 71% | 29/7/2011<br>29/3/2012 | 35 | 1,335 | 100% | 30/3/2012<br>29/8/2013 | 60 | 1,250 | 100% |
| **Daraa** | 18/3/2011<br>5/5/2011 | 7 | 167 | 42% | 6/5/2011<br>14/6/2012 | 56 | 1,851 | 89% | 15/6/2012<br>23/12/2013 | 84 | 584 | 79% |

Source: Data compiled from SMI (2024)

For each neighbourhood, the number of protests each week was counted, along with the total number of weeks in which at least one protest occurred. Protest intensity was assessed by assigning equal weight to both the frequency of protests and the duration of mobilisation (i.e., how long a neighbourhood could sustain protest activity). This aims to balance the neighbourhood's capacity to protest with its ability to sustain mobilisation over time. The sum of the average base intensity (the average number of protests per week) and the number of weeks was divided by the square of the total number of weeks to account for variation in mobilisation duration. The formula is expressed as follows:

$$PI = \left( \left( \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{np} p}{np} \right) + np \right) * \frac{1}{2n}$$

- *PI = Protest intensity*
- *pi = Number of protests in week i*
- *np = Number of weeks with at least one protest*
- *n = Total number of weeks in the respective protest period*

E. Data summary

Tables 8 and 9 provide a descriptive overview of the quantified values for both conditions and outcomes at neighbourhood and urban typology levels.

***Table 8. Values of Conditions and Outcomes on the Neighbourhood Level***

| | | | OUTCOMES | | | | CONDITIONS | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Name** | **Urban Typology** | **ALL** | **FIRST** | **SECOND** | **THIRD** | **FOOTPRINT** | **SOCALST** | **POPULATION** | **MOSQUES** | **GOV** | **SECURITY** | **SQUARES** | **STREETS** |
| | Miftara | regulated | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.04 | 0 | | 221 | 274 | 285 | 1810 | 71 |
| | Sajneh | regulated | 0.02 | 0 | 0.04 | 0.01 | 0.06 | 0 | 14 | 126 | 732 | 302 | 1429 | 59 |
| | SouqDaraa | regulated | 0.15 | 0.89 | 0.21 | 0.03 | 0.34 | 0 | 105 | 55 | 13 | 131 | 147 | 471 |
| | TareqTafas | regulated | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.12 | 0 | 38 | 230 | 657 | 268 | 1789 | 140 |
| | Ba'ath | regulated | 0.01 | 0 | 0.04 | 0 | 0.08 | 0.25 | 17 | 183 | 186 | 153 | 1653 | 97 |
| | ShmaalKhat | oldext | 0.32 | 0 | 0.72 | 0.1 | 0.39 | 0.25 | 201 | 52 | 13 | 114 | 419 | 495 |
| | Manshyyeh | regulated | 0.07 | 0 | 0.1 | 0.06 | 0.23 | 0.50 | 79 | 78 | 850 | 405 | 928 | 274 |
| | Kashif | regulated | 1.51 | 0.85 | 2.22 | 1.1 | 0.34 | 0.75 | 106 | 63 | 29 | 130 | 1024 | 441 |
| | Mataar | oldext | 0.24 | 0 | 0.2 | 0.29 | 0.38 | 0.75 | 196 | 86 | 21 | 182 | 956 | 591 |
| | Qusur | regulated | 0.93 | 0.43 | 1.21 | 0.77 | 0.28 | 0.75 | 106 | 120 | 61 | 214 | 1567 | 431 |
| | Sabeel | regulated | 1.11 | 0 | 1.87 | 0.68 | 0.36 | 0.75 | 98 | 92 | 39 | 208 | 1309 | 422 |
| | Sahari | oldext | 0.36 | 0 | 0.8 | 0.11 | 0.29 | 0.75 | 102 | 78 | 20 | 167 | 750 | 382 |
| | TareqSad | informal | 1.39 | 0.11 | 2.63 | 0.68 | 0.37 | 0.75 | 408 | 79 | 49 | 154 | 648 | 415 |
| | Abbasyyeh | Oldcity | 0.16 | 0 | 0.35 | 0.1 | 0.26 | 1 | 112 | 60 | 290 | 202 | 430 | 321 |
| | Arbaen | Oldcity | 0.51 | 0 | 1.14 | 0.28 | 0.18 | 1 | 52 | 101 | 249 | 1058 | 1245 | 142 |
| | Bihaar | Oldcity | 0.21 | 0.29 | 0.41 | 0 | 0.17 | 1 | 34 | 103 | 843 | 605 | 943 | 78 |
| | DaraaCamp | informal | 0.35 | 0.11 | 0.31 | 0.39 | 0.79 | 0.75 | 228 | 84 | 49 | 127 | 741 | 306 |
| | Karak | Oldcity | 1.89 | 2.74 | 2.56 | 1.18 | 0.25 | 1 | 149 | 46 | 265 | 181 | 345 | 575 |
| **Daraa** | SouqSweida | Oldcity | 0.08 | 0.11 | 0.13 | 0.05 | 0.34 | 1 | 111 | 44 | 354 | 394 | 651 | 297 |
| | Hawyeqah | regulated | 0.33 | 0.31 | 0.43 | 0.32 | 0.25 | 0 | 155 | 56 | 161 | 230 | 656 | 196 |
| | GhaziAyyash | oldext | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.14 | 0 | 91 | 72 | 108 | 83 | 1502 | 367 |
| | Rushdyyeh | Oldcity | 0.13 | 0.25 | 0.27 | 0.04 | 0.33 | 0.25 | 91 | 21 | 71 | 121 | 675 | 214 |
| | AbuAbed | Oldcity | 0.17 | 0.28 | 0.39 | 0.06 | 0.62 | 0.75 | 35 | 17 | 43 | 161 | 233 | 407 |
| | Aradi | oldext | 0.25 | 0 | 0.44 | 0.23 | 0.53 | 0.75 | 95 | 32 | 232 | 191 | 570 | 277 |
| | Ba'ajeen | oldext | 0.12 | 0 | 0.23 | 0.1 | 0.44 | 0.75 | 327 | 22 | 62 | 111 | 828 | 469 |
| | Industrial | regulated | 0.24 | 0 | 0.7 | 0.08 | 0.24 | 0.75 | 193 | 81 | 850 | 1291 | 2322 | 475 |
| | Kanamat | regulated | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.1 | 0.04 | 0.38 | 0.75 | 95 | 63 | 598 | 291 | 1143 | 734 |
| | Khasarat | regulated | 0.11 | 0 | 0.27 | 0.07 | 0.4 | 0.75 | 95 | 68 | 806 | 372 | 1412 | 369 |
| | Mowazafyen | regulated | 0.38 | 0.13 | 0.86 | 0.23 | 0.47 | 0.75 | 238 | 56 | 288 | 158 | 1530 | 320 |
| | Oumal | regulated | 0.61 | 0.19 | 0.74 | 0.69 | 0.43 | 0.75 | 339 | 94 | 310 | 212 | 1592 | 374 |
| | Ourfi | regulated | 0.67 | 0.47 | 1.39 | 0.41 | 0.4 | 0.75 | 238 | 74 | 250 | 270 | 1359 | 282 |
| | Qosour | regulated | 0.59 | 0.25 | 1 | 0.5 | 0.36 | 0.75 | 533 | 52 | 81 | 83 | 1577 | 459 |
| | Rasafeh | regulated | 0.03 | 0 | 0.06 | 0.03 | 0.21 | 0.75 | 339 | 112 | 166 | 687 | 2512 | 169 |
| | Hamedyyeh | oldext | 1.5 | 0.5 | 2.81 | 1.18 | 0.46 | 1 | 341 | 29 | 99 | 174 | 856 | 503 |
| | Joubeleh | regulated | 1.81 | 1.25 | 4.06 | 0.96 | 0.51 | 1 | 448 | 26 | 69 | 145 | 908 | 588 |
| | Jourah | informal | 0.97 | 0.44 | 1.6 | 0.85 | 0.52 | 1 | 596 | 89 | 92 | 121 | 2500 | 398 |
| | OldMataar | regulated | 0.58 | 1.19 | 0.93 | 0.31 | 0.3 | 1 | 151 | 64 | 736 | 381 | 1705 | 451 |
| | SheikhYassin | oldext | 0.4 | 0.28 | 0.64 | 0.34 | 0.53 | 1 | 357 | 22 | 92 | 172 | 447 | 348 |
| **Deir-ez-Zor** | TabJourah | informal | 0.05 | 0.06 | 0.03 | 0.06 | 0.18 | 1 | NA | 108 | 183 | 183 | 3035 | 305 |
| | Tahtouh | Village | 0.02 | 0 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.16 | 1 | 193 | 129 | 359 | 1500 | 3118 | 262 |
| | TishrinDis | regulated | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.24 | | 4 | 152 | 850 | 1500 | 1940 | 261 |
| | Andalus | regulated | 0.09 | 0.06 | 0.05 | 0.13 | 0.31 | 0.25 | 159 | 70 | 221 | 386 | 1578 | 175 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Ba'athH | regulated | 0.94 | 0.06 | 1.48 | 0.86 | 0.28 | 0.25 | 62 | 154 | 604 | 1445 | 2672 | 549 |
| | Bernawi | regulated | 0.02 | 0 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.3 | 0.25 | 75 | 80 | 263 | 1500 | 2236 | 438 |
| | Gharbmashta | regulated | 0.46 | 0 | 0.99 | 0.26 | 0.31 | 0.25 | 189 | 80 | 117 | 222 | 1678 | 352 |
| | Janobmalaab | regulated | 1.07 | 0.14 | 2.48 | 0.43 | 0.37 | 0.25 | 204 | 61 | 310 | 176 | 2210 | 482 |
| | Madineh | Oldcity | 0.21 | 0.75 | 0.21 | 0.06 | 0.5 | 0.25 | 98 | 48 | 624 | 870 | 1082 | 781 |
| | Masaken | regulated | 0.02 | 0.06 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.28 | 0.25 | 204 | 111 | 95 | 174 | 1957 | 527 |
| | Mashaforosy | informal | 0.1 | 0 | 0.26 | 0.03 | 0.39 | 0.25 | 106 | 646 | 850 | 360 | 2960 | 614 |
| | Nasr | regulated | 0.02 | 0 | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.31 | 0.25 | 90 | 484 | 260 | 377 | 2376 | 417 |
| | QusurH | regulated | 1.44 | 0.36 | 2.36 | 1.17 | 0.39 | 0.50 | 172 | 75 | 668 | 241 | 2121 | 316 |
| | Shariah | regulated | 0.15 | 0.11 | 0.27 | 0.08 | 0.36 | 0.50 | 120 | 119 | 162 | 406 | 1191 | 497 |
| | ShiekhAnbar | Oldcity | 0.95 | 0.08 | 1.4 | 0.91 | 0.51 | 0.25 | 302 | 20 | 99 | 233 | 971 | 1043 |
| | Tawnyyeh | regulated | 0.56 | 0.19 | 0.76 | 0.55 | 0.43 | 0.25 | 159 | 130 | 251 | 286 | 1639 | 461 |
| | Twahid | regulated | 1.12 | 0.25 | 1.54 | 1.12 | 0.37 | 0.25 | 135 | 670 | 150 | 1158 | 2942 | 407 |
| | WadiJawz | informal | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.29 | 0.25 | NA | 248 | 850 | 1500 | 2507 | 833 |
| | Alaylyat | oldext | 0.66 | 0.22 | 1.54 | 0.23 | 0.5 | 0.75 | 381 | 41 | 45 | 234 | 543 | 818 |
| | ArbaeenH | regulated | 0.52 | 0.17 | 1.13 | 0.23 | 0.37 | 0.75 | 135 | 96 | 496 | 1500 | 2389 | 205 |
| | Bayaad | oldext | 0.8 | 1.06 | 1.24 | 0.47 | 0.54 | 0.75 | 302 | 62 | 116 | 315 | 1453 | 564 |
| | Hamedyeh | oldext | 2 | 1.08 | 3.56 | 1.26 | 0.47 | 0.75 | 304 | 96 | 172 | 493 | 1200 | 755 |
| | Janobthakan | oldext | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.12 | 0.02 | 0.41 | 0.75 | 75 | 79 | 280 | 1443 | 1932 | 345 |
| | Mahatah | oldext | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.63 | 0.75 | 367 | 42 | 280 | 447 | 1446 | 375 |
| | Sabunia | oldext | 0.7 | 0.36 | 1.57 | 0.24 | 0.43 | 0.75 | 469 | 79 | 65 | 176 | 993 | 470 |
| | SoukShajara | Oldcity | 0.29 | 0.47 | 0.54 | 0.08 | 0.58 | 0.75 | 288 | 15 | 123 | 288 | 777 | 753 |
| | TareeqHalab | regulated | 3.28 | 0.44 | 4.43 | 3.38 | 0.38 | 0.75 | 310 | 83 | 356 | 1370 | 1900 | 367 |
| | Aidoon | informal | 0.02 | 0 | 0.04 | 0.02 | 0.62 | 1 | 650 | 54 | 355 | 1175 | 1659 | 736 |
| | Amiriyeh | oldext | 0.12 | 0.44 | 0.11 | 0.05 | 0.59 | 1 | 270 | 64 | 71 | 496 | 926 | 677 |
| | BabQibli | Oldcity | 2.2 | 0.42 | 3.3 | 2.02 | 0.71 | 1 | 509 | 39 | 547 | 1210 | 1330 | 1341 |
| | Barazyeh | Oldcity | 0.16 | 0.39 | 0.31 | 0 | 0.47 | 1 | 284 | 21 | 61 | 215 | 851 | 818 |
| | Baroudyyeh | oldext | 0.02 | 0.06 | 0.05 | 0 | 0.42 | 1 | 205 | 71 | 33 | 412 | 401 | 950 |
| | Bashoura | Oldcity | 0.06 | 0.17 | 0.11 | 0 | 0.52 | 1 | 150 | 25 | 64 | 456 | 594 | 1067 |
| | Dabaghah | Oldcity | 0.44 | 0.89 | 0.86 | 0.05 | 0.59 | 1 | 132 | 12 | 58 | 287 | 506 | 802 |
| | Farrayeh | Oldcity | 1.14 | 0.89 | 1.71 | 0.86 | 0.67 | 1 | 284 | 16 | 46 | 220 | 410 | 1016 |
| | Hader | oldext | 0.78 | 1.97 | 1.26 | 0.15 | 0.55 | 1 | 205 | 52 | 42 | 294 | 642 | 517 |
| | Jarajmeh | Oldcity | 0.4 | 0.78 | 0.62 | 0.15 | 0.67 | 1 | 523 | 47 | 313 | 1316 | 1530 | 1138 |
| | Manakh | oldext | 0.52 | 1.25 | 0.6 | 0.28 | 0.53 | 1 | 270 | 42 | 86 | 702 | 1169 | 573 |
| | MashaArbae | informal | 0.33 | 0.06 | 0.74 | 0.14 | 0.38 | 1 | 204 | 62 | 850 | 1500 | 2419 | 491 |
| | Sharqyyeh | oldext | 0.22 | 0.19 | 0.49 | 0.05 | 0.57 | 1 | 205 | 51 | 53 | 484 | 765 | 1000 |
| | Wadihawarn | Oldcity | 0.1 | 0 | 0.29 | 0.02 | 0.59 | 1 | 367 | 30 | 178 | 322 | 1109 | 498 |
| **Hama** | KarmHouran | oldext | 0.02 | 0.06 | 0.05 | 0 | 0.53 | 0.75 | 302 | 59 | 102 | 240 | 1562 | 731 |

***Table 9. Values of Conditions and Outcomes at the Urban Typology Level***

| City | Urban Typology | All | First | Second | Third | Footprint | Street | Mosque | Square | Socalst | Pop. | Security | Gov |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Daraa** | **Informal areas** | 0.87 | 0.11 | 1.47 | 0.54 | 0.45 | 280 | 99 | 896 | 0.875 | 233 | 316 | 255 |
| | **Old City** | 0.57 | 0.63 | 0.92 | 0.32 | 0.22 | 281 | 71 | 722 | 1 | 86 | 400 | 487 |
| | **Old City Ext.** | 0.31 | 0.00 | 0.57 | 0.17 | 0.32 | 473 | 66 | 618 | 0.58 | 151 | 16 | 146 |
| | **Regulated** | 0.42 | 0.24 | 0.63 | 0.29 | 0.19 | 241 | 201 | 1612 | 0.33 | 58 | 373 | 239 |
| **Deir-ez-Zor** | **Informal areas** | 0.51 | 0.25 | 0.82 | 0.46 | 0.37 | 333 | 97 | 2689 | 1 | 397 | 131 | 141 |
| | **Old City** | 0.15 | 0.27 | 0.33 | 0.05 | 0.48 | 310 | 19 | 454 | 0.50 | 63 | 57 | 141 |
| | **Old City Ext.** | 0.45 | 0.16 | 0.82 | 0.37 | 0.42 | 392 | 35 | 840 | 0.75 | 242 | 118 | 146 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Regulated** | 0.49 | 0.35 | 0.96 | 0.33 | 0.35 | 374 | 62 | 1447 | 0.75 | 237 | 332 | 330 |
| | **Villages** | 0.02 | 0.00 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.16 | 363 | 116 | 3543 | 1 | 96 | 604 | 1500 |
| **Hama** | **Housing** | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.31 | 393 | 260 | 2457 | 0.15 | 125 | 502 | 700 |
| | **Informal Areas** | 0.11 | 0.02 | 0.26 | 0.05 | 0.42 | 668 | 253 | 2386 | 0.62 | 320 | 726 | 1133 |
| | **Old City** | 0.60 | 0.48 | 0.94 | 0.42 | 0.52 | 911 | 33 | 876 | 0.82 | 291 | 174 | 468 |
| | **Old City Ext.** | 0.49 | 0.56 | 0.88 | 0.23 | 0.51 | 640 | 68 | 1042 | 0.86 | 277 | 113 | 499 |
| | **Regulated** | 0.69 | 0.13 | 1.11 | 0.59 | 0.34 | 390 | 145 | 2059 | 0.30 | 149 | 338 | 727 |

## 5.2 Research Analysis and Discussion

The primary aim of the analysis presented in this section is exploratory. It seeks to identify configurational pathways associated with mobilisation, and to identify cases that exemplify these pathways for in-depth analysis in the following chapter. Accordingly, the expectations of the empirical part of this research (the QCA) are calibrated to reflect these objectives: the analysis does not pursue generalisable causal claims, nor does it follow the complete formal procedures of QCA, such as constructing truth tables and performing logical minimisation.

Several potential limitations concerning the consistency and generalisability of the findings are discussed here. They stem from the complexity of the phenomena under study, the relatively large number of conditions, and the heterogeneity of cases. Although two robustness tests are conducted below to assess the stability of the findings, setting clear expectations in advance is essential to determine the empirical scope of the analysis. The analysis aims to suggest plausible combinations of conditions associated with mobilisation across the phases of the uprising; it does not attempt to provide definitive causal inferences.

### 5.2.1 Statistical Overview Analysis

Set-theoretic methods, such as QCA, which examine the combinations of conditions necessary or sufficient for an outcome to occur, differ fundamentally from inferential statistical approaches that estimate the effect of individual variables on an outcome. Nevertheless, it is often advised to perform descriptive and inferential statistical analyses between all condition variables and protest outcomes before conducting QCA (Legewie, 2013). Such a step helps to understand the empirical structure of the data, the relationship between conditions and outcomes, the distribution of set memberships, and to identify any potential skewness or multicollinearity.

A multivariable linear regression analysis was performed to evaluate the relationships and correlations between each condition and protest intensity across the three specified mobilisation periods. As shown in Table 10, FOOTPRINT, POPULATION, and STREETS

correlate weakly to moderately positively with protest intensity, though only POPULATION reaches significance at p≤0.01. Conversely, MOSQUES, GOV, and SQUARES display weak negative correlations with protest intensity, particularly during the FIRST mobilisation period. Apart from POPULATION in the SECOND and THIRD periods, no other condition reaches statistical significance, whether positively or negatively, across the different periods.

These findings suggest that no single condition can systematically explain the patterns of mobilisation and demobilisation observed across the case study cities. This supports the chosen analytical approach of this study, which emphasises the combined effect of conditions working together to trigger or prevent mobilisation. Consistent with this approach, conditions showing a negative correlation with most outcome periods will be negated during the analytic induction process to reduce interpretative complexity by limiting the range of condition combinations considered when identifying sufficient causal pathways.

***Table 10. Statistical Analysis of Conditions and Outcomes***

| Variable | ALL | FIRST | SECOND | THIRD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **FOOTPRINT** | 0.21 | 0.25 * | 0.21 | 0.18 |
| **POPULATION** | 0.33 ** | 0.15 | 0.36 ** | 0.29 ** |
| **MOSQUES** | -0.08 | -0.21* | -0.11 | -0.01 |
| **GOV** | -0.14 | -0.19 | -0.15 | -0.08 |
| **SECURITY** | 0.00 | -0.15 | -0.04 | 0.08 |
| **SQUARES** | -0.08 | -0.32 ** | -0.09 | 0.02 |
| **STREETS** | 0.21 | 0.25 * | 0.20 | 0.16 |

* Significant at ≤0.05 ** significant at ≤0.01

### 5.2.2 Data Calibration

As shown in Table 11, the gap between the mean and the median in the outcome values indicates a skewed distribution. This skewness reflects the presence of several outliers, neighbourhoods with exceptionally high levels of protest activity, pulling the mean upward relative to the median. In other words, the non-normal distribution captures a sharp contrast in the patterns and intensity of mobilisation across the city, where only a few neighbourhoods sustained high protest frequency and duration, while the majority remained less active. To mitigate the effect of this skew on the consistency of membership scores and configurational complexity in the analytic induction step, two solutions were tested: adjusting the middle calibration anchor to reduce the skewness in the data and bring the calibration scale closer to

the distributional centre; or modifying the outcome cut-off value, which defines the threshold of the presence or absence of the protest outcome.

For instance, during the first period of mobilisation, only a limited number of neighbourhoods engaged in protest and did so for a short time. By contrast, during the second and third periods, a greater number of neighbourhoods mobilised, though with varying intensity and duration. These key differences should be when using the Analytic Induction Tool to determine calibration anchors and outcome thresholds.

A further limitation is the high degree of inter- and intra-city heterogeneity in neighbourhood characteristics such as size, population, and built footprint. This variation is likely to distort calibration if a single scale is applied uniformly across all three cities. The calibration process was therefore conducted separately for each city before the scores were merged into the master dataset, maintaining city-specific variation in scale and urban form and allowing intra-city dynamics to be captured. QCA was then performed both for the entire protest period and for each phase individually. This chapter presents only the results of the selected analytical configurations.

***Table 11. Descriptive Statistics and Anchors of Calibration***

| | Name | MIN | 1st Q | Median | Mean | 3rd Q | MAX | St. Dev. | Anchors of calibration (Max/Mean/Min) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **OUTCOMES** | **ALL** | 0 | 0.06 | 0.25 | 0.49 | 0.67 | 3.28 | 0.61 | (3.28 / 0.49 / 0) |
| | **FIRST** | 0 | 0 | 0.11 | 0.30 | 0.42 | 2.74 | 0.47 | (2.74 / 0.3 / 0) |
| | **SECOND** | 0 | 0.1 | 0.44 | 0.85 | 1.24 | 4.43 | 1.00 | (4.43 / 0.85 / 0) |
| | **THIRD** | 0 | 0.03 | 0.1 | 0.34 | 0.43 | 3.38 | 0.53 | (3.38 / 0.34 / 0) |
| **CONDITIONS** | **FOOTPRINT** | 0.04 | 0.29 | 0.38 | 0.39 | 0.51 | 0.79 | 0.15 | (0.79 / 0.39 / 0.04) |
| | **POPULATION** | 4 | 99 | 191 | 211 | 302 | 650 | 143 | (650 / 210.8 / 4) |
| | **MOSQUES** | 12 | 47 | 70 | 95 | 96 | 670 | 110 | (670 / 94.9 / 12) |
| | **GOV** | 13 | 69 | 178 | 279 | 355 | 850 | 267 | (850 / 279 / 4) |
| | **SECURITY** | 83 | 181 | 287 | 496 | 496 | 1500 | 462 | (1500 / 495 / 83) |
| | **SQUARES** | 147 | 777 | 1330 | 1402 | 1810 | 3702 | 768 | (3702 / 1402 / 147) |
| | **STREETS** | 59 | 320 | 441 | 488 | 588 | 1341 | 260 | (1341 / 488 / 59) |
| | **SOCALST** | 0 | 0.25 | 0.75 | 0.66 | 1 | 1 | 0.33 | (1 / 0.65 / 0) |

### 5.2.3 Analysis of Necessary Conditions of Protesting Outcomes

The necessity analysis was performed using the FsQCA software to identify conditions that are consistently present whenever a protest outcome occurs. Table 12 presents the consistency scores for all tested conditions. The results show that only (~MOSQUES) and (SOCALST) meet the recommended necessity consistency threshold of 0.90 (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012) for the outcome (FIRST). This indicates that the presence of a dense network of mosques, or a dense and homogeneous social structure, was essential for protest activity during the mobilisation phase. Other conditions, such as (FOOTPRINT ← FIRST), (~SQUARE ← FIRST), (SOCALST ← SECOND), (~MOSQUES ← SECOND), exhibit high consistency values but did not surpass the recommended threshold to be deemed necessary. These findings further support the idea that no single structural factor alone was present in all instances of mobilisation; instead, a combination of multiple conditions was involved.

***Table 12. Result of the Necessary Test***

| | ALL | ~ALL | FIRST | ~FIRST | SECOND | ~SECOND | THIRD | ~THIRD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **FOOTPRINT** | 0.771048 | 0.578895 | 0.851216 | 0.539509 | 0.753323 | 0.58749 | 0.767432 | 0.562536 |
| **~FOOTPRINT** | 0.663238 | 0.650251 | 0.601425 | 0.667625 | 0.671344 | 0.647588 | 0.650940 | 0.629971 |
| **POPULATION** | 0.776381 | 0.496683 | 0.758173 | 0.507096 | 0.761078 | 0.503679 | 0.780793 | 0.47781 |
| **~POPULATION** | 0.651810 | 0.729246 | 0.689439 | 0.697737 | 0.659897 | 0.729354 | 0.625052 | 0.708934 |
| **MOSQUES** | 0.544381 | 0.447638 | 0.444258 | 0.45723 | 0.511078 | 0.452371 | 0.575365 | 0.4244 |
| **~MOSQUES** | 0.864000 | 0.767839 | **0.916178** | 0.70771 | 0.862998 | 0.754701 | 0.843424 | 0.7683 |
| **GOV** | 0.496381 | 0.460704 | 0.443839 | 0.467203 | 0.499631 | 0.452576 | 0.505637 | 0.454755 |
| **~GOV** | 0.813714 | 0.702914 | 0.855407 | 0.669735 | 0.790620 | 0.708095 | 0.827140 | 0.698367 |
| **SECURITY** | 0.469333 | 0.420703 | 0.439229 | 0.42616 | 0.470827 | 0.414145 | 0.466388 | 0.418444 |
| **~SECURITY** | 0.816381 | 0.730050 | 0.852054 | 0.707134 | 0.797267 | 0.73426 | 0.834238 | 0.719885 |
| **STREETS** | 0.750476 | 0.531658 | 0.789606 | 0.514768 | 0.743353 | 0.541496 | 0.752401 | 0.521422 |
| **~STREETS** | 0.683429 | 0.687638 | 0.642079 | 0.682777 | 0.671713 | 0.688266 | 0.655950 | 0.666475 |
| **SQUARE** | 0.666162 | 0.544120 | 0.522213 | 0.576141 | 0.648818 | 0.528618 | 0.683925 | 0.513545 |
| **~SQUARE** | 0.752460 | 0.684824 | 0.877200 | 0.606636 | 0.737445 | 0.6852 | 0.739457 | 0.681268 |
| **SOCALST** | 0.879637 | 0.693229 | **0.91185** | 0.682777 | 0.868527 | 0.706051 | 0.866971 | 0.711623 |
| **~SOCALST** | 0.409538 | 0.452073 | 0.364241 | 0.443613 | 0.401028 | 0.442968 | 0.42644 | 0.423439 |

### 5.2.4 Configurational Pathways to Protesting Outcomes

The main aim of QCA is to identify all combinations of possible configurational pathways, rather than individual variables, that lead to mobilisation across the entire protest phases. Such causal pathways are presented in a series of tables that represent the results of Analytic Induction tests conducted in FsQCA software. Based on the results of the necessity test and statistical analysis, as well as the researcher's theoretical and contextual knowledge, the presence or absence of conditions was predefined. (SQUARE) and (MOSQUE) were negated, while the rest of the conditions were set as present. Four models were tested, representing the four outcomes (ALL, FIRST, SECOND, THIRD) at a cut-off > 0.75, where the outcome was considered present (=1) if it was located in the first quartile. Additionally, a fifth model was tested for the negated outcome (~ALL) with a cut-off < 0.25, to explore the causal pathways for the non-occurrence of the outcome. In the result tables, the presence of a condition is indicated by a solid black dot (●) and its absence by a grey dot (◯). Several scores are included in these tables, mainly describing the consistency and coverage of the solutions derived from the analysis. These values are:

- Raw Coverage: indicates the proportion of the outcome explained by the causal configuration, demonstrating its empirical significance (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). Values range from 0 to 1, with solutions > 0.50 considered highly relevant, and solutions < 0.20 deemed empirically irrelevant, which were removed from the table.
- Unique Coverage: It refers to the part of the outcome explained solely by the specific configuration, highlighting its distinct contribution (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). While low values are common in complex models, configurations with a coverage < 0.01 are probably redundant and were therefore excluded.
- Solution Coverage: It measures the proportion of the outcome explained by all configurations combined, reflecting the overall explanatory power of the model (Ragin, 2008). Values > 0.50 are considered to have a good explanatory power. Solution coverages for the models discussed in this chapter range from 0.66 to 0.78, which are considered high explanatory power.

A. Outcome = ALL

The first model tests the configurational pathways for the entire study period (March 2011 - December 2013). Four solutions cleared the minimum thresholds of raw and unique coverage.

Overall, denser and socially homogeneous neighbourhoods consistently displayed the capacity to mobilise. These include neighbourhoods with a high urban footprint and street density, characterised by dense, homogeneous social ties. Paths 1 and 3 describe possible mobilisation routes for dense neighbourhoods that were close to main protest squares and/or had a dense network of mosques.

Path 4 shows that being part of a dense neighbourhood far from security and government buildings was sufficient for mobilisation, but only if there was a network of mosques or if it was close to central squares. Proximity to a central square was itself sufficient to mobilise dense neighbourhoods with a mosque network. Path 2 indicates that higher population density can offset the absence of both proximity to central squares and dense mosque networks.

***Table 13. Analytic Induction Analysis results (outcome = ALL, cut off > 0.75)***

| | SOCALST | FOOTPRINT | POPULATION | ~MOSQUES | GOV | SECURITY | ~SQUARE | STREETS | Cases | Raw coverage | Unique coverage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | ● | ● | | | | | | ● | BabQibli,Joubeleh, HamedyyehD,Sabeel,Kashif, HamedyehH | 0.545 | 0.042 |
| 2 | ● | ● | ● | | | | | ● | BabQibli,Joubeleh, HamedyyehD, Jourah | 0.534 | 0.031 |
| 3 | ● | ● | | ○ | | | ○ | ● | Joubeleh,Karak,HamedyyehD,HamedyehH | 0.483 | 0.034 |
| 4 | | ● | | ○ | ● | ● | | | BabQibli, TareeqHalab | 0.254 | 0.032 |
| Output<br>Outcome cutoff | | ALL<br>> 0.75 | | | | | | | | | |
| Frequency cutoff:<br>Solution coverage: | | 1<br>0.666 | | | | | | | | | |

B. Outcome = FIRST

During the initial phase of mobilisation, the analytical model identified two consistent solutions. Key conditions, including social cohesion, urban density, and close proximity to mosques and central squares, were sufficient for neighbourhoods to mobilise. Additionally, having a dense network of streets was an additional sufficient condition in Path 6. This confirms the mobilisation pattern seen during the early days of the uprising, as protests concentrated in neighbourhoods near central squares, which also offered security (urban density), solidarity

(social cohesion), and venues for protest (mosques). The state's presence did not appear to influence mobilisation during this period.

***Table 14. Analytic Induction Analysis results (outcome = FIRST, cut off > 0.75)***

| | SOCALST | FOOTPRINT | POPULATION | ~MOSQUES | GOV | SECURITY | ~SQUARE | STREETS | Cases | Raw coverage | Unique coverage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | ● | ● | | ○ | | | ○ | | Joubeleh, Hader, Manakh, HamedyehH | 0.588333 | 0.12 |
| 6 | ● | ● | | ○ | | | ○ | ● | Joubeleh,Karak, HamedyehH | 0.511667 | 0.05666 |
| Output<br>Outcome cutoff | | | FIRST<br>> 0.75 | | | | | | | | |
| Frequency cutoff:<br>Solution coverage: | | | 1<br>0.686667 | | | | | | | | |

C. <u>Outcome = SECOND</u>

Paths 7, 8 and 10 confirm that the conditions that played a role during the first period of the uprising continued to be important factors for consolidated mobilisation, particularly urban density, social coherence, and proximity to mosques. The exception is the impact of squares' proximity, which declined relatively due to the re-scaling of protests from citywide to neighbourhood levels, aiming to reach central squares. Nevertheless, the mobilisation remained high risk, underscoring the importance of networks of social solidarity and fortified urban environments.

Path 9 presents a distinct configuration towards mobilisation, with lower raw but higher unique coverage. It shows that neighbourhoods with a dense mosque network located away from governmental areas were also able to consolidate mobilisation. These neighbourhoods were concentrated in Hama, in zones relatively distant from the city centre. As mobilisation became localised within neighbourhoods, these local mosques operated both as protest sites and as a departure point for funeral processions of activists and civilians killed by security forces.

***Table 15. Analytic Induction Analysis results (outcome = SECOND, cut off > 0.75)***

| | SOCALST | FOOTPRINT | POPULATION | ~MOSQUES | GOV | SECURITY | ~SQUARE | STREETS | Cases | Raw coverage | Unique coverage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | ● | ● | | ○ | | | | ● | BabQibli, Joubeleh, HamedyyehD, Sabeel, Kashif, HamedyehH | 0.506364 | 0.064545 |
| 8 | ● | ● | | ○ | | | ○ | ● | Joubeleh, Karak, Hamedyyeh, BabQibli, HamedyehH | 0.46 | 0.03 |
| 9 | | | | ○ | ● | | | | QusurH, TareeqHalab, JanoobMalaab | 0.368182 | 0.111818 |
| 10 | ● | ● | ● | | ● | ● | ○ | | BabQibli, TareqSad | 0.205455 | 0.02727 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Output<br>Outcome cutoff | SECOND<br>> 0.75 |
| frequency cutoff:<br>solution coverage: | 1<br>0.671818 |

D. <u>Outcome = THIRD</u>

During the final phase of demobilisation, both building density and social cohesion were present across all pathways leading to mobilisation. These conditions were linked to the three pathways of this model: Path 11 includes neighbourhoods with dense street networks; Path 12 comprises all the features of Path 11 plus proximity to central squares and mosque networks. Path 13 involves neighbourhoods located farther from government buildings and security headquarters, as well as proximity to mosques.

Because this period was marked by heavy militarisation, mobilisation was concentrated in areas where the FSA could establish either permanent or periodic control to protect protestors. These were mainly neighbourhoods whose urban conditions favoured urban warfare strategies: dense, socially cohesive communities. Path 11, which has the highest raw and unique coverage, captures this pattern: socially coherent structures combined with dense buildings and complex street networks.

Path 13 presents an alternative path comprising dense areas close to the FSA-controlled city centre or old neighbourhoods, as indicated by their proximity to central squares. These areas,

being situated far from security and government buildings, showed a strong influence on mobilisation capabilities in dense regions. Such areas were more likely to be controlled by FSA groups due to their lower presence of regime forces and lower strategic importance.

It must be noted that the potential impact of the central square on the mobilisation efforts was not due to its ability to host large gatherings or its attractiveness to demonstrators, as in previous periods, but possibly due to its geographical location, indicating proximity to the old city.

***Table 16. Analytic Induction Analysis results (outcome = THIRD, cut off > 0.75)***

| | SOCALST | FOOTPRINT | POPULATION | ~MOSQUES | GOV | SECURITY | ~SQUARE | STREETS | Cases | Raw coverage | Unique coverage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | ● | ● | | | | | | ● | BabQibli, Joubeleh, Hamedyyeh, Sabeel, Kashif, Jourah, QusurD | 0.57 | 0.144545 |
| 12 | ● | ● | | ○ | | | ○ | ● | Joubeleh, Karak, HamedyyehD | 0.410909 | 0.025454 |
| 13 | ● | ● | | | ● | ● | | | BabQibli, TareqSad | 0.238182 | 0.029090 |
| Output<br>Outcome cutoff | THIRD<br>> 0.75 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Frequency cutoff:<br>Solution coverage: | 1<br>0.652727 | | | | | | | | | | |

E. <u>Outcome = ~ALL</u>

The aim of considering an additional model in which the outcome (ALL) is negated is to identify pathways for the non-occurrence of the outcome. This helps to understand how specific conditions hinder the outcome. There are three pathways resulting from this model. Path 1 involves proximity to government and security buildings, which was enough to prevent mobilisation during the uprising. Importantly, the absence of these conditions had little influence on mobilisation, but their presence was more evident in preventing mobilisation.

Path 2 shows that being located farther from central squares or the city centre was also enough to prevent mobilisation. Neighbourhoods along this path are mainly located in the city's peripheral areas, such as public housing areas, informal settlements, regulated districts, or newly developed neighbourhoods. Path 3 indicates that neighbourhoods with low urban density

and weak social ties did not experience any consistent protests. However, this last category does not include areas with extremely low urban density, which had already been excluded from the analysis before creating the data table.

***Table 17. Analytic Induction Analysis results of non-occurrence (outcome = ~ALL, cut off < 0.25)***

| | SOCALST | FOOTPRINT | POPULATION | ~MOSQUES | GOV | SECURITY | ~SQUARE | STREETS | Cases | Raw coverage | Unique coverage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | | ◯ | ◯ | | | Barazyeh,SouqDaraa,Ba'ajeen,Rushdyyeh,Masaken,GharbMashtal,AbuAbed,GhaziAyyash, SoukShajarah,Mataar,Baroudyyeh,Shariah,Bashoura, WadiHawarneh,Sharqyyeh, Amiriyeh,Ba'athD,Andalus,Aradi,Nasr,Mahatah | 0.497436 | 0.161795 |
| 2 | | | | | | | ● | | TareqTafas, Tahtouh,Ba'ath, MashaaForosye, Rasafeh,Sajne, IndustrialAreaZ,MashaaArbaeen,Nasr,Bernawi,Masaken,TishrinH,JanoubThakaneh,GharbMashtal, Aidoon, GhaziAyyash | 0.442051 | 0.071025 |
| 3 | ◯ | ◯ | | | | | | | TishrinDistri,Sajneh,TareqTafas,Bernawi,Madineh,MashaaForosyeh,Nasr,Shariah, Ba'athD,GhaziAyyash,Rushdyyeh,Andalus,GharbMashtal,Einlouze,Masaken, SouqDaraa | 0.369231 | 0.024358 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Output<br>Outcome cutoff | ~ALL<br>< 0.25 |
| frequency cutoff:<br>solution coverage: | 1<br>0.782308 |

### 5.2.5 Robustness Tests

The QCA results raise several potential concerns that could affect the models' stability and interpretability. These include case overlap, in which a small number of cases dominate multiple configurations, and redundant configurations, in which certain conditions recur across most causal pathways, potentially obscuring meaningful variation. Such challenges are to be

expected given the number and heterogeneity of cases (104 cases), the relatively large number of conditions (8 conditions), and the skewed distribution of protest data. To evaluate the sensitivity and robustness of the findings, two tests were performed to determine whether the model remains consistent after the dominant cases and conditions are altered or removed.

Robustness testing is an established practice in QCA, typically involving the analysis with different thresholds, calibrations, and samples to assess the stability of the resulting configurations (Skaaning, 2011; Oana & Schneider, 2021). Robustness testing acknowledges that QCA is a case-based method, making it inherently case-sensitive. As social data are rarely consistent, any changes in thresholds or calibrations are expected to influence the cross-case regularities and their results (Rutten, 2022; Emmenegger et al., 2014). Therefore, rather than expecting no changes in configurations, coverage scores, or cases, such tests primarily assess whether the model would collapse when any changes are introduced to cases or conditions.

A. Case overlap

The first issue to address is case overlap, which can produce a false sense of equifinality. Equifinality means that different combinations of conditions can lead to the same outcome. While equifinality is a positive indicator of causal complexity, reflecting real-world variation across cases, it becomes problematic when the same few cases recur across most or all solutions. In such instances, the configurations appear diverse but in practice merely re-slice the same cases in different ways. The model thereby becomes case-driven and overfitted, reducing the analyst's ability to generalise beyond these specific cases.

In the original analysis of induction results, cases such as Bab Qibli, Joubeleh, and HamedyyehD appeared across multiple pathways and significantly contributed to the coverage scores. These neighbourhoods are not statistical outliers but meaningful cases representing highly protest-active neighbourhoods that are theoretically central to the research. Therefore, they should not be excluded from the analysis but tested for sensitivity. A separate test was conducted in which these dominant cases were temporarily removed from the initial model (outcome = ALL) to assess the stability of key configurations and to refute reliance on overfitting and case-driven solutions. The primary goal of this test was to see if the main patterns associated with dominant cases also apply to other neighbourhoods. To ensure conceptual consistency, the original calibration was maintained during this process.

***Table 18. Analytic Induction Analysis results (outcome = ALL, cut off > 0.75)***

| | SOCALST | FOOTPRINT | POPULATION | ~MOSQUES | GOV | SECURITY | ~SQUARE | STREETS | Cases | Raw coverage | Unique coverage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | ● | ● | | | | | | ● | Sabeel,Kashif, HamedyehH | 0.424286 | 0.05 |
| 2 | ● | ● | ● | | | | | ● | Jourah | 0.418571 | 0.0442857 |
| 3 | ● | ● | | ○ | | | ○ | ● | Karak,HamedyehH | 0.385714 | 0.0485715 |
| 4 | ● | ● | | ○ | ● | ● | | | TareeqHalab | 0.225714 | 0.0457143 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Output<br>Outcome cutoff | ALL<br>> 0.75 |
| Frequency cutoff:<br>Solution coverage: | 1<br>0.597143 |

** Cases of Bab Qibli, HamedyehD, and Joubeleh were removed from the model*

The results (Table 18) show that, despite some cases previously dominating, the model is not entirely case-driven, as key configuration pathways persist (compared to Table 13) and remain relatively stable. Although solution coverage decreased slightly from 0.666 to 0.597, it remains within an acceptable range. Notably, unique coverage scores increased across most configurations, indicating reduced overlap and greater empirical distinctiveness after removing the dominant cases.

Based on these results, the model retains its explanatory structure without relying solely on a few active cases. The limited number of neighbourhoods supporting each configuration, however, restricts the scope for empirical generalisations. Given the exploratory and theory-driven nature of the analysis, the conclusions are best read as explaining how different combinations of conditions can produce divergent outcomes, rather than as universal claims.

B. Redundant configurations and over-determinism

A second potential limitation of the model concerns redundant configurations, in which a few conditions appear in most configurations, potentially making the model too rigid to capture causal complexity or alternative pathways. This presents the risk of a false perception of pathway diversity, where they seem different but in reality, they replicate similar pathways based on a dominant subset of conditions. In previous models (see Tables 13 - 16), the conditions (SOCALST) and (FOOTPRINT) repeatedly proved sufficient across multiple paths

but are not necessary conditions, as shown in Table 12 (except for SOCALST for outcome = FIRST). This indicates they are important but not essential contributors to the model. To examine for over-determinism, a sensitivity test was performed in which both conditions were removed from the model (outcome = ALL). The results of this test are presented in Table 19.

***Table 19. Analytic Induction Analysis results (outcome = ALL, cut off > 0.75)***

| | POPULATION | ~MOSQUES | GOV | SECURITY | ~SQUARE | STREETS | Cases | Raw coverage | Unique coverage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | | | ● | Karak, BabQibli, Joubeleh, Kashif, Hamedyyeh, Sabeel, HamedyehH | 0.622 | 0.0839999 |
| 2 | ● | | | | | ● | BabQibli, HamedyehH, Joubeleh, Jourah, Karak, HamedyehD | 0.571 | 0.033 |
| 3 | ● | | ● | ● | ○ | | BabQibli, TareqSad | 0.225 | 0.005 |
| 4 | ● | ○ | ● | ● | | | BabQibli, TareeqHalab | 0.254 | 0.0190001 |
| | Output<br>Outcome cutoff | | | ALL<br>> 0.75 | | | | | |
| | Frequency cutoff:<br>Solution coverage: | | | 1<br>0.713 | | | | | |

* Conditions (SOCALST) and (FOOTPRINT) were removed from the model

The test results demonstrate that the model still generates four pathways, with outcome cases aligning with those of the original model. Notably, the new model shows a greater contribution to alternative explanatory conditions, mainly (POPULATION). When configurational dominance is reduced by removing two previously dominant conditions and introducing alternative ones, the coherence of pathways and cases is preserved while solution coverage increases from 0.666 to 0.713. This confirms that the model's configurations are neither redundant nor overly constrained by a narrow set of conditions, and the model maintains configurational resilience. However, the unique coverage of Paths 3 and 4 declines significantly in the reduced model, indicating a substantial overlap with other configurations and a notable loss of unique explanatory power when the dominant conditions are removed.

In conclusion, the two robustness tests, removing dominant cases and dominant conditions, the primary model (outcome = ALL) remains conceptually stable and empirically coherent. New

pathways emerged under both reductions, and the key configurations persisted, indicating that the model is neither entirely case-driven nor over-determined. Several potential weaknesses nevertheless remain. The use of a relatively large number of conditions (8) creates the risk of limited diversity and low overall and unique coverage, which may, in turn, indicate that the solution set is incomplete or underspecified.

While the robustness tests provide some reassurance against these limitations, they emphasise the need for cautious interpretation of results and the avoidance of empirical generalisation. Given the exploratory objectives of this study, the QCA results should primarily aim to identify possible combinations of conditions associated with mobilisation and to inform subsequent qualitative case analyses.

## 5.3 Discussion

The configurational analysis presented above identifies thirteen distinct configurational pathways associated with the occurrence of mobilisation and non-mobilisation across the three phases of the uprising. The plurality of these pathways confirms the core premise of this research and the methodological choice behind it: mobilisation depends on the interaction of multiple factors, rather than on any single trigger or fixed structure. Combining the theoretical understanding of mobilisation and demobilisation dynamics developed in previous chapters with the empirical evidence presented here, three main clusters of security, organisational, and logistical conditions emerge as central to the pathways towards mobilisation: (1) an accessible physical space that can host protest gatherings and provide spatial protection from security forces; (2) a social organisation capable of develop mobilisation frames, circulate information, and mobilise under high-risk; and (3) a capability to resist or evade state counter-mobilisation tactics, whether by physically escaping security forces in dense areas or by maintaining resilience against infiltration through trusted networks and solidarity.

Combinations that satisfied these aspects were consistently associated with mobilisation (outcome = ALL). Conversely, the absence of one or more of these elements significantly weakened the potential for mobilisation, as shown in the model (outcome = ~ALL). Proximity to security (SECURITY) AND government buildings (GOV), low urban density (~FOOTPRINT) AND social heterogeneity (~SOCALST), OR a peripheral geographical location (~SQUARE) appeared frequently in configurations that did not lead to mobilisation.

None of these conditions was sufficient on its own to prevent mobilisation, but different combinations were necessary.

Yet pathways should be understood not as mechanisms but as empirical regularities that indicate which socio-spatial conditions were consistently present along with the outcome. The Event-Site Nexus presented in chapter 2 is called here not to explain the formation of condition combinations, but how this specific combination of conditions enabled the processes through which political mobilisation was initiated by individuals, then sustained or repressed. Four mechanisms are particularly reinterpreted with the language of configurational pathways and phased mobilisation: brokerage, diffusion and scale shift, boundary activation, and negative tipping dynamics. These mechanisms allowed for the interpretation of configurational pathways not as static conditions, but as empirical interfaces of processes that unfold in place and over time.

Brokerage and social appropriation

The role of social coherence has been central to most models, especially mobilisation's pathways, which is also the only condition, alongside (~MOSQUES), that meets the necessity threshold for the first period. In practice, SOCALST represents the social infrastructure built on pre-existing, dense, and trusted social ties through which the brokerage operates. This is important to translate local and common grievances into collective action (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). This is more likely to take place in neighbourhoods where social ties are dense and strong, with the presence of trusted individuals such as local activists, notable elders and mosque imams, who coordinate timing and recruit participants. However, these social structures, such as tribal, extended family, and neighbourhood networks, are not created for political mobilisation but provide templates that activists appropriate during the uprising. SOCALST is registered through the QCA as a structural precondition, not a dynamic process.

In comparison, social coherence (SOCALST) and population density (POPULATION) played empirically distinct roles. Although social density was statistically significant in the regression models for the outcomes (ALL), (THIRD), and (SECOND), it had a limited effect on the core pathways, especially when urban density (FOOTPRINT) and social coherence (SOCALST) were also included. This can be interpreted through the mechanism-centred approach, by differentiating between the functions of demographic mass and social coherence in facilitating coordination and organisation, both of which contribute to the activation of diffusion and social appropriation mechanisms. The robustness test (Table 19) reveals that removing SOCALST

and FOOTPRINT from the model gave POPULATION explanatory prominence, making it a lower-fidelity proxy for the social density that SOCALST captures more directly. Therefore, population density should be understood as a context-sensitive contributor to the outcome, whose influence is shaped by the presence and absence of other conditions.

Diffusion and scale shift

The role of spatial materiality in shaping mobilisation capacities was evident (Zhao, 1998), particularly in shaping the scale of action. The model enabled the depiction of phase-specific behaviour of different conditions. Proximity to central squares (~SQUARE) was prominent during the first phase, reflecting the logic of early mobilisation, in which reaching the central square was a means of achieving visibility and collective strength. In this phase, diffusion operated through the convergence at focal points, where activists expected to meet others with whom they had no prior connection. ~MOSQUES played a similar role at a more localised scale in the initial phase, when mosques served as departure points from which marches converged before proceeding toward the central squares. The mechanism of social appropriation captures how mosques, primarily religious sites, were repurposed as mobilisation structures. Although most protests originated within neighbourhoods, reaching central squares remained typically the main goal, making the neighbourhoods function as transit routes rather than the actual space of protest.

As the regime secured central squares through checkpoints and intensified its military presence, the spatial logic of mobilisation shifted within neighbourhoods from passages to focal points within the neighbourhoods themselves, giving greater significance to other spatial conditions such as urban density (FOOTPRINT, STREETS). Protection from security forces became a top priority, thereby increasing the significance of streets and building density. Thus, the role of mosques shifted from spontaneous gathering places at the start of the uprising and departure points for central squares to fixed sites of local protest in some areas while continuing to serve as important gathering points for protests and funerals.

In the third phase, under intensified repression that extended to the neighbourhoods themselves, a sense of solidarity and willingness to engage in high-risk activism became even more vital to mobilised neighbourhoods. Homogeneous and dense interaction within a community fosters a strong sense of trust, solidarity, and an obligation to contribute to the community (Nicholls et al., 2013). This effect was more pronounced in homogeneous social structures and in neighbourhoods that were relatively safer (i.e., far from security headquarters and/or embedded

in dense street networks). The dynamic intensified during the militarised phase: once mobilised, neighbourhoods came under the protection of FSA groups, and local spaces became the principal arena of mobilisation. Logistical factors, such as establishing a protest square, controlling access points, and managing crowds, became increasingly important. Areas with suitable street layouts, in which activist networks could foster strong ties of trust and solidarity, were better able to sustain mobilisation. During this period, mobilisation relied heavily on pre-existing social ties within dense neighbourhoods that could be fortified and defended.

Boundary activation

The government buildings (GOV) and security headquarters (SECURITY) were not direct measures of repressive action but spatial proxies of regime presence. Their role emerged as demobilising factors, with the close proximity being sufficient to hinder protests in these neighbourhoods (see Table 17). This effect might be due to security forces' ability to crush protests near it, the militarisation of public facilities, and the politicisation of service provision. The greater proximity to these infrastructures (absence of conditions) was present in pathways toward mobilisation. This asymmetric causality—where the role of conditions varies in enabling or hindering mobilisation—is a key feature of QCA. The absence of conditions that lead to mobilisation does not necessarily result in demobilisation. In other words, conditions such as (GOV) and (SECURITY) might prevent mobilisation when present, yet their absence alone does not suffice to cause protests. This theoretically explains the repression as a structural constraint that operates through boundary activation (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). The regime's extensive presence in some neighbourhoods, by contrast with more peripheral areas, activated a differentiation between safe and exposed urban spaces. In neighbourhoods adjacent to state infrastructure, the risk of direct repression was compounded by the politicisation of service provision and public employment, producing a higher demobilisation effect, particularly during the third period, when neighbourhoods were militarily divided. Neighbourhoods that had mobilised in earlier phases but were located near boundaries that later hardened into quasi-military fronts experienced dramatic demobilisation, driven by the spatial redistribution of repressive infrastructure, even where their underlying urban conditions remained significantly unaltered.

The boundary activation mechanism does not operate only through location alone, but through all three dimensions of Agnew’s relational understanding of place. The geographic position of regime infrastructure (Location), the everyday practices through which residents experience of

repressive structures and state spheres (Locale), and the symbolic meaning attached to the spatial division between "safe" and "risky" areas for protests, and later, a division that shifted over the phases of the uprising between the regime-controlled and "our neighbourhood", as these boundaries themselves became militarised. While the QCA empirically analyses the locational layer, the qualitative analysis in Chapter 6 will trace how locale and sense of place operated to translate spatial proximity into mobilisation effect.

Negative tipping and the diminishing of mobilisation capacity

The pathways towards demobilisation show that a combination of proximity to security infrastructure, low urban and social density, and distance to gathering spaces was sufficient to produce non-occurrence. This corresponds to the negative tipping mechanism (Beissinger, 2022), the moment when the mobilisation cost exceeds a threshold, causing even committed actors to withdraw. This pathway captures the structural conditions for cascade failure: declining participation and rising risk reinforce one another, triggering a withdrawal in a self-sustaining cycle.

Demobilisation pathways suggest that the combination of high exposure to regime infrastructure and weak social-organisational capacity raises the possibility of activating negative tipping mechanisms. Escalating repression can be resisted by dense and coherent communities that protect their members and impose a high social cost on defection through shaming and social policing. The cost of repression increases significantly when the state footprint is minimal, and the state is unable to penetrate such cohesive communities. The revolutionary cascade, then, is sustained not only by abstract commitment to action but also by embeddedness in local relational structures (Beissinger, 2022).

In sum, the configurational logic of QCA makes three unique contributions to understanding mobilisation dynamics beyond what qualitative or regression analysis alone can offer. First, it shows equifinality, in which no single pathway leads to mobilisation; rather, multiple combinations of conditions produce the same outcome. Second, the phased design of the model demonstrates how the same causal relevance of the same conditions shifts across temporal contexts. Third, the non-occurrence model yields causal pathways toward demobilisation that are not simply the inverse of those toward mobilisation, confirming the asymmetrical causality. These pathways provide the empirical foundation for the qualitative case studies in the next chapter. Whereas the pathways identified which conditions were associated with mobilisation

outcomes, the case-study analysis traces how the mechanisms linked to these pathways operated within specific neighbourhoods to produce those outcomes.

# CHAPTER 6. CASE STUDIES

This chapter offers an in-depth analysis of mobilisation and demobilisation dynamics across five neighbourhoods in the three cities under study. The case study analysis completes the final stage of the QCA, moving from the configurational pathways identified in Chapter 5 to the cases that represent them (Rihoux & Lobe, 2009). It also represents the return to the qualitative analysis as the final step of the sequential explanatory design model adopted in this research, following the quantitative measurement, calibration, and identification of the condition combinations that either led to or hindered the occurrence of the outcome. The analysis considers processual, temporal, and agential dimensions to explore how conditions operated in practice, when they became consequential, and how both challengers and the incumbent regime adapted across the event's different phases. This is also where the causal pathways identified in previous chapters intersect with the mechanism-based explanation. The aim is not hypothesis testing or the estimation of statistical causation, but mechanism-level interpretation, connecting the spatial configurations identified in the QCA to the processes through which outcomes were produced (Beach & Pedersen, 2013).

The selection of the five case studies (Hader, Bab Qibli, Old Airport, Joubeleh, and Tareq Sadd) was shaped by four criteria.

- The first is a balanced representation of urban typologies, reflecting variation in urban form, geographical location, social composition, and state footprint without duplicating conditions. Hader (Hama) is a historic, densely populated neighbourhood adjacent to the city centre. Bab Qibli (Hama) is historic old-city neighbourhood characterised by high density and strong social cohesion. Old Airport (Deir-ez-Zor) is a planned neighbourhood with a unique social structure linked to the surrounding countryside. Joubeleh (Deir-ez-Zor) is a central, densely built-up area with minimal state presence. Tareq Sadd (Daraa) is a neighbourhood of mixed urban densities, connecting the countryside to the city centre. Daraa Camp (Daraa) was added as a secondary case alongside Tareq Sadd: divided into internal sections for Palestinian refugees and internally displaced Syrians, it combines high population density with weak social structures. Together, the five primary cases and the secondary case cover the typological variation across the neighbourhoods included in the analysis.

- The second criterion is city-level balance, which preserves the comparative nature of the three-city design. Two cases are drawn from Hama, two from Deir-ez-Zor, and one primary with one secondary from Daraa.
- The third is phase-specific influence. Cases were prioritised for the significant role they played in at least one of the three phases of the uprising, measured by both their frequency in the QCA pathways and their absolute weight in the protest event data. Hader was the most important protest hub in Hama during the initial phase, before mobilisation shifted radically towards Bab Qibli in the second and third phases. Similarly, in Deir-ez-Zor, Old Airport was central during the initial phase, while Joubeleh remained influential across the three phases. Tareq Sadd was a prominent hub in Daraa during the second and third phases. This variation ensures that the chapter captures the temporal unevenness of mobilisation.
- The fourth criterion is the interpretive depth of available case knowledge, measured by the researcher's capacity to reconstruct within-case dynamics (Beach & Pedersen, 2013). Among the neighbourhoods that satisfied the previous three criteria, a subjective decision was made to favour those for which interview materials, SMI event data, and secondary sources were available. This is acknowledged openly as a pragmatic choice intended to maximise analytical productivity for mechanism tracing.

Each case follows a common analytical sequence. It begins with a contextual overview of the neighbourhood's evolution, including its historical development, morphological fabric, geographical location, and the state's spatial footprint. Mechanism-level explanation requires moving beyond a static description of socio-spatial conditions to an account of how and when those conditions developed into their present form. The case then reconstructs the mobilisation dynamics across the different phases of the uprising, explaining how different combinations of conditions activated the mechanisms that either facilitated or constrained mobilisation. Each case closes by returning to the causal pathways identified in Chapter 5, confirming, qualifying, or enriching the QCA's configurational results. This step informs the broader interpretation of how specific configurations of conditions influenced protest dynamics on the ground.

Multiple data sources were drawn on to build the socio-political profile of each neighbourhood and to trace the development of protest and repression. The primary sources are in-depth interviews with residents, activists, or individuals with direct experience in the neighbourhoods, cross-checked and supplemented by secondary sources available online.

Selected quotations are incorporated into the narrative to improve contextual understanding and to illustrate the lived experience of protest and repression. However, a significant limitation remained: the limited availability of publicly accessible neighbourhood-level data.

For each case, a series of maps was produced using QGIS. These maps were created on shapefile layers sourced from OpenStreetMap or generated by the researcher, depending on the spatial datasets used in previous chapters. Urban and state infrastructure data were obtained via Google Maps, and building footprints were extracted from the Global ML Building Footprint Dataset (2023). Protest data obtained from the SMI informed the production of graphs visualising the spatial, chronological, or temporal distribution of protests and state repression. Additionally, selected screenshots from protest footage were incorporated to provide visual context and comparative insights. It should be noted that the type and sequence of maps and graphs might vary across cases, reflecting the specific spatial, social, and political contexts of each neighbourhood.

## 6.1 Hader Area (Hader, Amirieh, and Manakh Neighbourhoods) - Hama

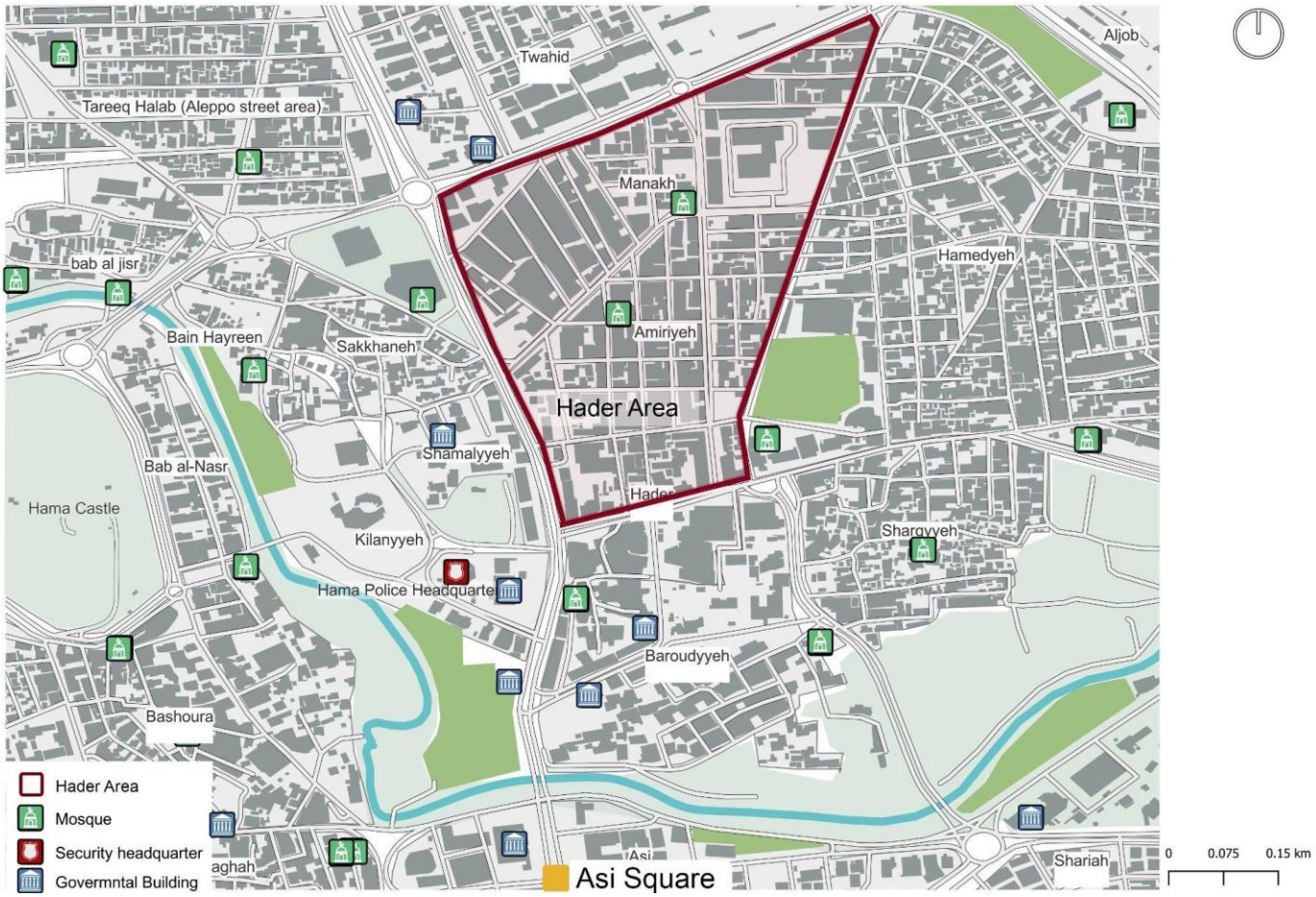
The Hader area, including the neighbourhoods of Hader, Amirieh, and Manakh, forms an important part of Hama's historical centre. Situated on the northeastern bank of the Orontes River, Hama was historically settled by rural traders who migrated there for commercial purposes. For many years, it remained a lively commercial hub, facilitating trade between the urban centre and the countryside. Upon settling in the city, residents of Hader and nearby neighbourhoods have maintained elements of their rural and desert social traditions, including cuisine, customs, and spoken dialect. Hader's native families have continued to reside and expand within their quarters, maintaining a high level of social cohesion and urban density. Most of Hader's long-established families are currently part of the low and lower-middle classes, primarily involved in trade, public-sector jobs, light industries, and craftsmanship (Interviewee#4; Interviewee#3).

***Map 4. Location of the Hader Area in Hama***

Source: Generated by the Author using QGIS

The area is mainly composed of informal quarters, with buildings ranging from two to four stories. In the 1960s, significant urban changes occurred when the state built new roads both around and within the district. Dozens of old houses, many of which were heritage buildings, were razed, and stone-paved streets were removed, displacing the original families to nearby areas (Interviewee#4). As a result, while Hader's inner residential quarters retained a high urban density, they were intersected by a network of straight, perpendicular streets.

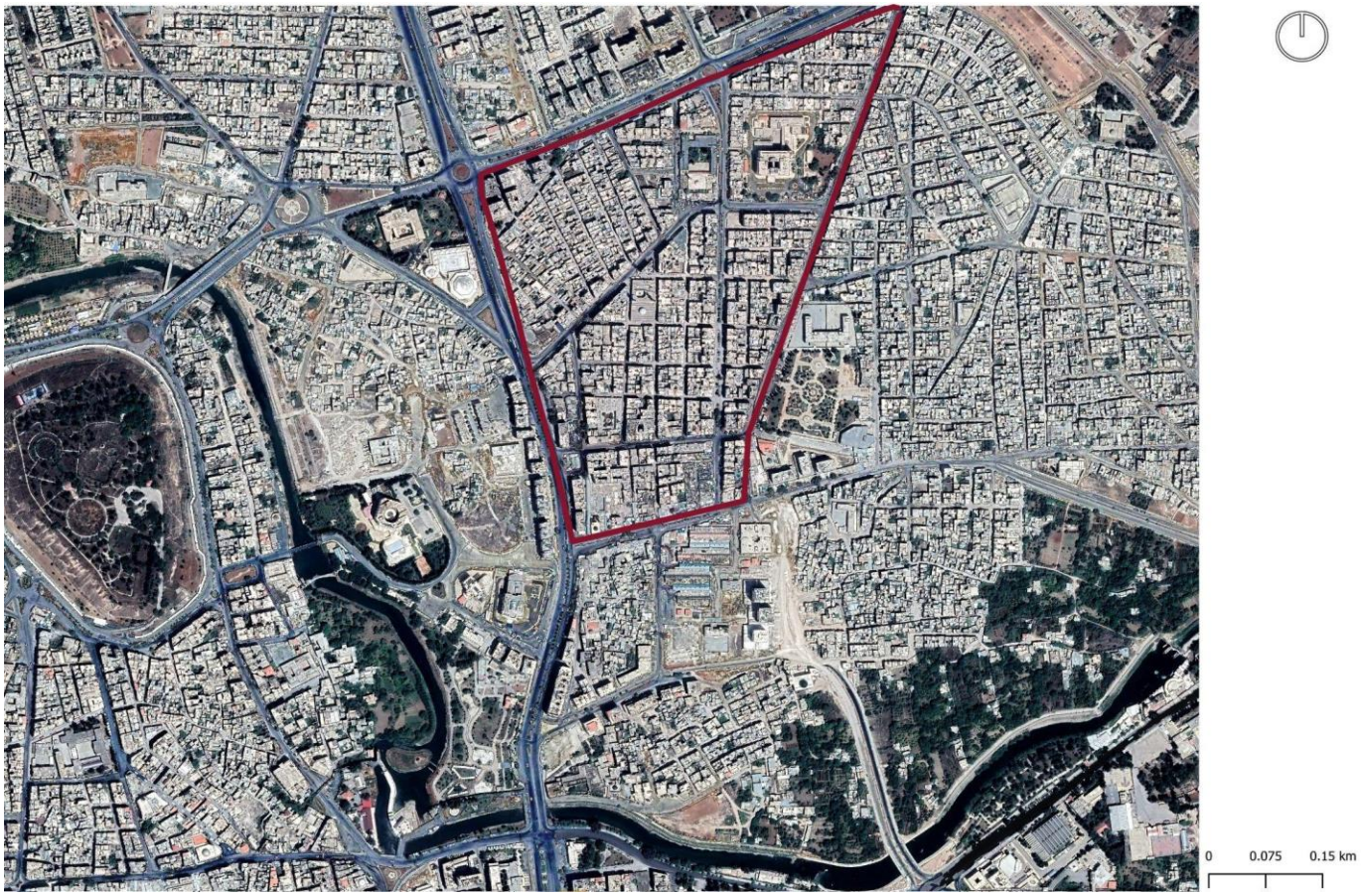
***Map 5. Map of Hader***




Source: Author's own illustration based on Google Maps, 2024; GLMB, 2023; OpenStreetMap, 2024

The neighbourhoods surrounding Hader, such as Hamidiyeh and Baroudyeh, share similar urban and socioeconomic status. Meanwhile, newer neighbourhoods like Qusur, Tareq Halab, and Arbaeen—developed after the 1960s—have attracted some families moving from Hader while maintaining close social ties with their original community (Interviewee#3). The wider area experienced significant upheaval following the events of the 1980s, with neighbourhoods such as Kaylanyeeh, Baroudyeh, and Shamalyeh suffering extensive destruction. This led to the replacement of several dense residential quarters with large government, commercial, and hotel buildings. However, Hader, Amirieh, and Manakh managed to preserve most of their historical structures and social fabric.

***Image 1. Satellite Image of Hader Area***




Source: Google Earth (2018)

Hader is strategically positioned near key city landmarks, including Hama Castle, Um Hasan Park on the Orontes River, and the Asi Area in the city centre, all connected via Saed bin A'as Street. Despite its proximity to the city centre, Hader remains physically separated by the river, accessible only through a few bridges. The neighbourhood itself contains no government or security buildings; however, several important structures, including the Hama Police Headquarters, Ba'ath Party Headquarters, Passport Directorate, and Traffic Directorate, are located in the southern part of the neighbourhood along the route to Asi Square. Additionally, a dense network of mosques, including Omar bin Khattab, Manakh, Bahsa, Takkyeh, and Abu Baker mosques, can be found in and around Hader.

In summary, although Hader and its surrounding neighbourhoods display high social and urban density, their areas are traversed by a grid of perpendicular streets. Despite being strategically close to the city centre, access is limited by the river and a large presence of government and security infrastructure along the approach to Asi Square.

As shown in Figure 14, the Hader area functioned as a key hub for mobilisation during the initial phase of the uprising. From March 2011 to August 2013, at least 266 demonstrations were recorded in the area, with 103 taking place during the first phase, making up 13.6% of all documented protests in the city during the same period. However, in later phases, the relative level of protest activity in Hader declined sharply, contributing to less than 3.2% of citywide demonstrations during the second phase and 4% in the final period.

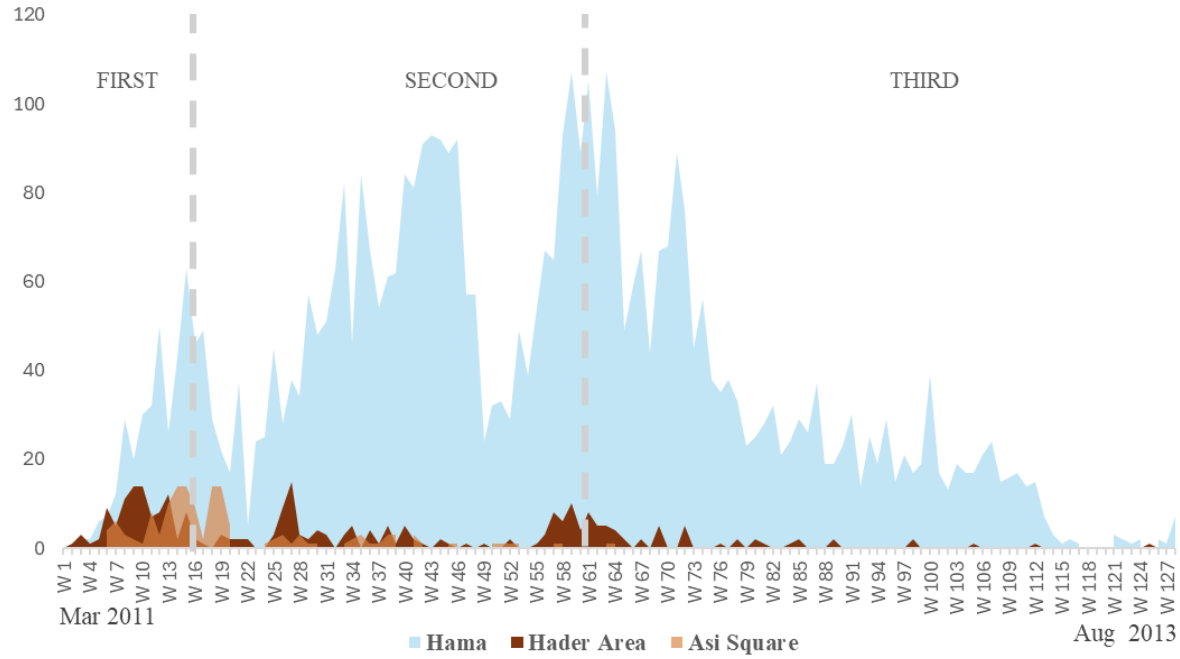
In the QCA analytic induction results (outcome = FIRST), both Hader and Manakh appear on path 5, but neither meets the threshold for sustained mobilisation for the outcomes (SECOND) and (THIRD). The analysis identifies four conditions that collectively contributed to initial mobilisation in Hader: coherent social structures (SOCALST), high building footprint density (FOOTPRINT), dense network of mosques (~MOSQUES), and proximity to Asi Square (~SQUARE). The combination of these factors constitutes the following pathway:

(OUTCOME = FIRST) SOCALST * FOOTPRINT * ~MOSQUES * ~SQUARE

The first protest in Hama occurred at Omar bin Khattab Mosque in Hader on 25 March 2011.[3] As noted in earlier analysis, this mosque was one of three strategic locations initially chosen by demonstrators (SMI_Interview#2; Interviewee#3). The fact that Hader's protest succeeded that day has made the neighbourhood a natural hub for protests in the weeks that followed.

[3] "Protests in Hama in the Friday of Pride", *SMI*, 25 March 2011, Retrieved 12 January 2025, from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/62030f86ee969d00013f33f0

***Figure 14. Protest in Hader Area and Hama City per Week***




Source: Author's own illustrations based on data from SMI (2024)

Activists and residents instinctively gathered at Khattab Mosque in anticipation of the next Friday prayers, awaiting a pivotal moment for mobilisation. However, because of its location on a main street next to several government buildings, security forces quickly intensified their presence around the mosque. In response, demonstrators adapted by assembling in nearby streets and at alternative mosques such as Manakh and Takkyeh. With the aim of reaching the Omar bin Khattab Mosque, several protests took place on the following Fridays around Manakh, a few blocks away, before proceeding southwards towards the mosque, ultimately targeting Asi Square.

> *"We decided to protest from two mosques: Omar bin Khattab and Manakh. Instead of heading directly to Asi Square—which involved passing through heavily guarded main roads—we took the quieter inner streets of Hader. An activist told us, 'Hader is fortified, go there.' That day, the protest lasted for two hours before security forces arrived, dispersing us with water cannons and tear gas." (Interviewee#1)*

Protests in this area were highly spontaneous and mobile. Demonstrators quickly adapted their movements to achieve multiple objectives: increasing visibility and mobilising both residents and outsiders (SMI_Interview#2); swiftly changing routes in response to security forces' deployments (SMI_Interview#3); and merging with other protests departing from mosques in surrounding neighbourhoods to the west and north, including Tareq Halab, Qusur, and Hamidiyeh.

> *"Choosing the protest location during the initial weeks was very spontaneous. People gathered around Manakh Mosque or Amirieh Street and naturally moved towards the southern streets near Kindi Park (closer to Asi Square), merging with other protestors from Sahaba Mosque in Tareq Halab and Hamidiyeh. Security forces were usually positioned on the vacant land beside the Ba'ath Party Headquarters, ready to attack if we tried to cross into the Asi area." (Interviewee#3).*

As several interviewees emphasised, Hader served as a key convergence point because it is one of the most densely populated areas along the protest route towards Asi Square. This relationship between Hader and Asi Square is clearly illustrated in Figure 14, where mobilisation was positively correlated in both locations, especially during the early months of the uprising when protests aimed to reach the squares.

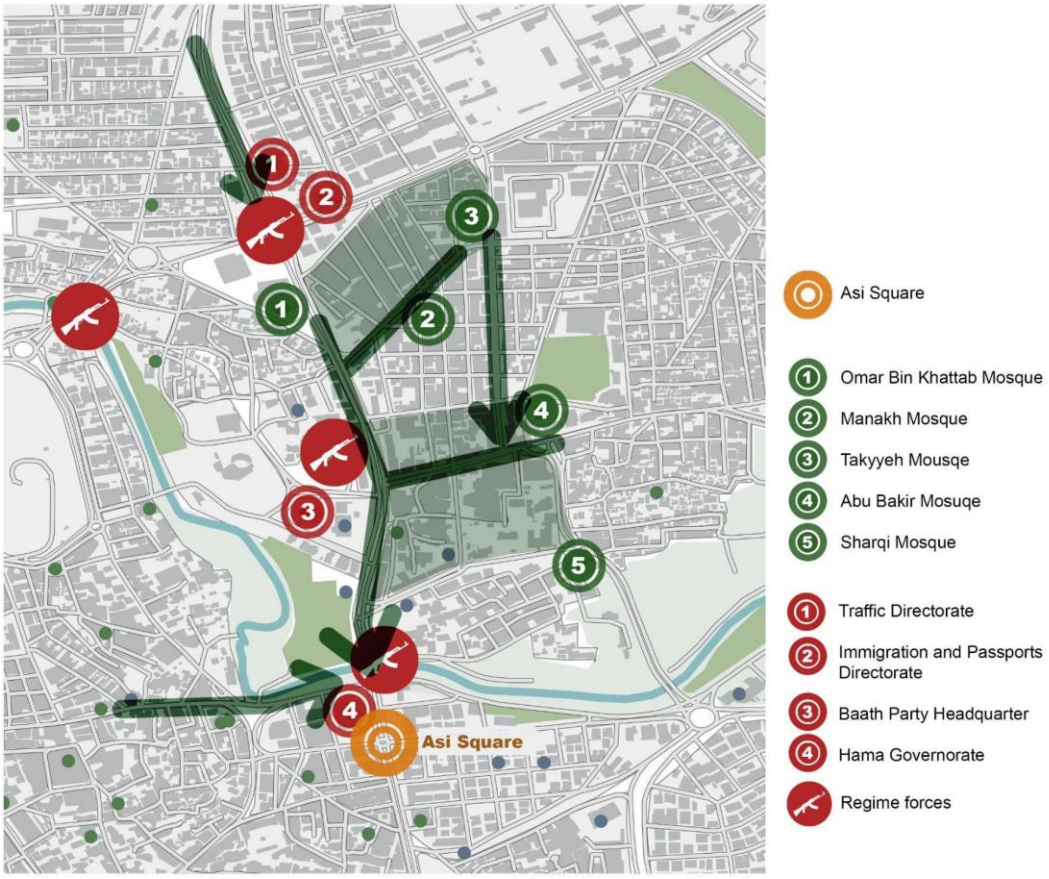
Demonstrations from various areas often converged in Hader, generating the momentum needed to overwhelm security forces and break into Asi Square, which is more heavily guarded due to the concentration of government buildings (SMI_Interview#1). Over time, protest numbers increased, with participants arriving from multiple directions. In response, security forces escalated their use of violence, driving protesters back into inner and densely packed areas such as Hamidiyeh. Whenever chased by security forces, protesters dispersed into the network of narrow and crowded streets, finding temporary refuge in local shops run by sympathetic owners (SMI_Interview#3). The strong social cohesion, mutual trust, and anti-regime sentiment within Hama's old neighbourhoods fostered an informal protective environment. This not only facilitated the persistence of protest activity but also reduced local cooperation with regime forces.

On the other hand, regime forces' repression tactics escalated over time from water cannons and tear gas in the early weeks to firing bullets at demonstrators attempting to reach Asi Square on Freedom Friday (20 May 2011),[4] killing dozens. This violent crackdown sparked further protests in the following days,[5] culminating in protesters finally reaching Asi Square from the Hader direction on Humat al-Diyar Friday (27 May).[6] On Freedom Children Friday (3 June), multiple protests converged at A'alaf Circle, at the northern edge of Manakh, before marching towards Asi Square (SMI_Interview#1). To reach the square, protesters had to cross the river

[4] "Security forces fired tear gas at a demonstration in Al-Hadir, Hama Governorate", *SMI*, 20 May 2011, Retrieved 12 January 2025, from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/65c91058f9249f508e933898
[5] A demonstration in Nazlat al-Hadir in Hama on the Humat al-Diyar Friday", *SMI*, 27 May, 2011, Retrieved 12 January 2025, from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/644de3f00958600001751772
[6] "A demonstration in Asi Square in Hama on the Humat al-Diyar Friday", *SMI*, 27 May, 2011, Retrieved 12 January 2025, from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/644de3b60958600001751672

via Obaisi Bridge—a strategic bottleneck where security forces carried out a massacre against demonstrators.[7]

***Map 6. Mobilisation Dynamics in Hader Area during the First Mobilisation Phase***




Source: Generated by the author using QGIS

As demonstrated in Figure 15, mobilisation declined and became less consistent during the second and, especially, the third phases. There were two exceptions: protests peaked in September 2011 and May 2012, then declined rapidly again. Two key factors may have contributed to this decline. The first is the geographical location: proximity to the city centre and to several security and government buildings, initially an advantage, then became a liability during the second and third phases. Following the military crackdown in August 2011,[8] and unlike more peripheral neighbourhoods, the regime focused its forces on preventing sustained mobilisation in or around the city centre. Additionally, Hader is surrounded by major roads and internally divided by a network of wide, straight, and perpendicular streets, which allowed

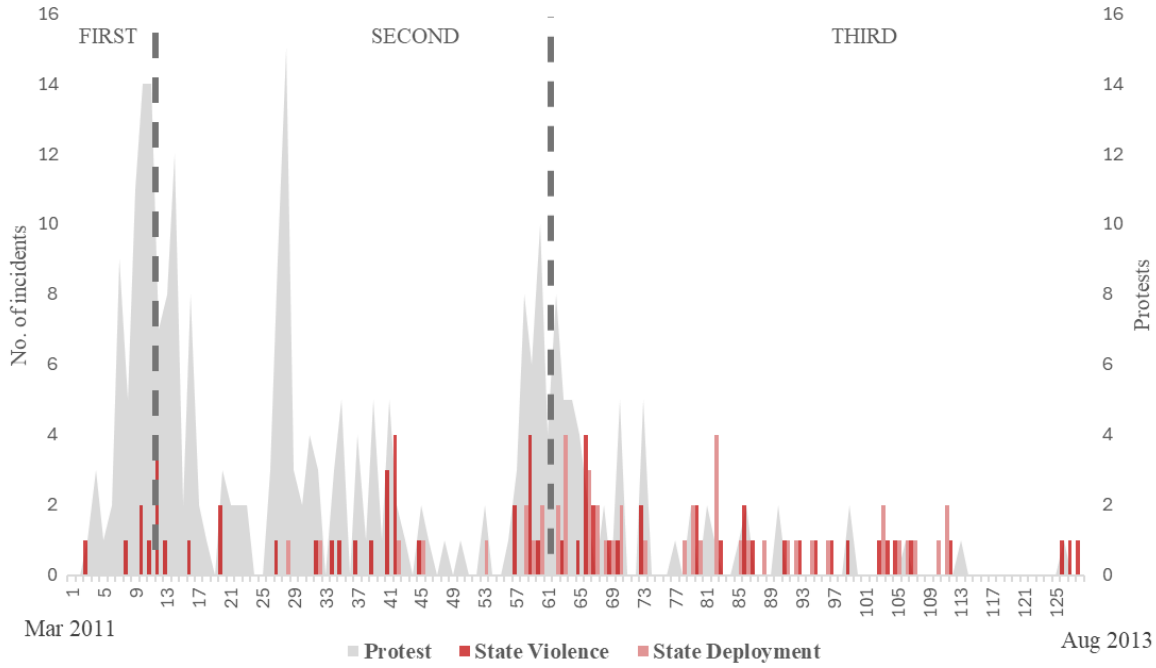
[7] "Security forces opened fire on demonstrators in Asi Square," *SMI*, 3 June 2011, Retrieved 12 January 2025, from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/65c91ede9c75305fc0f15895

[8] "Security forces and the army stormed Hader neighbourhood in Hama", *SMI*, 3 August 2011, Retrieved 13 January 2025, from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/62030ea7ee969d00013f32d2

security forces to quickly deploy reinforcements and penetrate the inner districts, reducing protesters' ability to evade capture.

***Figure 15. Mobilisation and State Violence in Hader Area per Week***

** State deployment: deploying security forces outside protest periods to prevent gatherings.*
*State violence: direct violence applied against protesters, including shootings and the use of tear gas.*




Source: Author's own illustrations based on data from SMI (2024)

The second factor is the absence of a defendable plaza where people could gather. During the second and third phases, protests in Hader remained mobile and involved fewer participants. Figure 15 shows that regime forces were able to deploy troops more frequently after the military campaign, sustaining a higher capacity to suppress protests swiftly.

***Image 2. Protests passing through Hader Area on Friday***

17 June 2011 09 May 2012

Source: SMI (2024)

In conclusion, the Hader case explains the QCA pathway for the initial phase. High social cohesion, proximity to Asi Square, and urban density are identified as preconditions, yet they alone cannot explain why mobilisation concentrated in Hader rather than other neighbourhoods, such as Qusur or Arbaeen, that ostensibly share similar socio-spatial characteristics or maintain close social bonds with Hader's residents through extended family ties. The answer lies in the development of a central religious site, namely Khattab Mosque, as a protest infrastructure during the weekly Friday prayer, repurposing existing, regime-tolerated institutional routine into contentious practices (McAdam et al., 2001). This appropriation was diffused to other local mosques within Hader and Manakh, transforming the mobilisation dynamics into a converging march. Another mechanism captured in the Hader case is the reputational diffusion: the neighbourhood's reputation for tactical viability was circulated across the city, drawing activists from other neighbourhoods. This is captured by one participant's phrase: "Hader is fortified, go there".

Moreover, the temporal ordering of events is crucial to understand why the static presence of these four conditions alone does not explain mobilisation, but the way associated mechanisms were sequentially activated. When the first protest succeeded in Hader due to its central location, prominent mosque, and social fabric, activists considered the neighbourhood as tactically viable, leading to the subsequent series of actions. This element co-operated with tactical innovation as activists adapted to the intensified security presence around Khattab Mosque, shifting gathering points to inner streets before converging again on main roads to reach the Asi Square. Furthermore, the historical legacy of these quarters as central sites during

the 1982 events added symbolic significance, reinforcing anti-regime sentiment and pro-revolutionary commitment (Interviewee#3). While processual and agential elements are not captured by the QCA's configurational pathways, these became visible during the case analysis.

The sharp decline of protest in Hader following the military crackdown is not simply a failure of the original conditions but a reflection of the spatial transformation of repression, where security deployment was organised around the city centre to prevent any sort of mass gathering. Proximity to the central square, previously an advantage for challengers, became a constraining factor. Repression shifted from being episodic, linked to mobilisation periods, to being pre-emptive, aimed at isolating different parts of the city and preventing gatherings throughout the week. Under new repression conditions, the same socio-spatial conditions were unable to activate the mechanisms crucial for mobilisation. Assembly sites that were crucial during the second and third phases were absent in Hader, which lacked a defendable plaza despite its dense urban environment. Proximity to Asi Square became associated with a high-security presence, while the dense mosque network was disrupted by perpendicular and monitored streets. Repression should therefore be understood not as a static backdrop but as a temporally variable structural condition.

## 6.2 Bab Qibli – Hama

Bab Qibli is one of Hama's historic neighbourhoods, situated on a hill southwest of Hama Castle. Its name, "the Southern Gate", refers to its position at the southern edge of Hama's ancient walls. Because of its steep terrain, fertile land, and caves, the neighbourhood became home to families who moved out of the castle and to rural migrants who continued to farm small plots and breed livestock along the Asi River. Unlike other neighbourhoods in Hama, which were reshaped by state-led urban planning strategies, Bab Qibli preserved its original urban and demographic characteristics.

***Map 7. Location of Bab Qibli in Hama***

Source: Generated by the Author using QGIS

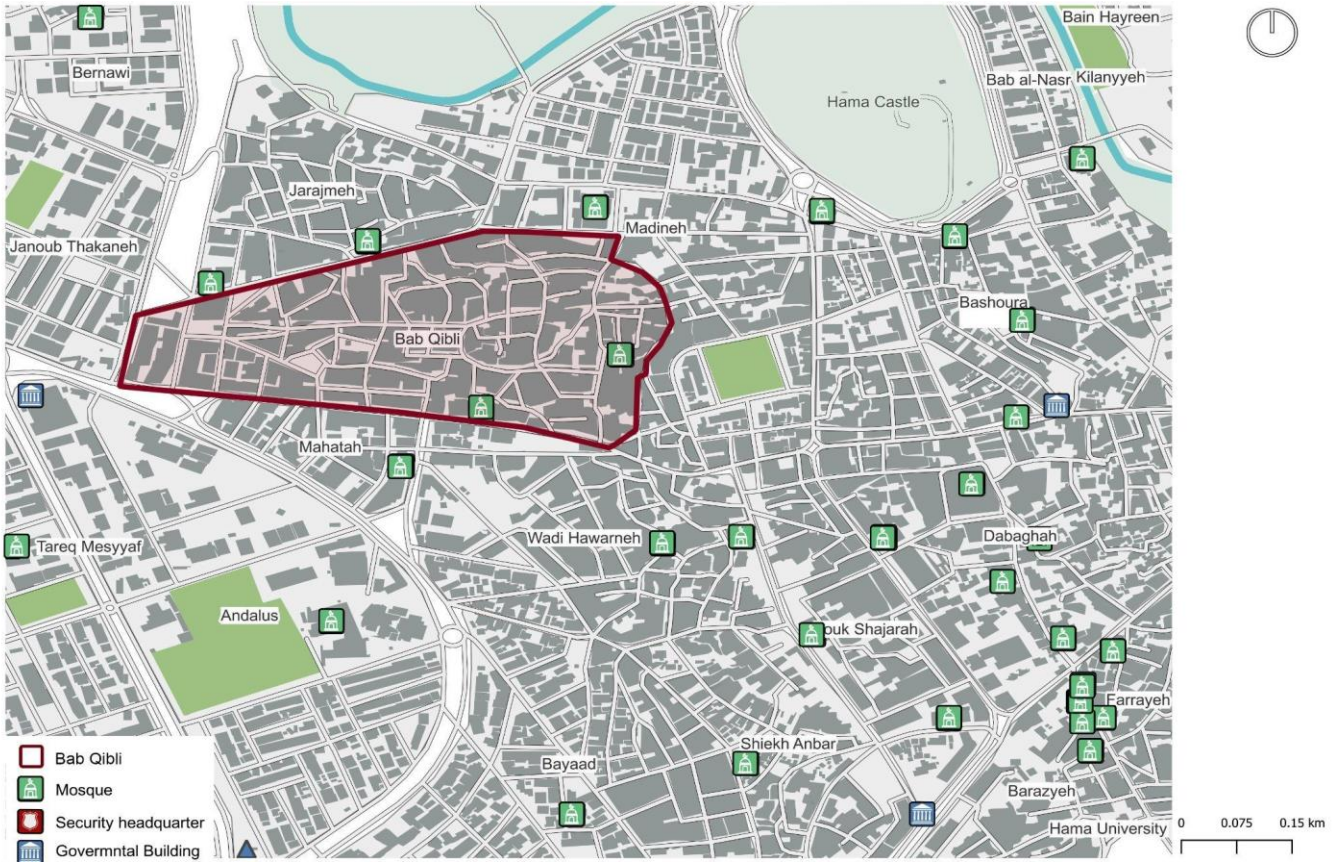
Over time, local residents of Bab Qibli established economic ties with the city's walled neighbourhoods, primarily working as daily labourers in the service sector (Batman, 2019) and as lower- and middle-level employees in the public sector (Interviewee#5). For decades, the neighbourhood has maintained its status as a low-income area where residents are neither traditional traders nor farmers, but rather daily workers in construction, stonecutting, and bakeries (Interviewee#7).

Bab Qibli is surrounded by neighbourhoods that share similar urban and socio-economic traits, such as Wadi Hawarneh and Madeneh, as well as by others with distinct social and economic profiles, including Mahatah, Janoub Thakaneh, Abdalus, and Ba'ath. Religiously, Bab Qibli is one of the few mixed neighbourhoods in Hama, where Muslims and Christians have coexisted for generations. However, Christian residents tend to be concentrated in specific streets or quarters. The neighbourhood, like most of Hama's old quarters, is structured around extended family units, with members typically living in the same house or a cluster of adjacent homes. Social mobility into and out of Bab Qibli has historically been limited, and most houses have remained within the same families for generations. Some quarters are even named after the dominant families living there, such as Douri and Staify. This spatially structured, family-based settlement has fostered strong social cohesion, deeply rooted communal ties, robust social interactions, and high levels of trust (Interviewee#5).

*"Houses' doors in our neighbourhoods are usually kept open all the time. Women and children can enter each other's houses freely. Houses with two entrances connecting different roads are often used as shortcuts by women passing through to reach the other road {...}*

*When a son marries, he typically lives with his wife (and later children) either in the same house or by adding an extra floor to the family home. If it becomes crowded, he may move to another house nearby within the same street or the surrounding streets." (Interviewee#5).*

***Map 8. Map of Bab Qibli***



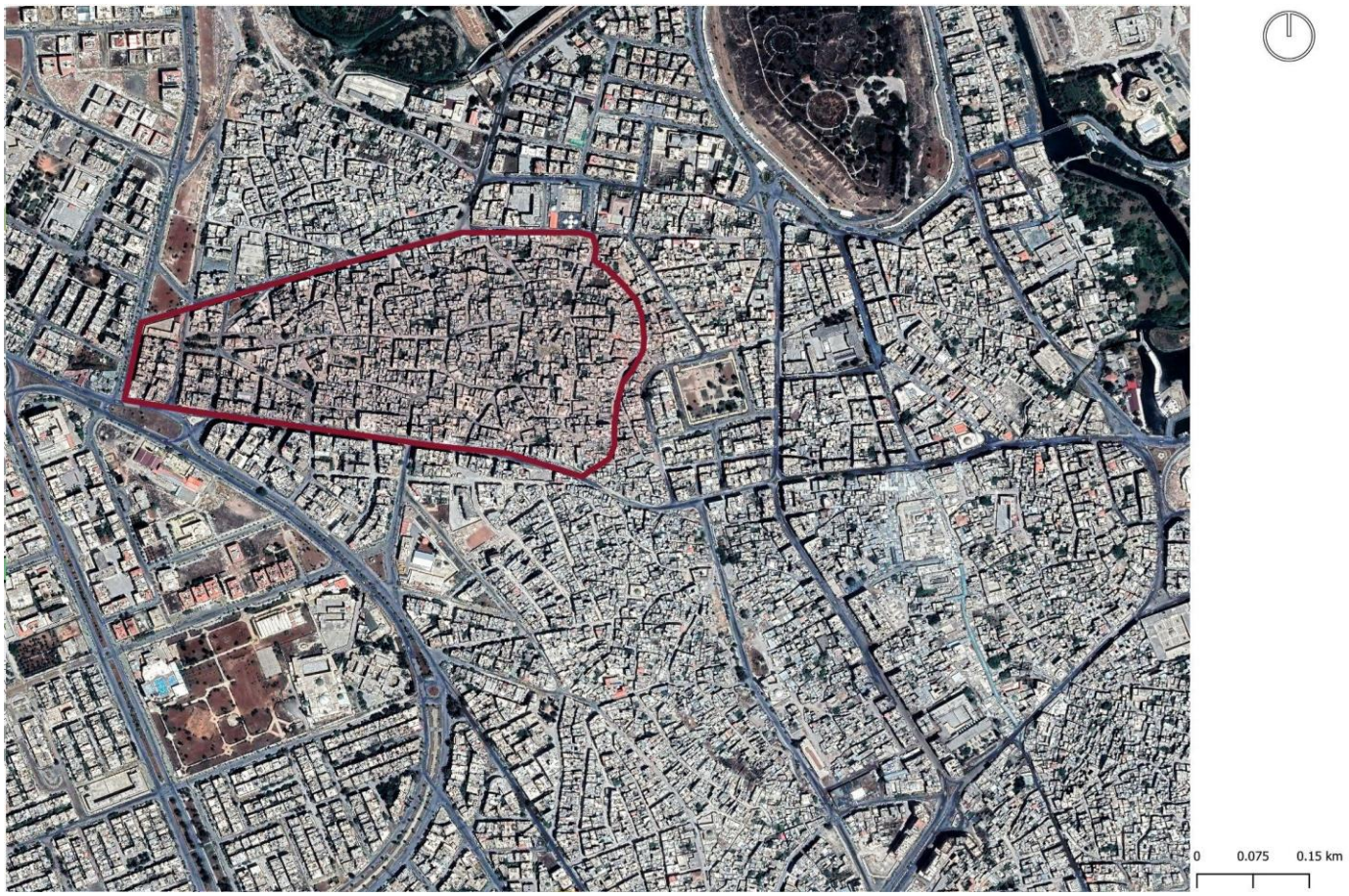

Source: Author's own illustration, based on Google Maps, 2024; GLMB, 2023; OpenStreetMap, 2024

Bab Qibli is an informal neighbourhood characterised by an irregular street layout and unorganised clusters of houses. Many of its streets are narrow or have stairs, restricting vehicle access. The neighbourhood features enclosed inner plazas, which are open from the inside but closed from the outer street side. Most of the buildings are traditional Arabic houses, although recent decades have seen the addition of multi-storey residential buildings. There are no government buildings within the neighbourhood, apart from a small health centre.

In short, Bab Qibli is one of the most densely populated neighbourhoods in Hama in terms of building footprint, street network, and social cohesion. Although it is not directly adjacent to

the city centre, it is well-connected by major roads, such as Nazlet Jizdan. It also links to several mosques within and around the neighbourhood, including some prominent ones, such as the Grand Mosque of Hama. The state's presence in Bab Qibli is limited, with the Labour Union building—a high-rise structure—being the only government establishment at its western edge. For security forces to reach the neighbourhood, patrols had to travel from Hama Military Airport or security branches in the southern part of the city, giving activists time to be alerted and evade capture (SMI_Interview#9).

***Image 3. Satellite Image of Bab Qibli***




Source: Google Earth, 2018

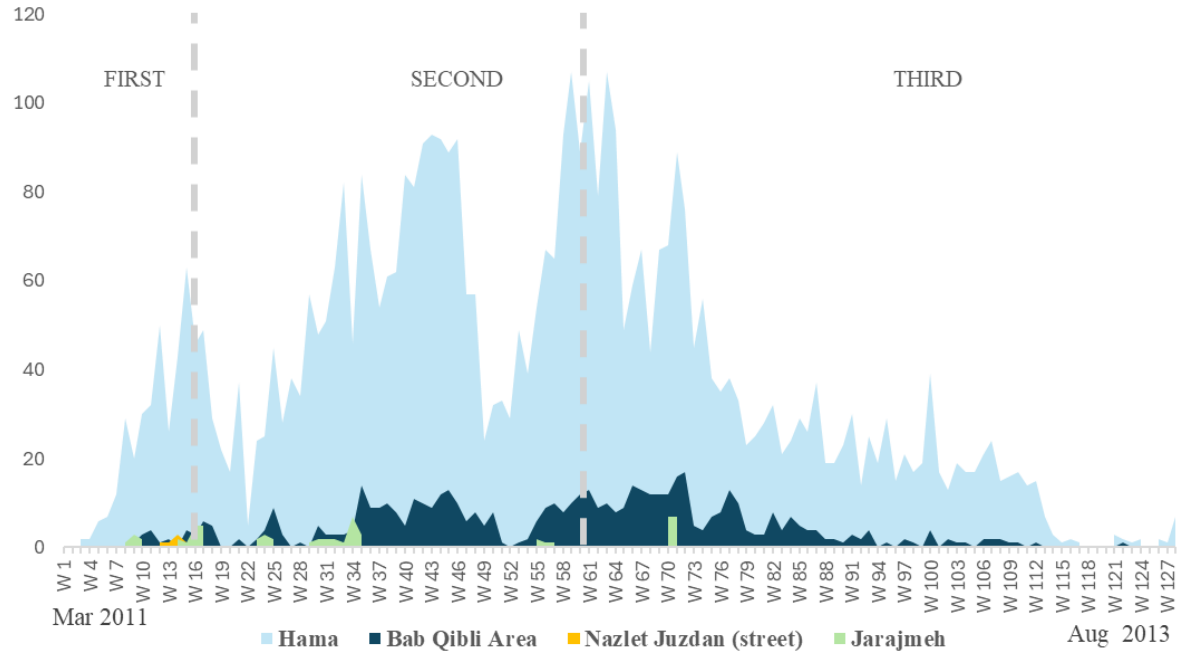
Figure 16 illustrates that Bab Qibli was a key hub for protests in the Souk District. The QCA analytic induction results show that Bab Qibli appeared in all pathways leading to mobilisation during the second and third phases. In contrast, fewer protests occurred in Bab Qibli during the first phase, making the neighbourhood less relevant in the causal pathways. Only 1.2% of protests in Hama during the first period took place in Bab Qibli, but this increased markedly in the second period to 7%, and in the third period to 19.5%. This surge in overall protest turnout over time indicates that although the neighbourhood may not have initially had the necessary

conditions to be among the first mobilising areas, it later became one of the most resilient, able to endure mobilisation. The conditions of (SOCALST), (FOOTPRINT), and (STREETS) were significant factors enabling mobilisation in both phases, while (~MOSQUES) played an additional role during the second phase.

(OUTCOME = SECOND) SOCALST * FOOTPRINT * ~MOSQUES * STREETS

(OUTCOME = THIRD) SOCALST * FOOTPRINT * STREETS

***Figure 16. Protest in Bab Qibli and Hama City per Week***




Source: Author's own illustration, building on SMI (2024)

Similar to Hader, where Omar bin Khattab Mosque served as a key protest hub during the early weeks of the uprising, the Serjawi Mosque in the neighbouring Jarajmeh neighbourhood emerged as another centre for demonstrations in the Souk District. However, it was not until the end of April 2011 that the first protest occurred at the Serjawi Mosque.[9] Prior to this, protests in Hama were focused on Hader and Hamidiyeh, attracting demonstrators from across the city, including Bab Qibli itself. According to the SMI's Protest Dataset, the first recorded protest in Bab Qibli took place on the Great Friday (22 April 2011).

[9] "Demonstration from Sarjawi Mosque in Jarajmeh in Hama", *SMI*, 17 May 2011, Retrieved 20 January 2025, from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/658027e5809d100001e822dc

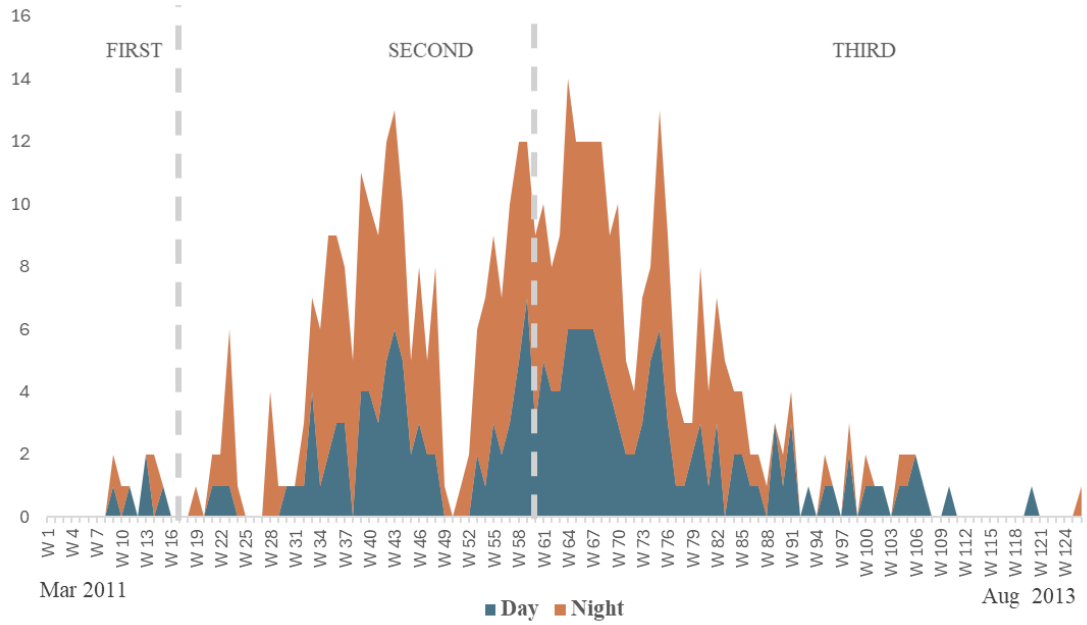
On that day, the protest was divided into two branches: one heading towards the old city (Marabit) and the other marching towards Hama Castle.[10] Regime forces responded by killing one protester. His funeral procession the following day was attended by a large crowd, which departed from the Serjawi Mosque and marched through Jarajmeh and Bab Qibli (SMI_Interview#8). From that point on, Serjawi became a central site of protest, hosting demonstrations every Friday. The frequency of protests steadily increased, reaching nearly daily by early July. Until the military operation in August, protests in Bab Qibli and Jarajmeh primarily aimed to reach Asi Square or Tareq Haleb, another central protest hub in Hama (Interviewee#5). Similar to Hader, multiple protests often originated from different mosques—such as Hawarneh Mosque and Hasaneen Mosque—converging on 8th of March Street and attempting to reach Asi Square from its western entrance via Marabet Street (SMI_Interview#4; SMI_Interview#3).[11]

During the initial months, protests in Bab Qibli primarily took place on the main roads that connect the neighbourhood to the city centre and the Hader district. However, as regime forces often blocked bridges or traffic nodes around the castle or Asi Square, they forcibly dispersed most marching protests originating from Bab Qibli (SMI_Interview#4). Figure 16 demonstrates this relationship between Bab Qibli and its surroundings. It shows that during the early months of the uprising, protests often originated simultaneously in Bab Qibli and its surrounding areas, before mainly becoming concentrated within the neighbourhood itself. This probably suggests that the protests originated outside the neighbourhood and then marched through it.

By July 2011, increasing security restrictions caused activists to prefer night protests, especially in Bab Qibli, where the dense urban layout and strong social ties offered some protection. Night protests often started from the Serjawi Mosque, passing through Jarajmeh and Bab Qibli before reaching the Christian districts in Madinah,[12] where they received support and sympathy from Christian families (SMI_Interview#9).

[10] "Protest and funeral procession for one of the people killed on Good Friday in Hama," *SMI*, 23 April 2011, Retrieved 20 January 2025, from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/5db5f15e2fa5520001b77f30
[11] "Protesters from Sarjawi Mosque, heading to Al-Asi Square through March 8 Street," *SMI*, 17 June 2011, Retrieved 25 January 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/5dea1bc762f5280001e370ec
[12] "Night protest in Nazlit Jezdan in Hama," *SMI*, 30 June 2011, Retrieved 25 January 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/63e102142ea6b0000138c3a2

***Figure 17. Time of Protests in Bab Qibli per Week***




Source: Author's own illustration based on data from SMI (2024)

The military raid in early August 2011 reduced protests throughout the city for several weeks before demonstrations resumed in specific locations by mid-August. As reaching the Asi Square became increasingly difficult, the nature of the protests changed. Activists began organising quick demonstrations in safer areas to emphasise the revolution's continuation. Bab Qibli quickly became a key hub for these protests, eventually turning into the main centre of demonstrations in the city.

> *"We continued to protest in this way until the end of Ramadan [August 2011]. We started with four people marching in the streets, and others began to join us. Bab Qibli and Farrayeh were well-protected because of the presence of numerous secondary streets, which made it difficult for security forces to penetrate them." (SMI_Interview#7)*

> *"After the raid, a group of activists gathered to encourage people to protest again. For two weeks, the protests involved no more than 10 people before more participants started joining. Bab Qibli was especially suitable due to its 14 entrances, its dense urban fabric of old houses, and its diverse yet cohesive population (80% Muslim, 20% Christian). Additionally, a local armed group was formed to protect the protests." (SMI_Interview#8)*

By October 2011, demonstrations had grown larger and more frequent. With regime forces' limited capacity to enter the neighbourhood to disperse protests, activists, protected by FSA cells, could organise demonstrations for extended periods without fear of sudden raids. A coordination committee was established to formalise revolutionary activities, covering

logistics, media coverage, banner production, and organisation of a chanting stage (Interviewee#2). By November 2011, the necessity for a fixed protest site had become more urgent.

***Image 4. Satellite Image of the Main Protest Square in Bab Qibli***

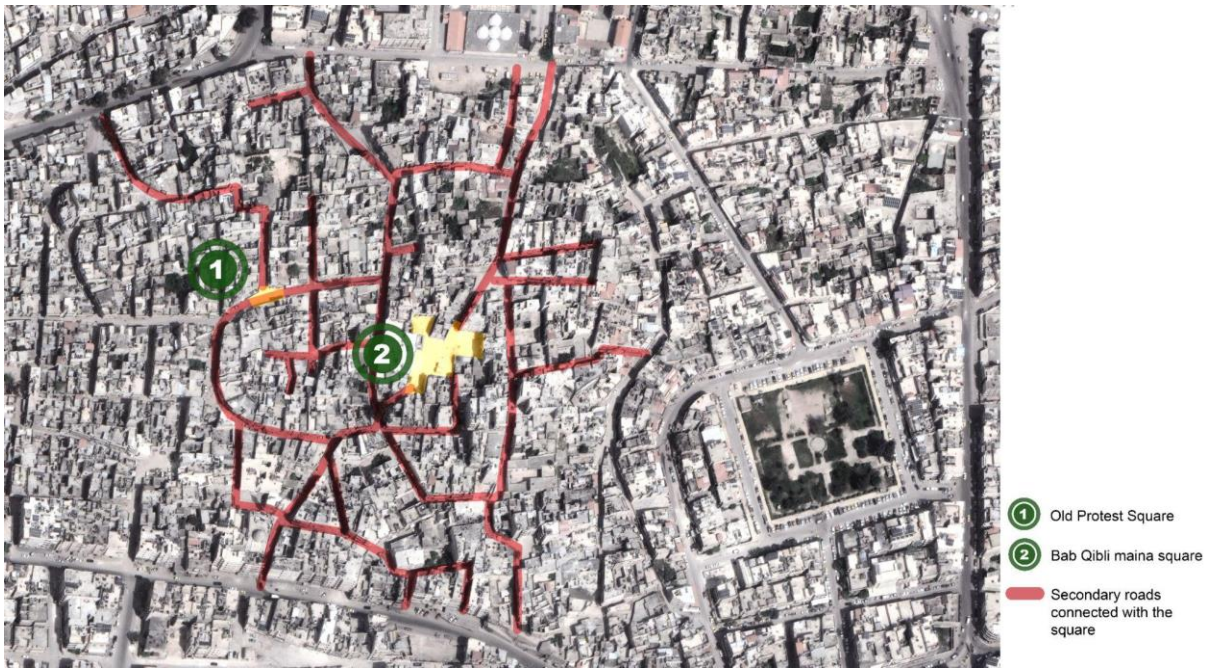
Source: Google Earth (2018)

> *"The Sukkar Square was the first space we chose for demonstrations. Abu Salim, who was assigned as the communication focal point with residents, reached out to residents adjacent to the square to seek their approval for gatherings. Attendance exceeded our expectations, prompting us to select a larger square. The new site was ideal as it contained an unoccupied built-up structure where we established our chanting stage" (Interviewee#2).*

The role of the coordination committee went beyond logistics to ensure the sustainability of demonstrations by fostering an attractive environment through creative slogans, banners, and interactive activities, and by ensuring harmony between residents and protestors.

> *"Activists in Bab Qibli shared pre-revolution strong ties through friendships and neighbourhood connections. This facilitated collaboration, secured support from local residents, and created a safe environment for FSA fighters, who in return provided protection for revolutionary activities." (Interviewee#7)*

***Image 5. Streets Network around Bab Qibli Protest Square***




Source: Google Earth (2022)

Beyond its urban footprint, the neighbourhood's social cohesion and spatial configuration (which create secondary streets surrounding urban squares) were crucial in facilitating large gatherings and allowing participants to rapidly disperse in multiple directions in the event of security raids (Interviewee#7). A comparable neighbourhood, Sheikh Anbar, also emerged as a protest hub due to similar urban and social characteristics. However, two factors gave Bab Qibli an ultimate advantage: the absence of a central square in Sheikh Anbar and its lower elevation, which made its streets more visible to snipers stationed at the Labour Union building (Interviewee#7; Interviewee#1). In contrast, Bab Qibli's square was situated at a higher elevation and was surrounded by three- to four-storey buildings that naturally protected protesters.

Given its dense urban footprint and street networks, security forces avoided conducting frequent incursions. Combined with the time required for any military or security patrol to reach the neighbourhood from the military airport, Bab Qibli became a relatively safe space for FSA units (SMI_Interview#9). However, as FSA influence grew in Bab Qibli and surrounding neighbourhoods such as Sheikh Anbar and Jarajmeh, their operations evolved from purely defensive to offensive actions against regime figures and checkpoints.

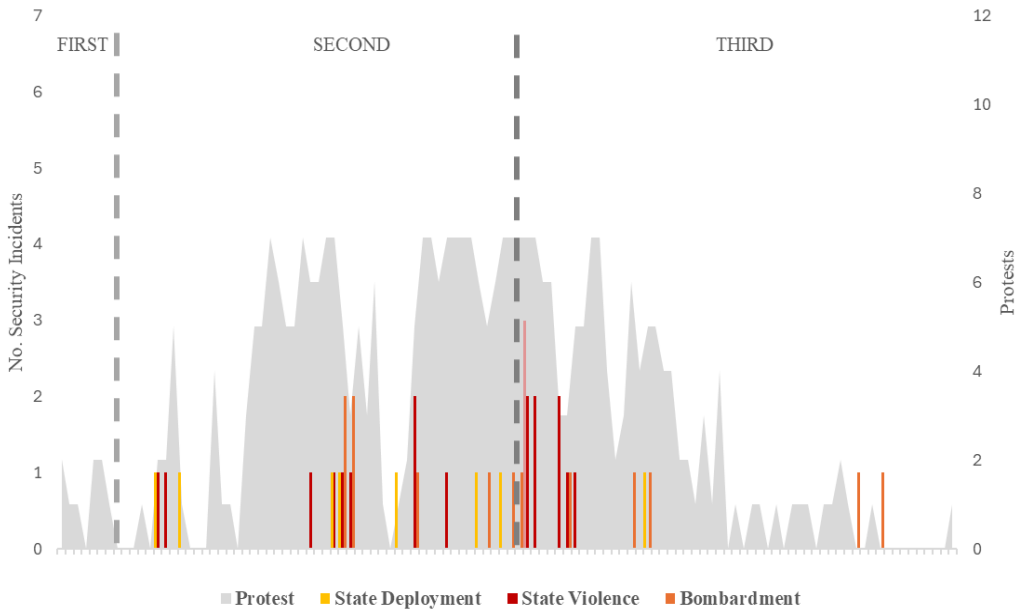
***Image 6. Night protest in Bab Qibli Square***

20 January 2012 | 16 December 2011

Source: SMI, 2024

A turning point happened in January 2012 with the assassination of Brigadier General Adel Mustafa of Military Security (BBC, 2012). While killing a central security figure gave FSA groups greater momentum to act more openly, it also prompted a more forceful response from the regime. In the following weeks, the regime launched significant military offensives, using shelling and airstrikes for the first time (Interviewee#2). Attempts by FSA fighters to retreat into neighbourhoods were unsuccessful, partly because of resistance from residents who feared a repeat of the bloodshed from the 1980s. As shown in Figure 16, protests in Bab Qibli sharply declined during these weeks, then rose again in March 2012.

***Figure 18. Mobilisation and State Violence in Bab Qibli per Week***




Source: Author's own illustrations based on data from SMI (2024)

Along with escalating military raids, the regime systematically targeted key activists in the neighbourhood through arrests and assassinations. As the neighbourhood became increasingly dangerous, many FSA fighters and activists moved to northern rural Hama or northern city neighbourhoods such as Tareq Halab and Arbaeen (SMI_Interview#8). By late 2012, a mix of mobilisation fatigue and a fractured activist network caused protests to steadily decline, nearly ceasing by April 2013.

The case of Bab Qibli represents a temporal inverse of Hader, a contrast that is analytically decisive for the phased-causation argument. While the neighbourhood played a marginal role during the first phase, it became the most important hub during the third. The three conditions, urban density, street network density, and social cohesion, were sufficient to sustain mobilisation under direct repressive pressure, yet they were not crucial in the first period, which required the centrality and visibility needed to drive marches towards Asi Square. This demonstrates that the causal relevance of socio-spatial configurations is not static but depends on the repertoire of mobilisation that each phase demands.

Bab Qibli's dense urban geometry, social cohesion and fortification through defined entrances sharpened the insider-outsider distinction, hindering the capacity of security apparatus to enter the neighbourhood and enabling the sheltering of local FSA groups. The mechanism of boundary activation was not replicable in Hader, where the street network allowed security forces to raid the neighbourhood more frequently. The scale shift of the protests from city-level marches to localised gatherings within neighbourhoods allowed for a fixed protest square to emerge, transferring recurrent activity into an institutionalised local movement managed by a coordination committee, sustained by residents and protected by the FSA. None of these three mechanisms — boundary activation, scale shift, and certification — could have materialised during the first phase, when the repertoire, based on marching and visible protests towards Asi Square, did not require them.

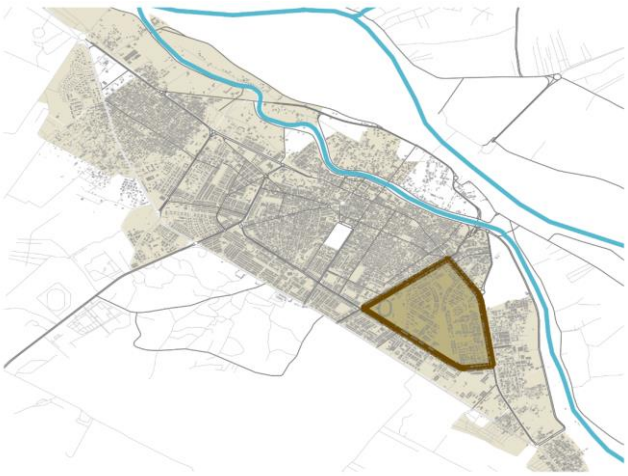
The decline of protest in Bab Qibli after March 2012 was not due to mobilisation fatigue alone, but also to escalating repression. Until early 2012, repression in Bab Qibli was mainly ground-based, encompassing security raids and arrests, before it shifted to aerial bombardment and the targeted assassination of key activists. While the spatial advantage was enough to protect the neighbourhood from the first form of violence, it offered little defence against the new repressive environment. The arrest and assassination of the chief activists dismantled the brokerage and certification networks that had facilitated the coordination. The new repressive

conditions rendered the socio-spatial conditions that had enabled mobilisation in the second phase largely irrelevant. Driven by memories of the 1982 events, local residents were reluctant to shelter the FSA groups in their neighbourhoods for an extended period. Meanwhile, the targeting of key activists forced their relocation to rural areas, dismantling the social foundation upon which earlier boundaries had rested.

## 6.3 Old Airport (Mataar Qadeem) - Deir-ez-Zor

The Old Airport neighbourhood, officially called Hettin, is located in the eastern part of Deir-ez-Zor. As its name indicates, the neighbourhood was developed after the city's old airport was relocated, which had been built by French colonial authorities outside the city in the mid-1950s. Once the airport was relocated, its land was rezoned for residential use. The majority of residents who settled in this neighbourhood originated from the Bukhabour region in eastern rural Deir-ez-Zor, particularly from the town of Mohasan (Ali, 2009; Allawi, 2016). Geography has played a primary role in shaping the spatial distribution of tribes within Deir-ez-Zor, including that of Old Airport. At the time of its establishment, the neighbourhood was located at the city's eastern periphery, physically connected to the broader eastern rural areas of the governorate. This geographical proximity made it a preferred destination for families relocating from these areas, emphasising a pattern of close-knit socio-spatial clustering (Ali, 2009; Interviewee#12). The highway that directly links Old Airport to Mohasan has also strengthened the connection between the two areas, both geographically and socially (Interviewee#15).

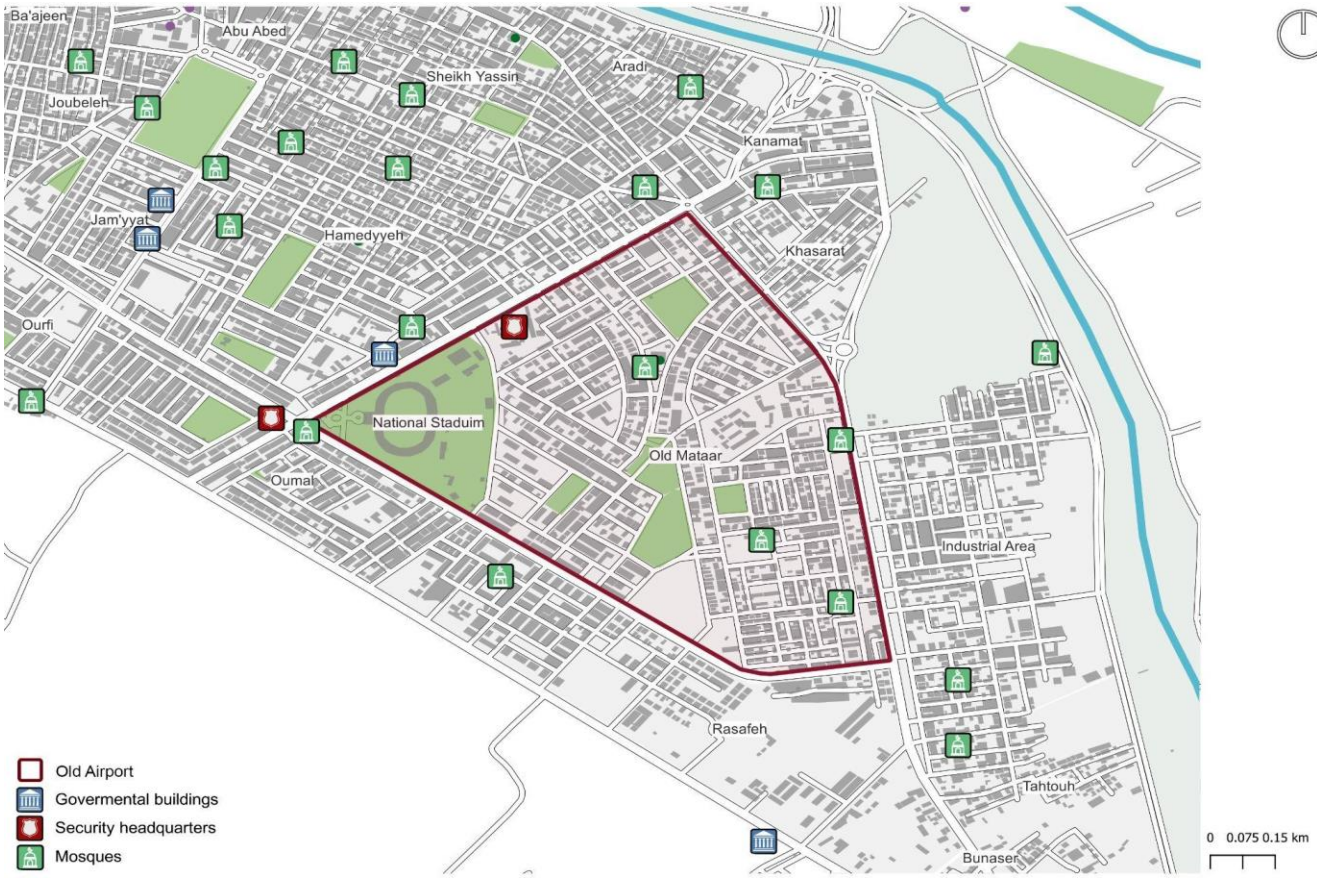
***Map 9. Location of the Old Airport in Deir-ez-Zor***



Source: Generated by the Author using QGIS

The strong tribal affiliations of Old Airport's residents, coupled with their enduring ties to the larger Bukhbour community, have significantly influenced the neighbourhood's social fabric, fostering high levels of social cohesion. Moreover, Mohasan, known for its history of political and cultural activism and pro-communist and Arab nationalist movements (SMI_Interview#5), earned the nickname Little Moscow (Allawi, 2016). This tradition of political and cultural engagement was carried over to Old Airport, making the neighbourhood an incubator of political activism even prior to 2011.

***Map 10. Map of Old Airport***




Source: Author's own illustration based on Google Maps, 2024; GLMB, 2023; OpenStreetMap, 2024

Planned and developed between the 1950s and the 1960s, Old Airport has a relatively modern urban layout, consisting of regulated, wide and asphalt roads with clear zoning. It also contains several landmarks, including the National Stadium at its southwestern edge and the Othman bin Affan Mosque. Old Airport is served by multiple public parks and markets, including the Consumer Cooperative Association, attracting shoppers from across the city (Ali, 2009).

Notably, aside from the Hajjaneh headquarters on its western boundary, the neighbourhood contains no significant government or security buildings.

Various urban typologies can be observed in the surrounding neighbourhoods. To the west lie older, densely populated areas such as Hamidiyeh, Sheikh Yassin, and Aradi. In contrast, to the south, the neighbourhood is bordered by Oumal, a planned, working-class district. Meanwhile, to the southwest, areas such as the industrial zone and Tahtouh exhibit dense, rural-like features. The neighbourhood is separated from its surroundings by main roads, including Hajaneh Street, Main Street, and Arafi Street. In addition to the prominent Othman bin Affan Mosque, the neighbourhood contains several mosques, including the Taqwa Mosque. Although other mosques, such as the Hussain, Ali bin Abi Talib, Safa, and Farouq mosques, are located nearby, they are separated by main roads.

***Image 7. Satellite Image of The Old Airport Neighbourhood***

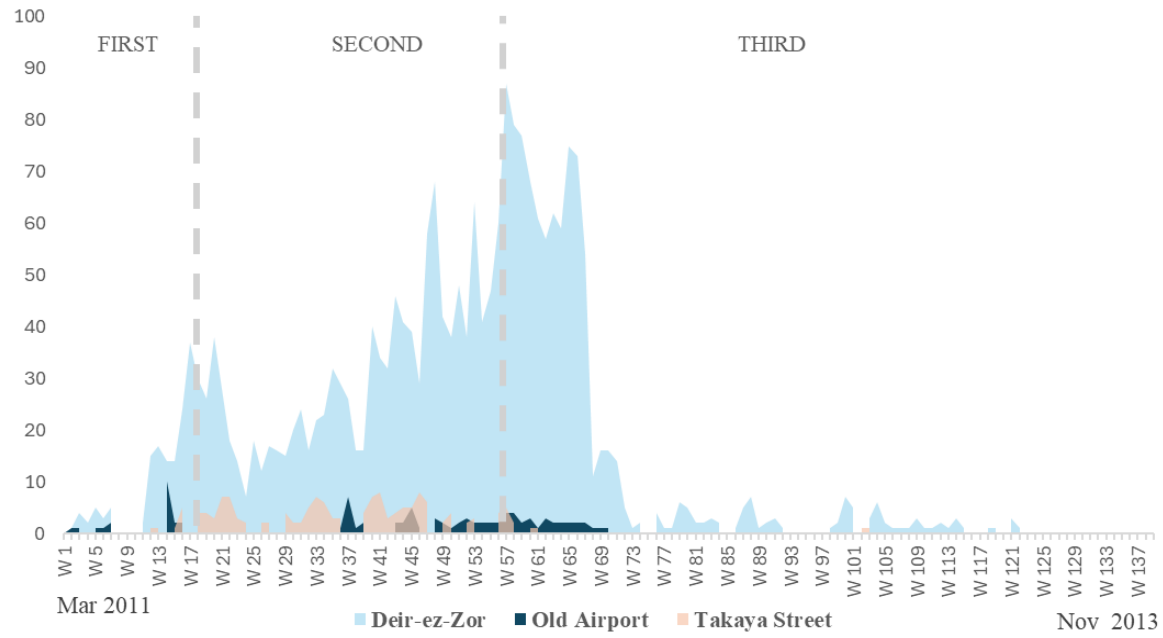

Source: Google Earth, 2012

According to the SMI's Protest Dataset, at least 104 demonstrations took place in Old Airport between March 2011 and August 2013. The number of protests during the first phase (28

protests) is relatively lower than in the second and third phases (41 and 36, respectively). However, the neighbourhood's contribution to citywide mobilisation was higher in the first phase of the uprising, accounting for 11% of Deir-ez-Zor's total protests, compared to only 4% in the later phases. Results from QCA's analytic induction show that Old Airport is the main case of Path 2 (outcome = FIRST). Meanwhile, it does not appear to represent any other pathways associated with the (SECOND) and (THIRD) phases. A combination of three conditions enabled mobilisation in the neighbourhood during the first phase: a cohesive and dense social structure (SOCALST), greater distance from government buildings (GOV) and security headquarters (SECURITY).

(OUTCOME = FIRST) SOCALST * GOV * SECURITY

***Figure 19. Protests in Old Airport (March 2011 - August 2013)***




Source: Author's own illustrations based on data from SMI (2024)

As mentioned in Chapter 4, several simultaneous attempts were made to initiate protests in Deir-ez-Zor by early March. These efforts were organised by various unconnected groups of friends, colleagues, and relatives, alongside calls for mobilisation on Facebook. However, these attempts failed due to a lack of trust in online calls and limited participation. The football match on 18 March 2011 presented an opportunity to harness the large crowd and incite unrest, potentially transforming it into a protest. Although some riotous activity did occur outside the stadium, whether it constituted a revolutionary event remains contested. Nonetheless, it

provided momentum for activists. On 25 March 2011, a group of activists succeeded in organising a protest after Friday prayers at the Othman bin Affan Mosque.[13] Following the end of the prayer, activists coordinated chants encouraging people to gather outside the mosque and move towards Takaya Street.

> *"We were about 100 people [...] We marched towards Main Street and turned left towards Ghassan Abboud Circle, aiming to reach Takaya Street. People started to join the protest from different neighbourhoods, although the majority were residents of Old Airport. As soon as we entered Takaya Street, security forces, joined by members of the Ba'ath Party and Student Union, attacked the demonstration and dispersed it." (SMI_Interview#5)*

On the same day, activists chose another mosque, specifically Safa Mosque, situated in the Oumal neighbourhood next to Old Airport (SMI_Interview#6). The proximity of both mosques to the stadium, combined with strong social connections among residents, made them ideal spots for potential protests. However, the Imam of Safa Mosque, aligned with the regime and supported by security forces and pro-regime individuals, restricted protests from occurring outside the mosque (Interviewee#13).

> *"Between the stadium event and the Great Friday, all protests were spontaneous and brief, attended by small numbers. Protest times and locations were kept within close circles of trusted friends and only announced a few minutes before they began via mobile messages" (Interviewee#15).*

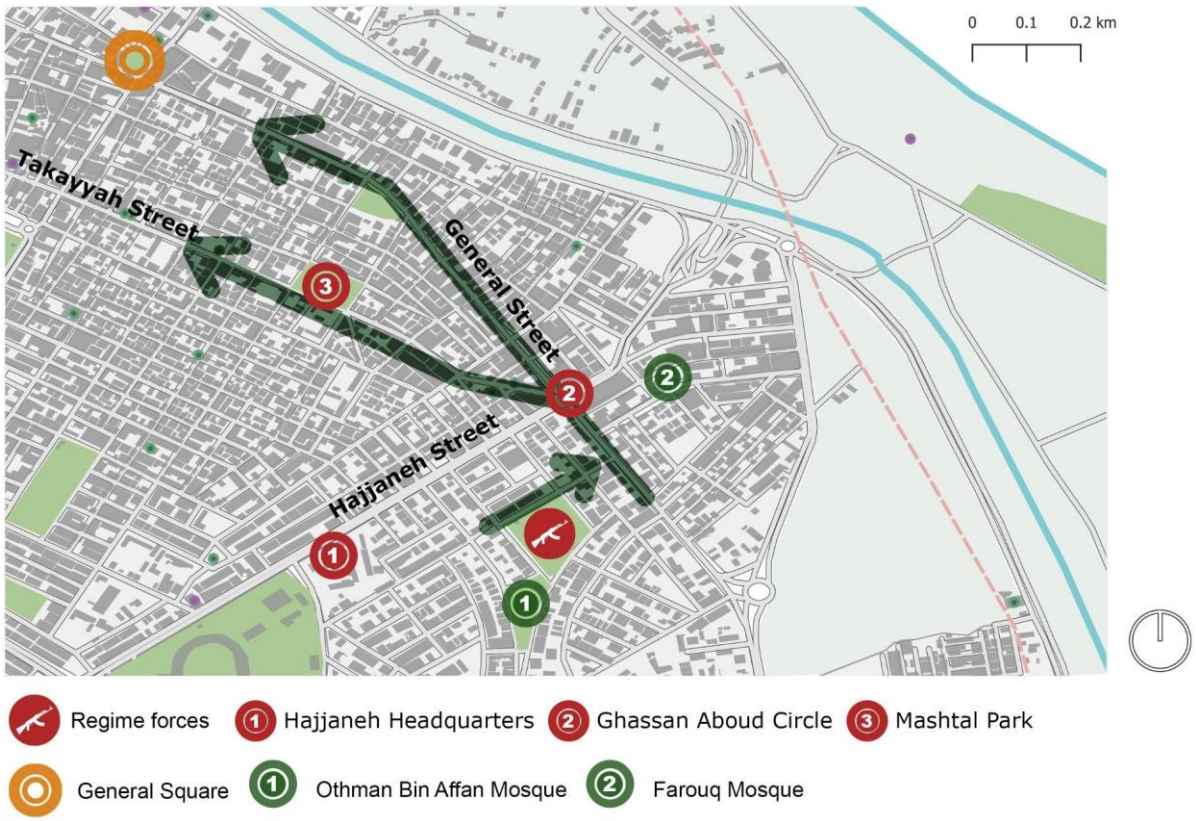
Following the first protest, activist coordination intensified, as did the regime's security presence around Othman Mosque. The absence of any security or governmental buildings in the neighbourhood limited the regime's ability to rapidly deploy or permanently station forces. That said, the mosque's physical layout played a dual role. It is connected to two gardens and surrounded by a network of wide, perpendicular streets that are closely connected to the main roads, namely the Hajjaneh Street and the General Street. While these characteristics gave the rebels an advantage in gathering in larger numbers and reaching main roads easily, they also meant that regime forces could do the same. Before Friday prayers, security forces routinely assembled in the parks around the mosque and blocked strategic road junctures such as Old Airport Garden and Mashtal Garden on Takaya Street, near General Square (SMI_Interview#5).

Despite these security measures, two factors provided activists with a strategic advantage in the initial weeks. First, the historically minimal security presence in the neighbourhood,

[13] "Protest in Old Airport in Deir-ez-Zor," *SMI*, 25 March 2011, Retrieved 30 January 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/65be485b5f4dec103b099e1d

coupled with the fact that many security forces were not originally from the city and had little knowledge of its streets or residents, enabled protestors to escape through secondary streets and conceal their identities (Interviewee#15). The regime tried to counter this by deploying informants from the Ba'ath Party, Farmers Union, and Student Union within the community to help security forces identify key activists and their homes (Awwad, 2021). The second advantage stemmed from Old Airport's geographic location on the city's eastern periphery, which facilitated strong connections with the eastern countryside. This connection enabled rural residents, often belonging to the same tribes and families as neighbourhood residents, to travel to Old Airport to participate in demonstrations (Interviewee#17).

***Map 11. Mobilisation Dynamics in Old Airport***




Source: Generated by the Author using QGIS

Between April and June 2011, despite increasing security restrictions and partial closure of Othman Mosque, protests continued, particularly on Fridays. The activists' strategy was to depart from several mosques simultaneously, such as Mufti Mosque in Oumal, and Mus'ab bin Omair in Hamidiyeh, gather around Othman Mosque, and march toward General Square. This plan, however, rarely materialised due to the regime's counter-mobilisation strategy, which

included isolating these mosques from one another by erecting roadblocks at key junctures (Interviewee#15).

Figure 19 illustrates this negative relationship between the neighbourhood and its surrounding streets. As protests aimed primarily at reaching the main streets and squares, the figure suggests that mobilisation declined steadily within the neighbourhood whenever main streets were accessible to demonstrators. By January 2012, protests concentrated again within the neighbourhoods, as the main squares were highly inaccessible.

On the Friday of the Challenge (6 May 2011), security forces suppressed a major protest in Old Airport, arresting prominent activist Akram Assaf. His arrest sparked a sit-in around Othman Mosque that lasted until midnight and drew a large crowd (SMI_Interview#5).[14] Over the following days, the regime sought to balance between preventing sustained mobilisation in the neighbourhood by deploying security forces and dispersing protests, while avoiding excessive violence that might provoke a larger backlash, given the neighbourhood's strong sense of solidarity. Security forces initiated a dialogue with activists to end the sit-in, but ultimately closed the mosque entirely on 8 May 2011, installing checkpoints and surveillance cameras around it. As the only mobilisation hub in the neighbourhood, its closure effectively curtailed mobilisation in Old Airport, forcing activists to shift protests to other districts, such as Hamidiyeh and Jourah.

> *"After the closure of Othman Mosque, all our attempts to protest in the neighbourhood were unsuccessful. To find other demonstrations, we drove randomly around the city. One day, we heard about a protest in Jourah. As we headed there, we saw many others individually making their way in the same direction." (SMI_Interview#5)*

Over time, the regime's security strategy became more aggressive, conducting raids to arrest chief activists. Given the neighbourhood's tight-knit social fabric, arrests often sparked further demonstrations, led by detainees' relatives and friends. On 10 June, activists managed to breach the mosque, dismantling surveillance cameras (SMI_Interview#5). In response, the head of State Security negotiated with activists, agreeing to reopen the mosque and release detainees. During this period, the city experienced large-scale mobilisation, with protests organised freely between the General Square and Medilji Square. Demonstrations increasingly moved onto main roads around Old Airport, such as Takaya Street, aiming to reach the city's central squares (see Map 11). This city-wide mobilisation continued until the end of July, when regime forces

[14] "Night protest and sit-in Othman ibn Affan Mosque in Old Airport on the Friday of Challenge," *SMI*, 6 May 2011, Retrieved 2 February 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/62030fc3ee969d00013f343f

intensified their crackdown, launching a major military campaign that included mass arrests and the removal of makeshift barriers set up by residents to hinder security raids.

On 10 August 2011, during the military campaign, regime forces bombarded the Othman Mosque and intentionally demolished its minaret.[15]

> *"At 7 AM, I was in Sina'a, and I watched regime forces deploy heavy military vehicles around the neighbourhood and fire directly at the mosque until its minaret collapsed. Their targeting of the mosque was driven by hatred, as it had become a revolutionary symbol across the city." (SMI_Interview#5)*

As seen in Hama, protests plummeted in the weeks following the military campaign, particularly in the Old Airport area. Activists searched for alternative locations, such as the Ali bin Abi Talib Mosque in Hamidiyeh (SMI_Interview#5). However, as the regime tightened its grip, protest hubs shifted to denser western neighbourhoods, such as Joubeleh (Interviewee#19). Meanwhile, increased operations by FSA cells in the area, accompanied by periods of military control, created opportunities for protest, especially during the first few months of 2012.

Between June 2012 and March 2013, control shifted between regime forces and the FSA, until the regime ultimately took over in March 2013.[16] However, FSA control did not result in increased mobilisation, as regime forces, whenever they lost ground, responded with heavy bombardment from Therdeh Mountain, adjacent to the military airport. This shelling caused significant destruction to the urban landscape and led to the mass displacement of residents, significantly reducing both civilian and revolutionary activities in the area. To illustrate, Oumal, located to the south of Old Airport and directly beneath the mountain, remained largely out of reach of the regime's artillery, thereby providing a more stable environment for governance and civilian activism (Interviewee#12). However, by mid-2013, revolutionary activities had vastly diminished across the city, especially with the rise of jihadist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State (IS) in the months that followed.

The case of Old Airport is distinctive in terms of conditions contributing to mobilisation, namely social cohesion and the absence of a state footprint. This contrasts with the previous

[15] "The bombardment of Othman ibn Affan Mosque's minaret in Old Airport," *SMI*, 9 August 2011, Retrieved 2 February 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/5f1d637476d3eb00012e8cbd
[16] "A visual report on the battle to control the old airport neighbourhood in Deir-ez-Zor," *SMI*, 26 February 2013, Retrieved 2 February 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/607763360b32430001410f98

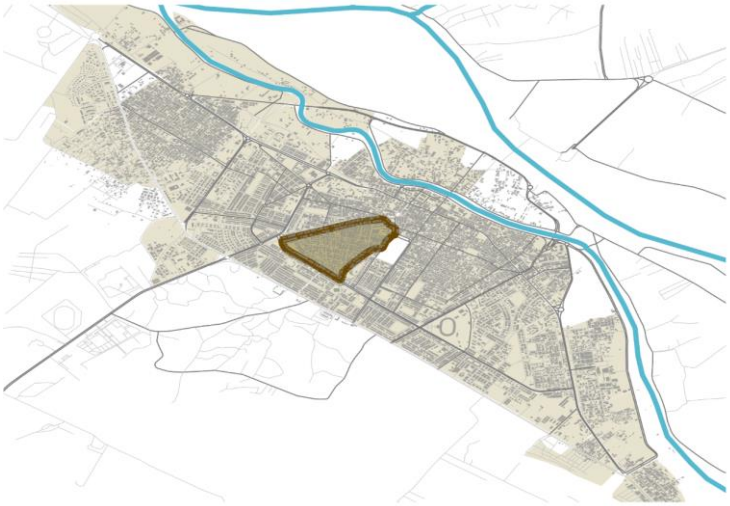
cases of Hader and Bab Qibli, in which urban conditions were decisive in conferring defensibility or centrality. Social and state-absence conditions were sufficient to initiate mobilisation but not to sustain it under escalating repression. One of the main mechanisms operating in Old Airport was trans-local brokerage, linking the neighbourhood with its tribal extension in Mohasan, a hub for pre-2011 Arab nationalist and communist activism (Allawi, 2016). This connection ensured the establishment of an activist network and a repertoire of contention that were crucial in organising the first protest in the neighbourhood. Taking these two factors into account, the appropriation of the Othman Mosque into a site of contention became possible, until it was blocked by the regime in early May 2011, when mobilisation scaled downward, and activists began searching for alternative mosques.

Moreover, the neighbourhood's link to a tribal, rural constituency was an additional factor that prompted the regime to calibrate its repressive calculus. Following the mosque sit-in in May 2011, security forces initially refrained from intensive and indiscriminate repression, confining their response to installing cameras and checkpoints, followed by negotiations between the activists and the security forces that led to the mosque's reopening. This calibrated approach was a structural response to the neighbourhood's social configuration, strong tribal cohesion and the trans-local tie to Mohasan, which made the use of excessive violence risky for the regime. However, as regime violence escalated city-wide, peaking with the military campaign in August 2011, the strategy shifted to two goals: neutralising the neighbourhood's main mobilisation infrastructure and dismantling Old Airport's demographic base through intensified bombardment. In sum, the case of Old Airport demonstrates that the effect of the mechanism sequence attached to a configurational path shifted across phases, producing different outcomes. Under escalating violence, the neighbourhood's urban and street layout could not sustain the mobilisation that its location and social structures had initially made possible.

## 6.4 Joubeleh - Deir-ez-Zor

Joubeleh is one of the oldest neighbourhoods built outside the historical centre of Deir-ez-Zor. It was established in 1918 as an extension of Ba'ajeen, following the end of Ottoman rule in the region, and is located in the western central part of Deir-ez-Zor, neighbouring other historical districts to the south, such as Abu Abed and Rushdiyeh. To the west and south, it borders newer, more regulated neighbourhoods like Qusur and Mowazafien, which are predominantly middle-class.

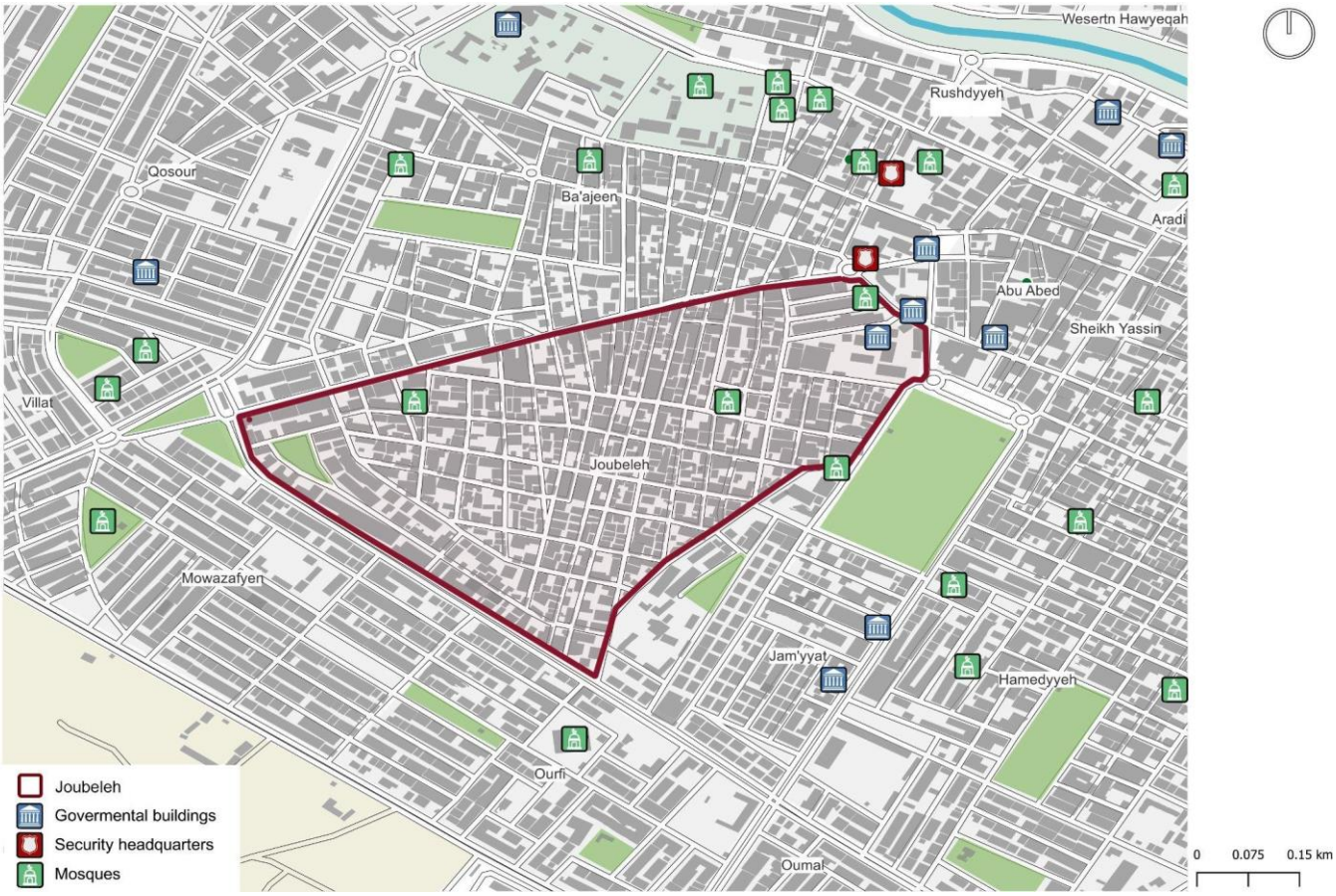
***Map 12. Location of Joubeleh in Deir-ez-Zor***



Source: Generated by the Author using QGIS

While some newer neighbouring areas, such as Mowazafien and Ourfi, are largely tribal, mainly inhabited by the Busaraya Tribe, the situation in the older central neighbourhoods, such as Joubeleh and Hamidiyeh, is different. Joubeleh is home to a mix of families, both native to the city and migrants from rural regions, without a dominant tribal structure (Interviewee#14). Social organisation is centred on family ties, with some quarters named after and primarily occupied by specific families, such as the Hayzat, Sayyah, and Ridesat quarters (Faraj, 2014; Interviewee#16).

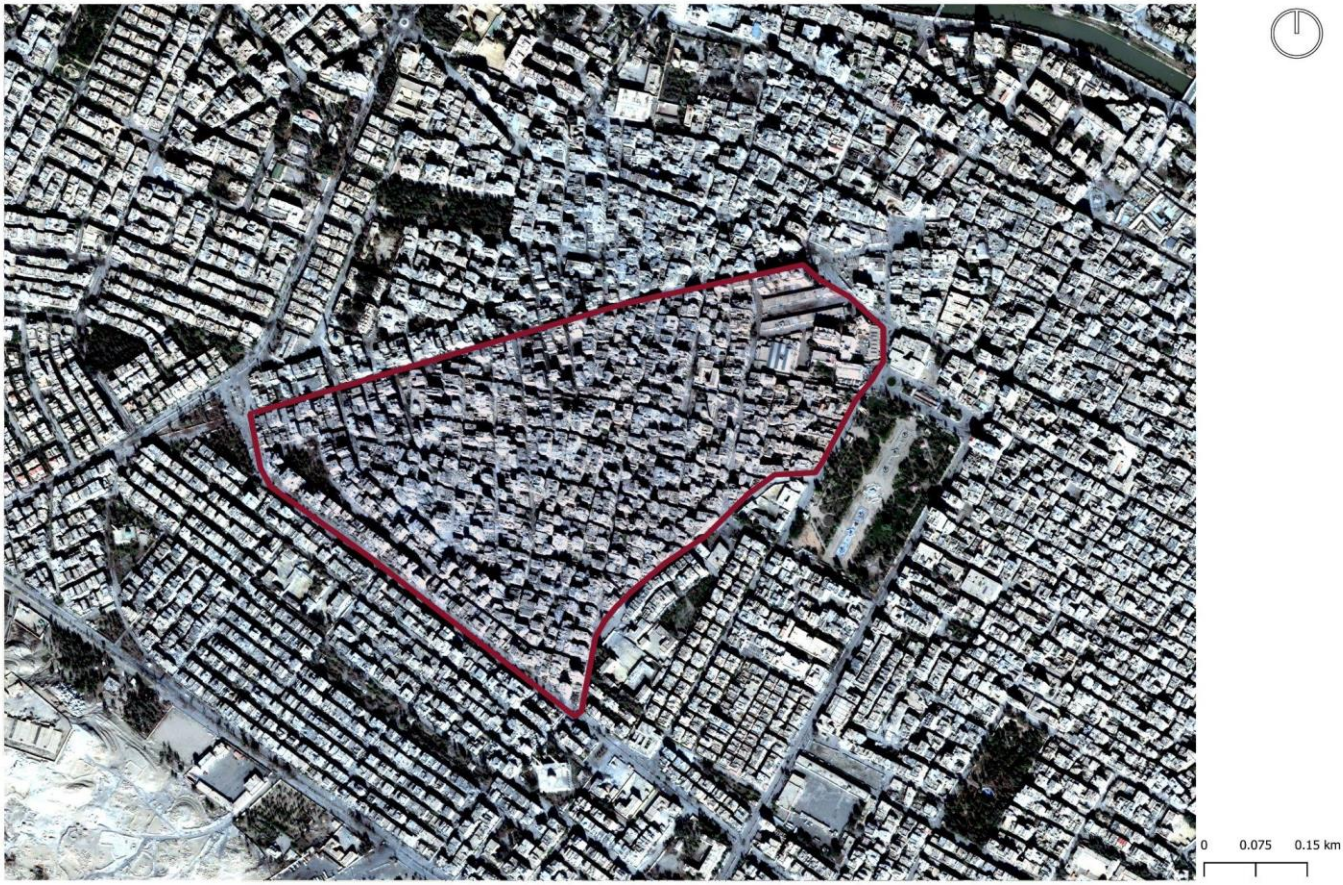
***Map 13. Map of Joubeleh***




Source: Author's own illustration based on Google Maps, 2024; GLMB, 2023; OpenStreetMap, 2024

Joubeleh enjoys a central and strategic position in Deir-ez-Zor. In addition to its central location between several major roads such as Busaraya, Old Intilaq and N7, it also hosts the Hal Market, a key commercial hub that attracts shoppers from across the city, as well as several historical cafés, making it a popular destination for labourers, public servants, and families (Talab, 2022). A key road, Souq Joubeleh Street, runs between Joubeleh and Ba'ajeen, connecting Medilji Square and General Street, both of which lead to General Square, one of the city's main public spaces. Despite its centrality, the state's presence in Joubeleh is minimal, with only the Directorate of Electricity located in the northeastern corner, behind Hal Market. However, the Local Police Headquarters is situated at the southern edge of Ba'ajeen, near Joubeleh. The neighbourhood also contains several major mosques, such as Fardous and Rawada, which were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s, often through joint efforts by local families.

***Image 8. Satellite Image of The Joubeleh Neighbourhood***




Source: Google Earth (2012)

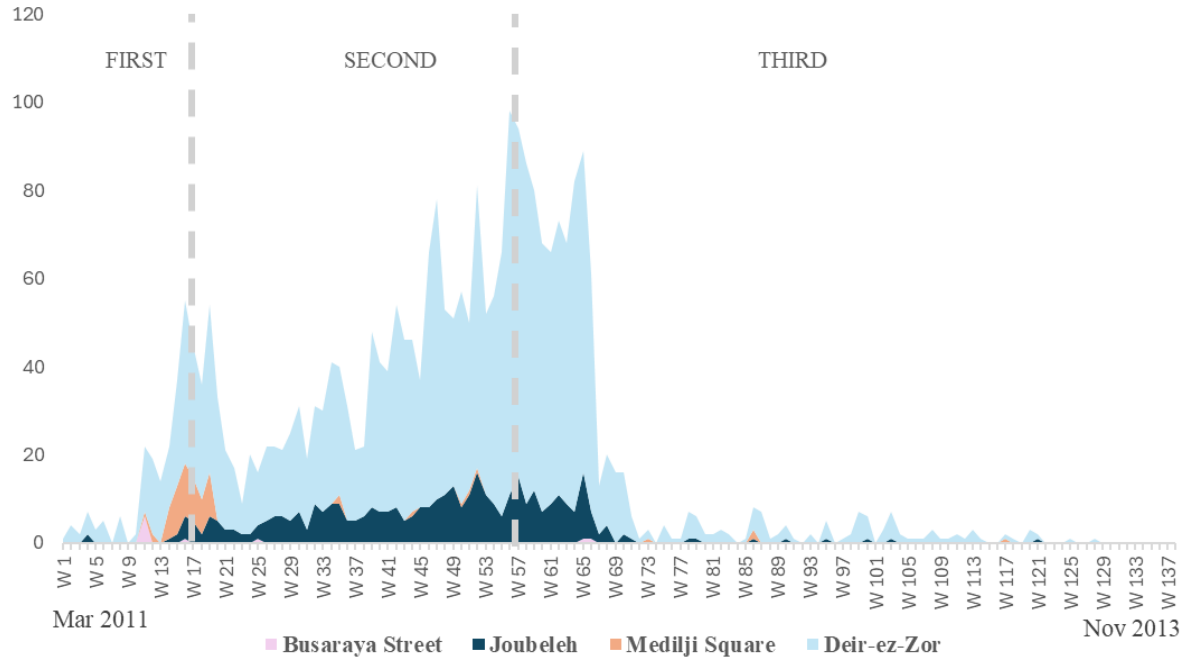
During the uprising, Joubeleh emerged as one of the primary hubs for both protest and military activity in Deir-ez-Zor. Between March 2011 and August 2013, at least 403 protests were recorded in Joubeleh, the highest number of any neighbourhood in the city, according to the SMI's Protest Dataset. Joubeleh's importance was not only due to the large number of protests, but also to the sustained mobilisation across all phases of the uprising. Despite the high turnout in neighbourhoods of Deir-ez-Zor (ranging from 71% to 100%), Joubeleh hosted 6% of the citywide demonstrations during the first period, 18.4% during the second period, and 10.7% during the third period.

According to the results of QCA's Induction Analytic, Joubeleh appeared in all mobilisation pathways: (ALL), (FIRST), (SECOND), and (THIRD). During the first phase, four conditions were crucial in enabling mobilisation: cohesive social structures (SOCALST), a dense urban footprint (FOOTPRINT), a dense network of mosques (~MOSQUES), and proximity to main squares (~SQUARE). While (SOCALST) and (FOOTPRINT) continued to play a central role

during the second and third phases, (~SQUARE) and (~MOSQUES) became less significant as protests shifted into inner neighbourhood streets, increasing the importance of (STREETS).

(OUTCOME = FIRST) SOCALST * FOOTPRINT * ~MOSQUES * ~SQUARE
(OUTCOME = SECOND) SOCALST * FOOTPRINT * ~MOSQUES * STREETS
(OUTCOME = THIRD) SOCALST * FOOTPRINT * STREETS

***Figure 20. Protests in Joubeleh (March 2011 - August 2013)***




Source: Author's own illustration building on data from SMI (2024)

Joubeleh was not among the earliest neighbourhoods to witness protests in Deir-ez-Zor compared to Old Airport, Hamidiyeh, and Jourah. The first recorded demonstration in Joubeleh occurred at night on 10 April 2011 on the neighbourhood's main commercial street to show solidarity with Daraa.[17] During that week, security forces had aggressively suppressed demonstrations originating from mosques, prompting activists to explore alternative strategies such as organising protests in busy commercial areas where large numbers of people were already gathered.

[17] "A night demonstration in Joubeleh market in Deir-ez-Zor city after the funeral of a number of people," *SMI*, 10 April 2011, Retrieved 15 February 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/5d837049bcb49c000132679f

***Image 9. The first protest in Joubeleh Market Street on 10 April 2011***


Source: SMI (2024)

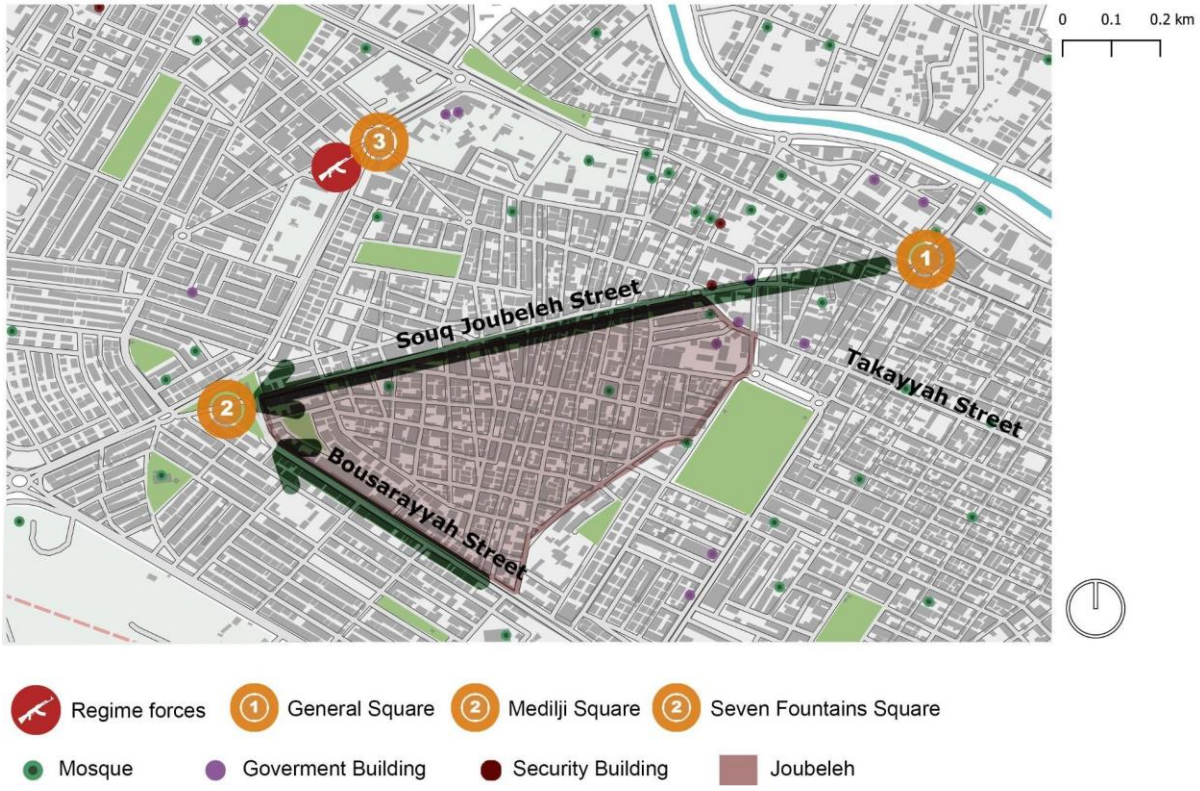
However, Joubeleh took on a more prominent role during the second half of June 2011, especially after security forces killed Moaz Rakkad on 3 June 2011.[18] During this period, mobilisation expanded to the city level, with protests happening in General Square during the day and Medilji Square at night. Protesters often crossed the main street in Joubeleh as they moved between these two sites.[19] The neighbourhood's proximity to Medilji Square made Joubeleh a strategic route for many demonstrations, while its relative distance from major military headquarters, such as Military Intelligence and Hajaneh, offered protesters a safer passage to the square.

As the regime gradually restricted access to the main squares in the northern part of the city, including General Square and Seven Fountains Square, Medilji Square became more significant as the central hub for protests, further elevating Joubeleh's role in the movement (Interviewee#16). The relationship between Medilji Square and Joubeleh is illustrated in Figure 20, which shows that mobilisation initially increased in neighbouring Busaraya Street and Medilji Square, briefly overlapping with Joubeleh before gradually shifting towards the neighbourhood independently of the square by the end of the first phase of the uprising.

[18] Moaz Rakkad is a high-school student, who was the first individual to be killed by security forces in a protest in the neighbourhood of Jourah. His death triggered enormous outrage and catalysed massive demonstrations, reinforced by the city's tribal nature and feeling of solidarity.

[19] "A night demonstration marching from Joubeleh to Medilji Square in Deir-ez-Zor city on Tuesday on "Supporting Detainees," *SMI*, 12 July 2012, Retrieved 15 February 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/628c349fc5113a0001e69a65

***Map 14. Dynamics of Mobilisation and Repression in Joubeleh***



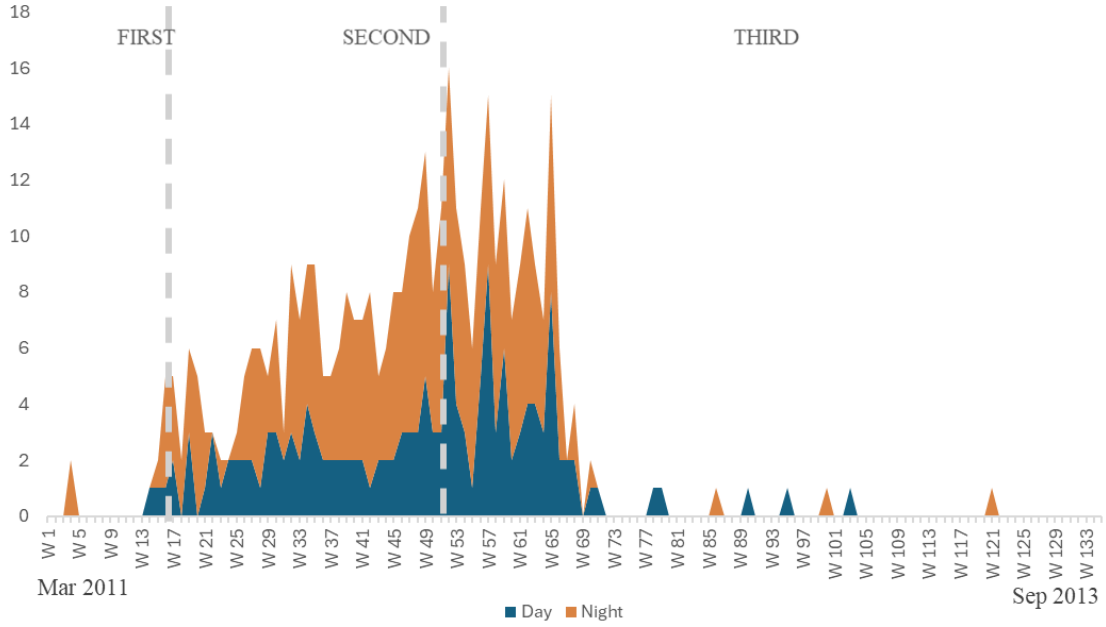

Source: Generated by the author using QGIS

As mentioned earlier, the regime's military campaign in August 2011 ended the citywide mobilisation. The campaign started on the city's western edge, including Joubeleh, resulting in the removal of makeshift checkpoints set up by local activists and the establishment of control over main traffic nodes and squares. In response, protests shifted to the central and southern neighbourhoods, such as Hamidiyeh and Joubeleh (Interviewee#17). Besides their dense urban layout, which served as incubators for spontaneous, mobile, and rapid protests, the formation of localised military cells in these neighbourhoods strengthened protection for demonstrators (SMI_Interview#6). As shown in Figure 20, by the second phase, protests had largely disappeared from Medilji Square and Busaraya Street, becoming confined within the neighbourhood itself, mainly at night. Factors like density and social cohesion, rather than geographic location, became more important for mobilisation dynamics.

> *"The main reason for selecting the protest location was the ability to escape when security forces pursued us. Neighbourhoods such as Joubeleh and Hamidiyeh were ideal not only because of their dense network of secondary streets but also because we knew many of their residents and trusted them. When fleeing from security forces, it was often necessary to quickly enter a house for refuge, and if the residents could not be trusted, they might turn us in" (Interviewee#13)*

Many activists who had previously been involved in organising protests joined FSA cells. These groups were typically formed by small groups of individuals connected by familial, tribal, or neighbourhood ties (Interviewee#18). The aggressive approach applied by the regime following its military campaign against demonstrations has further accelerated the militarisation of these neighbourhoods. Interestingly, the division of control between regime forces and the FSA also took on a temporal dimension. During the day, regime forces set up checkpoints, conducted searches, and carried out arrest raids in major streets. However, by night, fearing ambushes and hit-and-run attacks, they withdrew from dense urban areas (Interviewee#15). This dynamic likely contributed to the increase in nighttime protests during the second phase, as shown in Figure 21.

***Figure 21. Time of Protests in Joubeleh per Week***




Source: Author's own illustration based on data from SMI (2024)

The street extending between the Dalleh Circle and Seven Fountains Circle effectively became a frontline between regime forces and the FSA, which successfully repelled multiple regime advancements toward eastern Joubeleh. Between March and June 2012, the protection facilitated dozens of protests within the neighbourhood, many of which were led by women[20] and schoolchildren,[21] and expressed solidarity with FSA groups. On June 11, 2012, regime

[20] "Women-led demonstration in Joubeleh in Deir-ez-Zor," *SMI*. 14 April 2012, Retrieved 20 February 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/628c3659c5113a0001e69ba1

[21] "Protest led by students of Mohammad Mulla Essa School in Deir-ez-Zor," *SMI*, 25 March 2012, Retrieved 20 February 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/65c4b1caee673a349e499e6c

forces infiltrated a key local battalion, namely the Ali bin Abi Taleb Battalion, detonating an explosive device that killed five of its members, including its leader, Mohammed Jasem, as well as several demonstrators outside the building. This incident mobilised both civilian and military activists, aiming to secure full control over the neighbourhood. Simultaneously, mass protests erupted in support of FSA groups,[22] with demonstrators strategically utilising secondary streets lined with high-rise residential buildings to shield themselves from snipers and shelling.

***Image 10. Women-led (Left) and Student-led (Right) protests in Joubeleh***

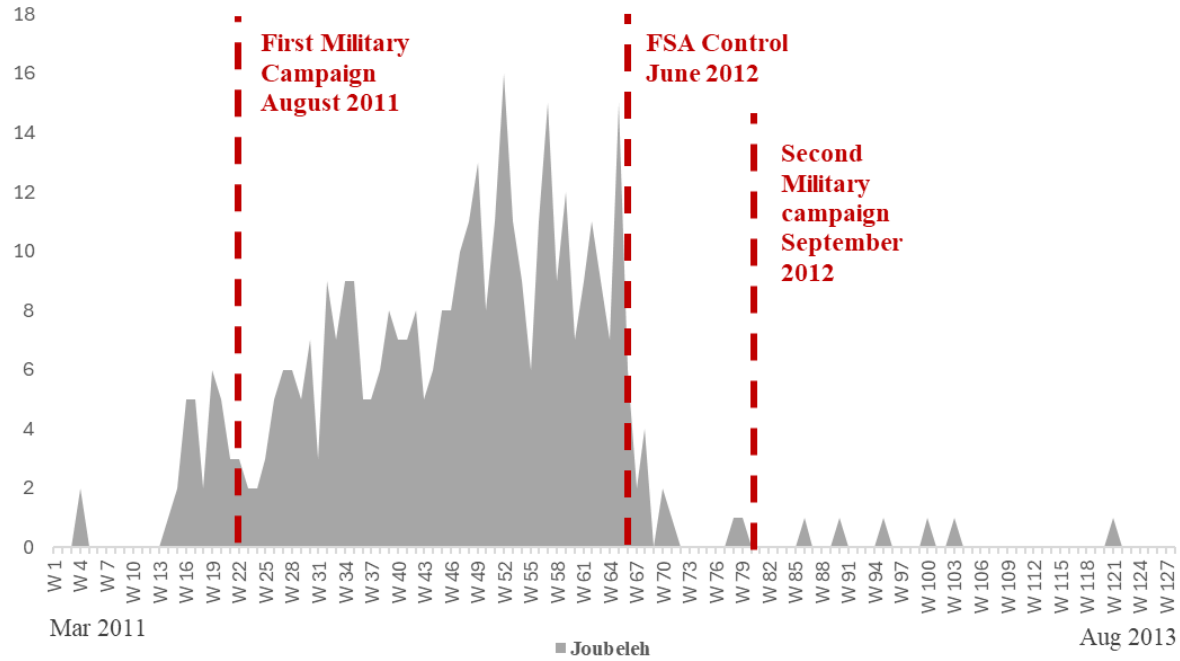
14 April 2012 09 April 2012

Source: SMI (2024)

In September 2012, the regime launched its second and largest military campaign. The offensive started in Jourah and Qusur, located east of Joubeleh, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of civilians, before progressing westward towards Joubeleh. Although FSA groups initially repelled the attack, they ultimately suffered substantial territorial losses, with nearly half of Joubeleh and Ba'ajeen falling under regime control. By the end of this battle, the FSA retained control over much of the city, except for Qusur and Jourah. However, security conditions worsened significantly in neighbourhoods close to the front lines, such as Joubeleh and Rushdiyeh, and in areas exposed to regime artillery, like Old Airport. As a result, by late 2012, civilian governance and activist networks across contested zones had vanished.

[22] "Night demonstration in Joubeleh in Deir-ez-Zor," *SMI*, 12 June 2012, Retrieved 20 February 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/62030d23ee969d00013f30d9

***Figure 22. Protests in Joubeleh between March 2011 and August 2013 with respect to the Main Military Events in Deir-ez-Zor***




Source: Author's own illustration based on data from SMI (2024)

In conclusion, Joubeleh's appearance in the three pathways makes it one of the most central cases for this research, demonstrating how QCA's phased design captures the changing operation of mechanisms across phases within the same neighbourhood. The configuration that constitutes the first pathway: social cohesion, dense footprint, mosque network, and proximity to Medilji Square, initially made Joubeleh a route rather than a protest hub. Protestors favoured Joubeleh as a safe passage between General Square and Medilji Square, and its dense urban environment, which activated the diffusion mechanism through transit. Notably, the first protest in Joubeleh reappropriated a crowded commercial routine for contentious purposes rather than using a mosque, favouring spatial mobilisation over institutional mobilisation as seen in Hader and Old Airport. With the closure of the central squares during the second and third phases, mobilisation shifted downward, transforming the neighbourhood from a passage into a site of mobilisation in its own right. The conditions of dense street networks, social trust and tall building heights activated the mechanism of boundary activation, distinguishing the neighbourhood from its surroundings (such as Qusur) through the combination of urban geometry and interpersonal trust.

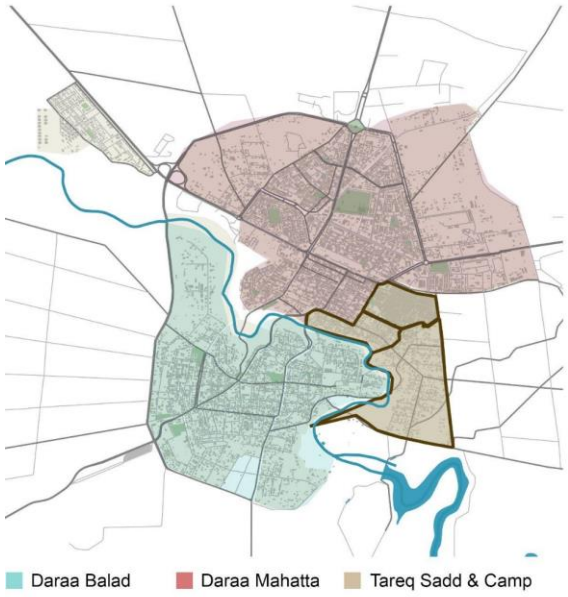
A comparison with Old Airport further explains the research's phased-causation argument. While both neighbourhoods mobilised successfully during the first phase, their configurational

pathways are structurally different; the absence of the urban-form condition from Old Airport constrained its capacity to sustain mobilisation in the later phases, especially once its primary mobilisation node (Othman Mosque) was dismantled. Joubeleh, by contrast, relied on a combination of social cohesion and urban density that preserved its advantage as a mobilisation hub and enabled it to absorb the closure of the central square, which ended the initial phase. The decline in mobilisation in Joubeleh from mid-2012 resulted from a repressive dynamic distinct from that in other cases. Joubeleh came under FSA control, positioning it as an active military frontline between the FSA and regime forces and repurposing the dense urban environment from protecting demonstrators to sheltering combatants. The transformation of the neighbourhood into a contested military zone made civilian protest incompatible with the new military purpose of the dense streets.

## 6.5 Tareq Sadd and Daraa Camp - Daraa

Tareq Sadd, which literally means Dam's Road, is located on the eastern outskirts of Daraa city. It comprises two sub-areas: western and eastern Tareq Sadd, both situated along the road that links the city to the main water dam and the eastern rural regions. The western part is directly connected to the city's main commercial and administrative centre, known as Souq Daraa, as well as the Mahatta Area. In contrast, the eastern part gradually merges into rural surroundings.

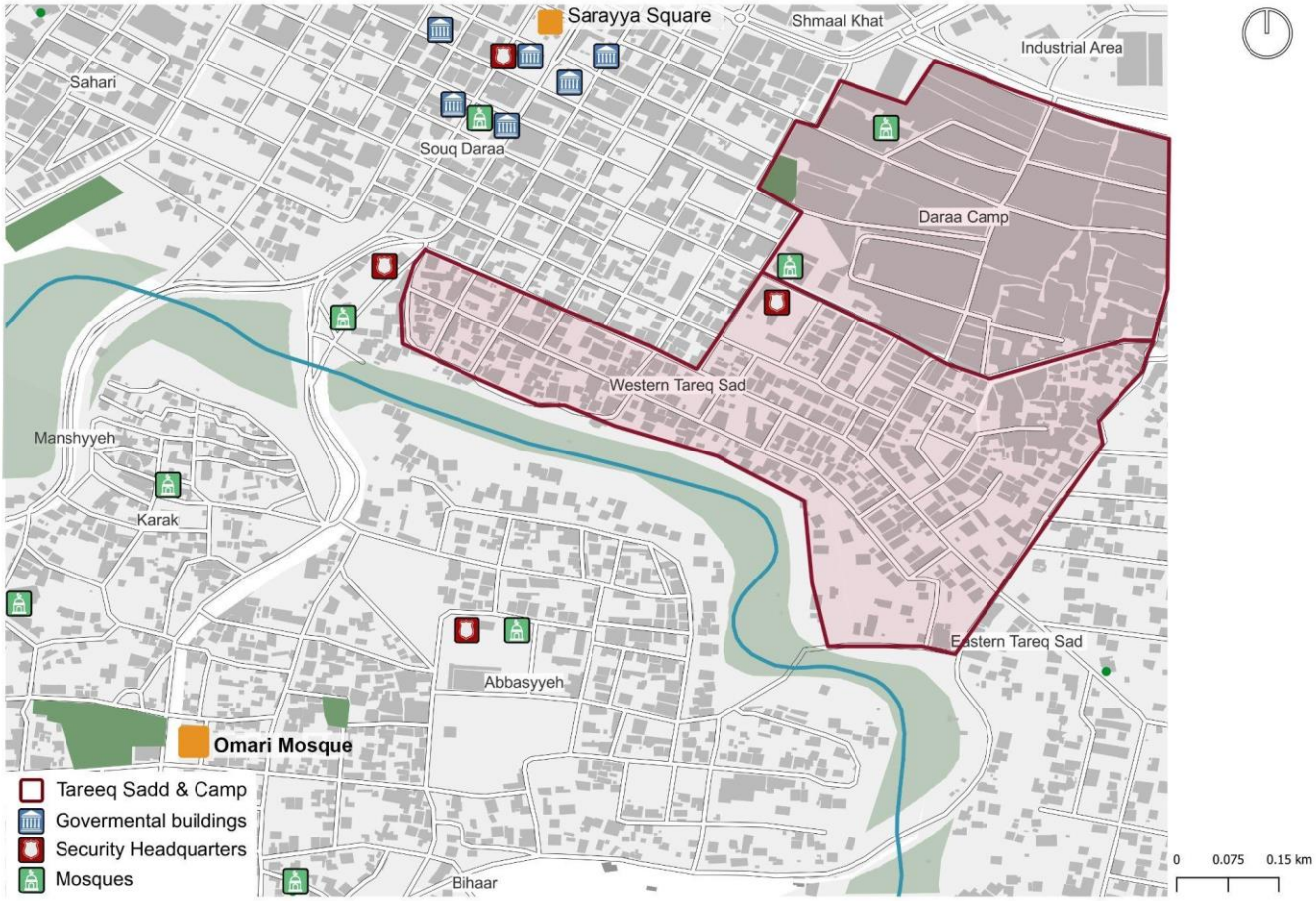
***Map 15. Location of Tareq Sadd and Daraa Camp in Daraa***




Source: Generated by the Author using QGIS

To the north lies Daraa Camp, an informal settlement with strong commercial links to its rural surroundings. It is internally divided into three administrative sections, each hosting different groups of Palestinian refugees and Syrian displaced persons from the Golan Heights who arrived between 1950 and 1967 (Jalabi, 2024). These groups are not only spatially distributed within the camp's southern, northern, and central sections but are also governed by different administrative bodies, including UNRWA, the Quneitra Governorate Council, and a network of local Palestinian committees (Jalabi, 2024).

***Map 16. Map of Tareq Sadd***




Source: Author's own illustration based on Google Maps, 2024; GLMB, 2023; OpenStreetMap, 2024

The urban and social fabric of Tareq Sadd differs from that of its immediate surroundings. While its urban layout is more regulated than that of Daraa camp, a completely haphazard area, Tareq Sadd remains less organised than the adjacent Mahatta area, which features grid-patterned streets and larger multi-storey buildings. Tareq Sadd mainly consists of two to three-storey structures, with urban density decreasing as one moves eastward towards the countryside. The Zaidi Valley acts as a natural boundary between Tareq Sadd and Daraa Balad.

However, some parts of Daraa Mahatta, Tareq Sadd and Daraa Camp are more aligned with Daraa Balad in terms of social composition and urban typology. Similar to Daraa Balad, state presence in Tareq Sadd is minimal. However, there is a significant concentration of state buildings in the adjacent Souq Daraa, including the Air Force Intelligence and State Security branches, situated in the industrial area north of the camp.

The social composition of Tareq Sadd is more homogeneous than that of the camp, mainly consisting of Syrian families originally from Daraa city or nearby rural areas. Despite sharing a similar socio-economic background, social interaction between Palestinians and Syrians in Tareq Sadd and the camp was limited before the uprising (Interviewee#23). However, economic ties were strong, primarily through the Hal Market in the camp, which attracted shoppers from across the city.

***Image 11. Satellite Image of Tareq Sadd and Daraa Camp***


Source: Google Earth (2012)

According to SMI's Protest Dataset, at least 330 protests were recorded in Tareq Sadd and 77 in Daraa Camp between March 2011 and December 2013. While mobilisation in both

neighbourhoods was almost absent during the first phase, it grew substantially in the subsequent periods, with nearly 2.3% and 14.6% of the citywide protests occurring in Daraa Camp and Tareq Sadd, respectively, during the second phase. In the third phase, these figures changed to 4% and 9.7%.

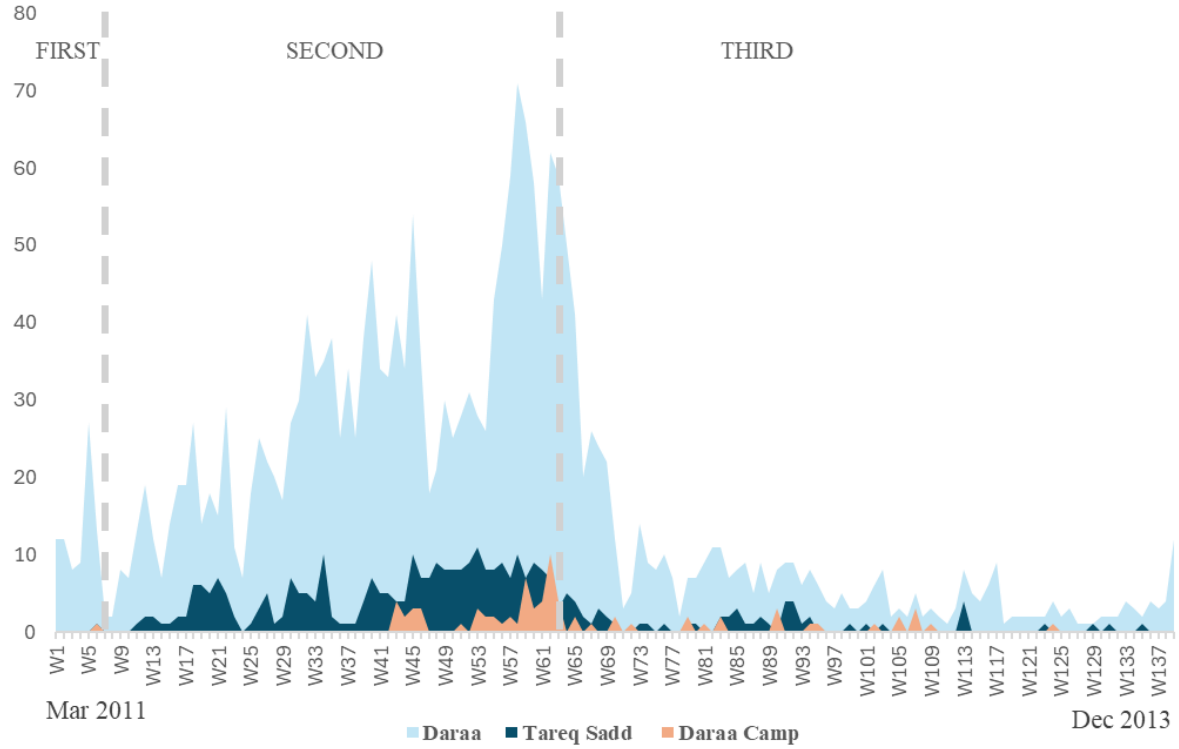
This mobilisation trajectory is reflected in the QCA induction analysis results, where Tareq Sadd did not appear in any causal path for the outcome (FIRST), but appears in one pathway for (SECOND) and in two for (THIRD). While Daraa Camp does not appear in any QCA outcome paths, it is included in this analysis due to its spatial and strategic adjacency to Tareq Sadd, offering comparative insights into the mobilisation and demobilisation dynamics of the two neighbourhoods during the uprising. For Tareq Sadd, the QCA identifies five key factors consistently associated with all configurational pathways: dense and homogeneous social structures (SOCALST), high urban footprint density (FOOTPRINT), distance from governmental building (GOV), distance from security headquarters (SECURITY), and proximity to main square (~SQUARE). The paths to mobilisation are as follows:

(OUTCOME = SECOND) SOCALST* FOOTPRINT * POPULATION * GOV * SECURITY * SQUARE

(OUTCOME = THIRD) SOCALST * FOOTPRINT * GOV

Prior to the military raid on 25 April 2011, neither Tareq Sadd nor Daraa Camp had witnessed a sustained protest presence. Most early demonstrations were concentrated mainly around the Omari Mosque in Daraa Balad and the Saraya Square in the adjacent Souq Daraa. However, due to its geographic location at the eastern edge of the city and its direct road connections to rural towns such as Elnayma, Tareq Sadd frequently served as a transit corridor for protests originating in rural areas and moving towards the city centre. In the weeks following the military raid, mobilisation gradually shifted towards Tareq Sadd, influenced by the regime's security strategy of closing major mosques and isolating neighbourhoods through a network of checkpoints at key junctions. This strategy diminished mobilisation around major squares and curtailed inter-neighbourhood protests.

*Figure 23. Protests in Tareq Sadd, Camp and Daraa City (2011 - 2013)*



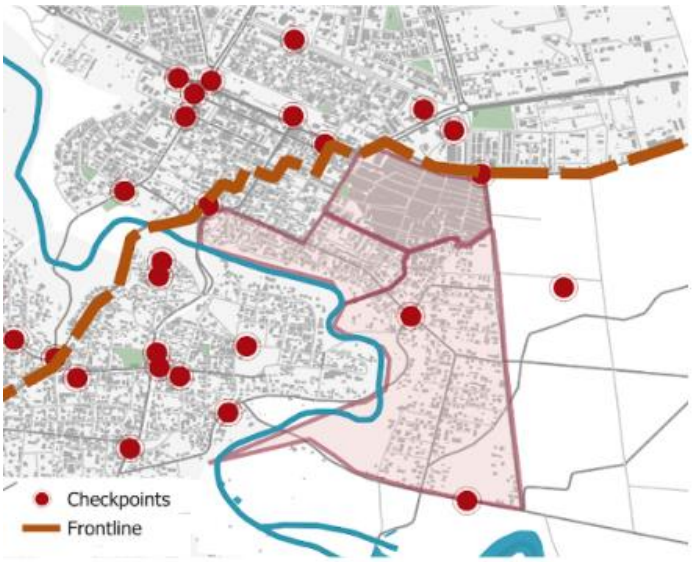

Source: Author's own illustration based on data from SMI (2024)

Despite its relatively marginal location at the eastern edge of the city, Tareq Sadd and Daraa Camp gained a significant geographical advantage, serving as a connection point between Daraa Balad and Daraa Mahatta, especially after these two districts became physically disconnected. Due to the high urban and population density and limited state presence in the camp, the regime forces avoided installing any checkpoints or deploying permanent patrols. Rather, checkpoints were installed around the neighbourhood to isolate it from Souq Daraa, Daraa Balad, and the southeastern quarters of the city.

As shown in Figure 23, mobilisation in Tareq Sadd clearly increased by June 2011, followed by a more gradual rise in Daraa Camp towards the end of 2011. Protests mainly occurred on Fridays, but from August 2011 onward, they became nearly daily, especially at night. As state repression limited protest activity elsewhere in Daraa Mahatta, Tareq Sadd emerged as a preferred hub for activists. Its urban density, cohesive social networks, and geographical position, which links Daraa Balad to the eastern countryside, made it a sanctuary for activists, offering them a safer hub for clandestine operations (Interviewee#20).

*"When revolutionary activities declined in Daraa Mahatta, only two major blocs remained active in the city: the Balad bloc and the Tareq Sadd/camp bloc. The latter absorbed activists from other Mahatta neighbourhoods who had relocated there. I personally moved first to Abbasiyah in Daraa Balad before relocating again to Tareq Sadd because I felt I could work harmoniously with the activists there" (Interviewee#25).*

***Map 17. Distribution of Checkpoints around Tareq Sadd and Daraa Camp between 2011 and 2013***




Source: Author's adaptation, based on interviews

In contrast, despite sharing a similar geographical location and dense urban environment, Daraa Camp experienced comparatively lower levels of protest activity between mid-2011 and early 2012.[23] This divergence can be attributed to its complex internal social composition, which includes various groups of Palestinian and Syrian displaced people as well as pro-regime Palestinian figures and militant groups, a mix that created an internal deterrent to collective mobilisation (Interviewee#24). While the regime lacked the logistical capacity to suppress protests within the camp directly, it exploited these internal networks to do so. Nonetheless, the camp maintained its strategic importance as a passage for activists moving from Daraa Mahatta towards Daraa Balad and Tareq Sadd, and this role steadily grew in significance as FSA operations consolidated.

Lacking a central square and a major mosque, Tareq Sadd and Daraa Camp hosted mainly march-based protests. Notably, until late 2011, protests in Daraa were filmed from behind to conceal participants' identities, later than in other cities or neighbourhoods in Daraa. This

[23] "Night demonstration in the displaced persons camp in Daraa city," *SMI*, 23 January 2012, Retrieved 8 March 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/60c2223a03092d000112a23e

stemmed from fears of regime security raids and the risk of arrest. However, as the FSA strengthened its control, security conditions improved, enabling greater mobilisation.

***Image 12. Protests in Tareq Sadd***

11 June 2011

11 November 2011

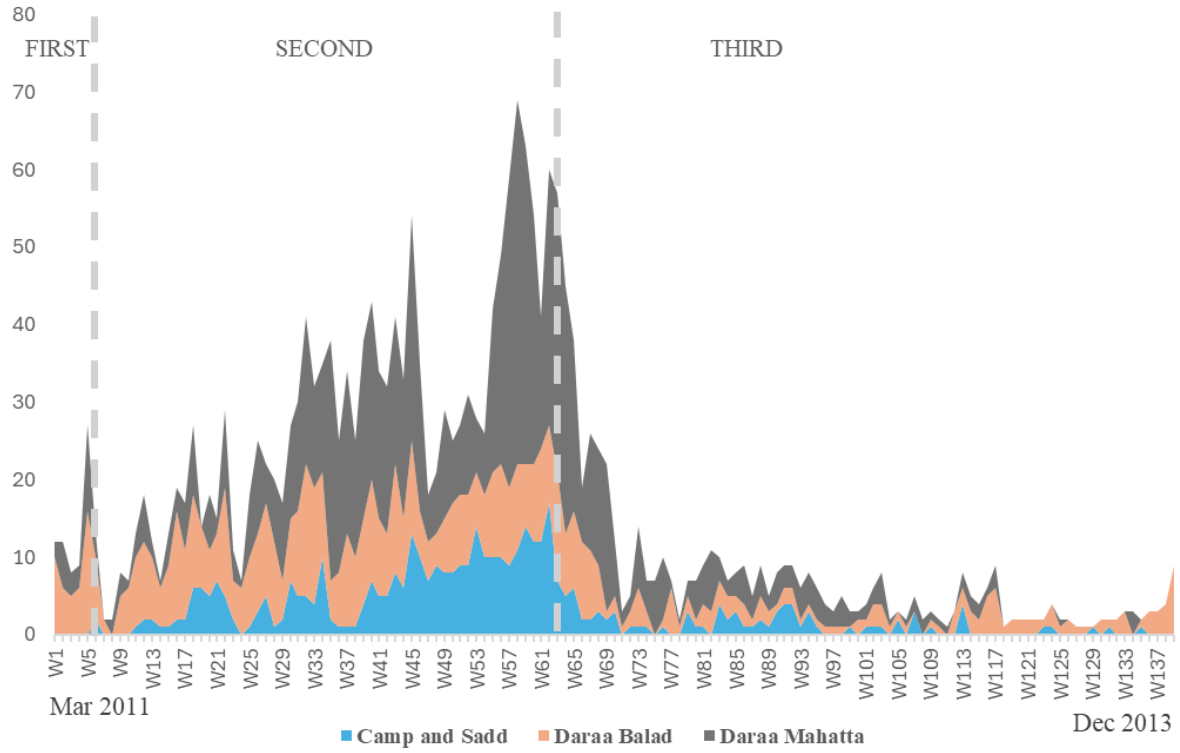
Source: SMI (2024)

With few, dispersed checkpoints, regime forces became exposed targets for FSA cells, thereby preventing them from conducting security raids or installing new checkpoints near or within residential quarters (Interviewee #23). Pro-regime figures and militant groups became another target for FSA operations, which eventually drove them out of these neighbourhoods, leading to a homogenisation of the local socio-political structure. By late 2011, Tareq Sadd and Daraa Camp were among the first areas where the FSA established actual territorial control. Several factions, including the Jolan Sons Battalion, Tahir Sayasneh Battalion, and Saddiq Battalion, were officially formed by early 2012. During this period, Tareq Sadd emerged as a significant hub for demonstrations, which expanded to include the camp area as well by early 2012. Apart from four major military raids,[24] Regime forces were unable to penetrate this area; instead, they consolidated their positions around it, particularly in the Industrial Area and Souq Daraa (Interviewee#20). Meanwhile, FSA groups strengthened their control, especially at night, when protests became the main form of mobilisation (Interviewee#24).

> *"Until mid-2012, protests were either quick and spontaneous, originating from local mosques, or night protests taking place within neighbourhoods' inner streets. Areas with the highest number of FSA groups formed also became the most mobilised areas" (Interviewee#20).*

[24] "Storming of Tareq Sadd in Daraa Governorate by regime forces," *SMI*, 4 November 2012, Retrieved 10 March 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/65abf5707d392f46fbe572de

***Figure 24. Protests in the three main blocks in Daraa city between 2011 and 2013***




Source: Author's own illustration based on data from SMI (2024)

By the end of 2012, the connection between Tareq Sadd and the rest of Daraa Mahatta had ended entirely, with only a single regime-controlled military checkpoint permitting passage, especially as large-scale military operations intensified (Interviewee#20). It was during the same period that larger military groups, such as the Houran Martyr Brigade, emerged within the camp, offering protesters protection from regime forces. The FSA established its first stable territorial control in the camp, where the lack of a significant state presence, combined with high urban density and irregular street patterns, allowed them to secure the entire neighbourhood by seizing the police station in July 2012.[25] In contrast, gaining control over Tareq Sadd required capturing all major checkpoints and establishing a broad military frontline adjacent to Souq Daraa. This process culminated in January 2013 with the launch of the "High Spears Battle". The urban layout of western Tareq Sadd, characterised by grid-like streets and large, separated buildings, created a unique type of military frontier, transforming the area into an ongoing combat zone (Interviewee#25). This, in turn, influenced internal mobilisation dynamics within the neighbourhood.

[25] "Controlling the camp police station by Taher Al-Sayasneh Battalion," *SMI*, 27 July 2012, Retrieved 10 March 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/5ebed952ce8f7600010285bb

***Image 13. Night protest in Tareq Sadd (Left) and Protest in Daraa Camp (Right) protected by the FSA***

20 March 2012 8 June 2012

Source: SMI (2024)

As in other cities, full territorial control by the FSA over specific neighbourhoods did not necessarily correlate with increased mobilisation throughout the uprising. In contrast, deteriorating security conditions, particularly through sustained bombardment and frontline military engagements, made protesting increasingly risky, especially during periods of escalation. Consequently, funeral processions became a more common form of protest,[26] honouring those who were killed by regime shelling or FSA fighters killed in military activities. As shown in Figure 24, neighbourhoods along the most active military frontlines, such as Tareq Sadd and Daraa Camp, experienced the greatest impact on protest frequency during the third period due to intensified military activities. From January 2013 onwards, protests became less frequent and more sporadic, with funeral marches replacing traditional mass demonstrations as the main mode of expression and mobilisation.[27]

In conclusion, the Tareq Sadd case represents a mechanism distinct from other cases, namely, the relational displacement. Whereas the four previous cases demonstrated how neighbourhoods mobilised through mechanisms rooted in their own configurational features, Tareq Sadd benefited from the closure of alternative protest hubs in the city, including the Omari Mosque and the Mahatta commercial district, due to the regime's repressive strategy.

[26] "Funeral of the victims of the camp massacre in Daraa Balad," *SMI*, 26 June 2012, Retrieved 12 March 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/65a5a16658117c2edea387a5

[27] See for example: "Funeral of Mohammed Ahmed Hamdan in the displaced persons camp," *SMI*, 20 December 2012, Retrieved 12 March 2025 from https://syrianmemory.org/archive/multimedia/5ed14907531c6100012ccf86

The disconnection between Daraa Balad and Daraa Mahatta further emphasised the significance of Tareq Sadd as a link between both districts, where repertoires of contention could still be practised. Furthermore, activist networks from Daraa Mahatta were physically reassembled again within Tareq Sadd under displacement pressure. Such an effect played a role in activating the configurational pathway during the second phase, which combined social cohesion, urban density, the absence of state footprint, and proximity to the central square.

The inclusion of Daraa Camp primarily serves to provide a controlled contrast, showing that similar configurations, such as urban density, location, and exposure to repressive infrastructure, were not sufficient to position both neighbourhoods as equally favourable for absorbing displaced activists during the second phase. The primary distinction is social composition: the camp is internally divided among different social groups, in contrast to the relatively homogeneous Tareq Sadd. This social heterogeneity may have prevented the social-cohesion condition from operating, giving the regime an advantage during the first phase by enabling it to co-opt internal political networks and disrupt or repress mobilisation. When the FSA gained control of the camp in 2012, the socio-political structures were homogenised, forcibly activating the social cohesion condition. The finding supports the conclusion that social cohesion operates as a necessary rather than a sufficient condition, and that its absence cannot be compensated for by spatial conditions alone.

Similar to Joubeleh, Tareq Sadd was transformed into an active combat zone, with its grid-like streets and bulk buildings being militarily utilised by both regime forces and the FSA to consolidate military control. The immediate impact on mobilisation was not demobilisation but a repertoire contraction; protests did not cease but shifted to forms compatible with active military actions. Funeral processions gained particular significance as a repertoire adaptation strategy in Tareq Sadd, honouring both civilians and fighters killed by regime forces as an alternative to mass demonstration, which became structurally unfeasible under intensifying military conditions.

# CONCLUSION

Why did mobilisation outcomes vary within the same city under comparable socio-spatial conditions? Divergent trajectories of contention emerged across neighbourhoods ostensibly exposed to the same security apparatus and national political opening. Moreover, neighbourhoods that initiated mobilisation demonstrated divergent capacities to sustain it over time. Some maintained mobilisation even through the militarised phase, while others demobilised rapidly as violence escalated. These puzzles have guided the research, which examined the spatial dynamics of mobilisation and demobilisation during the 2011-2013 uprising and the early stages of the Syrian conflict across the neighbourhoods of three cities: Daraa, Deir-ez-Zor, and Hama. The thesis argues that the macro-level approaches commonly adopted to analyse the Arab Spring, which focus on regime type, political opportunities, and sectarian cleavages, fall short of explaining micro-level variation within cities. Nor can city-level analysis, which treats cities such as Daraa or Hama as homogenous analytical units, capture this variation. The neighbourhood, therefore, emerges as the scale at which intra-city dynamics can be analytically investigated. However, neighbourhoods are not just smaller containers of dynamics observed at the city level, but distinct infrastructures that either facilitate or constrain mobilisation.

The research argues that neighbourhood structures do more than shape where mobilisation takes place; they determine whether the mechanisms of mobilisation, including brokerage, diffusion, and boundary activation, can operate and in which phases of the uprising, they do so. More precisely, intra-city variation in mobilisation outcomes is patterned by configurations of socio-spatial conditions that combine differently across the different phases of the event. This inquiry is rooted in the Event-Site Nexus (Allegra et al., 2013), which examines how the urban, social, and political structures of a site intersect with the phases of the event (mobilisation, mobilisation consolidation, and demobilisation). This approach identified the combinations of conditions that rendered the (non-)occurrence of different outcomes possible. The theoretical framework links Tilly's model of mobilisation with Agnew's theory of place and politics to spatially explain how the mechanisms of mobilisation operate at the neighbourhood scale. Empirically, the framework was operationalised using original protest event data and neighbourhood-level socio-spatial data within a fuzzy-set QCA design. The causal pathways identified through the analysis were then explained and validated through 27 in-depth interviews.

## Studying social movements in mid-sized Syrian cities

Scrutinising how patterns and outcomes of collective action varied across different parts of the cities is the main empirical puzzle which steered this research, requiring attention to a scale often neglected in the study of social movements in Syria and comparable contexts. During the Syrian Revolution, protest activities evolved from large, centralised gatherings in central squares during the initial months to more neighbourhood-based mobilisation thereafter. Even major square protests were typically the product of several neighbourhood-originated protests that eventually converged. This reflected not only a tactical adaptation to counter-mobilisation but also the centrality of neighbourhoods as a spatial and social basis for mobilisation in the absence of citywide or nationwide political organisation (Pearlman, 2021; Bayat, 2010). Neighbourhoods, however, vary in location, density, social structures, economic activities, and state presence, and these variations proved crucial in shaping mobilisation capacity. To account for them, the research sought to identify an analytical site where neighbourhood-level dynamics would be visible and traceable across the three phases: mobilisation, consolidation, and demobilisation.

The focus on mid-sized cities, rather than capitals or mega-cities that dominate the comparative literature, was a deliberate analytical choice. It required shifting the analytical lens from iconic square occupations to the everyday physical settings of smaller urban life. In Syria, in particular, regime forces successfully prevented mass gatherings in the large cities, mainly Damascus and Aleppo, producing different patterns of mobilisation that were episodic, fragmented, and concentrated in peripheries. Smaller cities such as Hama, Deir-ez-Zor, and Daraa share certain characteristics with mega-cities, including legible neighbourhood boundaries and marked socio-spatial segmentations. However, the absence of cosmopolitan activist infrastructure gave greater weight to local socio-spatial conditions in determining mobilisation at the neighbourhood scale, the scale at which the Syrian uprising actually unfolded and was sustained.

As argued before, mobilisation outcomes diverged across different socio-spatial settings, placing urban typologies at the centre of the analytical framework. In Chapter 4, six different urban typologies were identified across the three cities: the old city, old city extensions, regulated neighbourhoods, informal areas, housing projects, and absorbed villages. The historical evolution of these typologies reflected the accumulation of successive urban, social, and economic layers: the Islamic, modern/colonial, and (neo)liberal periods. Rapid urban

growth, politically driven urban policies, and waves of rural migration have prevented these layers from integrating (Yaacobi & Shechter, 2005), producing a fragmented urban landscape segmented along socio-economic and ethno-sectarian lines (Clerc & Hurault, 2010; Goulden, 2011). These typologies, however, were insufficiently representative to serve as analytical units in their own right, given their internal heterogeneity in urban density, social structures, and state footprint. Individual neighbourhoods, therefore, served as the primary units of analysis, while the typologies remained a central interpretive lens when the analysis returned to the qualitative case studies.

The temporal structure of the study was organised around a three-phase periodisation. First, the initial mobilisation phase, which was characterised by low to moderate neighbourhood turnout and uncoordinated, mosque-centred demonstrations attempting to converge on central squares. It lasted between 7 and 18 weeks across the three cities, producing 1,290 recorded protests. Second, the mobilisation consolidation phase, which saw protests take a more systematic and organised form, with fixed protest squares emerging to host daily or weekly demonstrations. It lasted between 35 and 56 weeks, with 6,474 recorded protests and near-full neighbourhood turnout. Third, the demobilisation period, marked by intensified regime repression, militarisation, and the gradual contraction of protest geography, until the total mobilisation had sharply declined by the end of 2013. This phase spanned 60 to 84 weeks and recorded fewer protests than the previous phase (3,003 protests). The transition from one phase to the next was not automatic; it varied across cities depending on the interactions between contentious actors and their socio-spatial environment.

To analyse the intersection between events and their sites, the research adopted the Event-Site Nexus as its primary analytical framework (Allegra et al., 2013). The nexus explains how a site's characteristics enable or constrain both the organisational capacity of challengers and the coercive capacity of the state. Observing this interaction made it possible to identify the mechanisms governing mobilisation and to quantify them into measurable variables. The nexus was operationalised through the combination of mobilisation and place theories, which together frame mobilisation as co-produced by the organisational capacity of challengers and the repressive capacity of the state, both of which are facilitated or constrained by the structural characteristics of place. This dynamic framework made it possible to explain why neighbourhoods with ostensibly similar socio-spatial characteristics often followed divergent mobilisation trajectories, thereby challenging oversimplified associations between the uprising and urban informality, or between demobilisation and upper-class neighbourhoods. It

demonstrates instead that mobilisation and demobilisation were determined not by a single urban or social typology (e.g., socio-economic status or ethno-sectarian composition), but by multiple conditions whose configurations varied over time.

## Lessons learned from Syrian neighbourhoods

The empirical analysis identified eight socio-spatial conditions across the site's urban, social, and political components. Across the full course of the uprising, four causal pathways to mobilisation emerged, each combining urban density with proximity to protest squares and/or dense mosque networks. Alternative pathways included dense neighbourhoods located a distance from government or security buildings, and dense neighbourhoods with mosque networks situated near central squares. The model of non-occurrence, in turn, identified three hindering pathways: proximity to government and security buildings, distance from to central squares, or low urban density and weak social ties. One of the main outcomes of the analysis was the changing effect of these configurations across the phases of the event. During the initial phase, combinations of social density and homogeneity, urban density, and proximity to mosques and central squares proved sufficient to trigger mobilisation. This reflected the tactical objective of demonstrations during this period, namely, to reach the central squares. Dense neighbourhoods adjacent to central squares offered favourable conditions, including security (urban density), solidarity (social cohesion), and places for assembly (mosques).

During the consolidation phase, neighbourhoods with strong social solidarity and a fortified urban morphology remained central, while the relative influence of central squares relative to protests declined as protests themselves dispersed. Along another pathway, mainly in Hama, mobilisation was consolidated in neighbourhoods with dense mosque networks located far from government areas. During demobilisation, social homogeneity, together with urban and street density, was sufficient for mobilised groups to persist despite escalating repression, reinforced either by distance from security and government buildings or by proximity to mosque networks or central squares. Robustness tests confirmed that the resulting configurations are neither case-driven nor over-determined. Overall, the multiplicity of socio-spatial causal configurations underscores the value of a dynamic, context-sensitive meso-level approach for tracing the transition from structural conditions to agentic action. It conceptualises the place of protest as a mediating layer between macro-level conditions and micro-level collective action.

The return to qualitative case studies in the previous chapter allowed the causal structures identified through pathways to be unpacked, explaining how these associated mechanisms operated in practice. The empirical configurations should not be read as a static map of mobilised and non-mobilised neighbourhoods; rather, they show how mobilisation is structured spatially and offer transferable claims about revolutionary contention under authoritarian rule. The remainder of the section discusses four propositions to translate the configurational findings into evidence and implications useful in comparable contexts.

Local unevenness of political opportunity

Mainstream studies of contentious politics engage with the opportunity-structure framework at the national, or at most the city, scale (Tarrow, 2011; Beissinger, 2022). Factors such as regime type, elite alliances, and repressive capacity are typically considered to determine the feasibility of contention. The findings of this research suggest that capturing how political opportunity varies at smaller scales requires a different set of factors. A neighbourhood that hosts a major intelligence security branch, for instance, faces a lower opportunity structure than one located on the opposite side of the city, even where the two share a comparable social composition. Likewise, a neighbourhood with a dense, irregular street network offers protestors multiple escape routes and hidden spaces to operate in, translating into a tactical advantage over contrasting urban morphologies. These factors were not supplements to the national opening; they constituted structural opportunities for the residents of these neighbourhoods.

However, the presence of such conditions was not, on its own, sufficient to ensure mobilisation. Other conditions, including weak social ties and low urban density, could dominate hindering pathways and suppress mobilisation in neighbourhoods that otherwise met the socio-spatial criteria associated with protest elsewhere in the city. Such conditions were not mere correlates of non-mobilisation; they actively shaped activists' calculations of feasibility. As the case studies demonstrated, the geography of risk and feasibility, encompassing determining which street to march through and how to circulate the announcement of a protest, strongly conditioned how activists engaged with the uprising at the local level. Therefore, the uneven distribution of risk and feasibility within the same city becomes a constitutive dimension of the opportunity structure, rather than a refinement of it. When applying this model in other contexts, the question shifts from whether a regime offers a political opening to where within the city such an opening is viable.

Socio-spatial conditions as situated mechanisms

The second main theoretical contribution of this research is to redefine socio-spatial conditions beyond the static features of the urban environment. As the dynamics of mobilisation shifted across the different phases of the uprising, it was not the social or building environment itself that changed, but what those environments did. The same conditions often performed different causal work across phases because they engaged with different processes and interactions generated by the unfolding of the event. However, this claim should not be taken for granted: the conditions themselves were sometimes reshaped by the physical destruction of the built environment, the mass displacement of residents, and the relocation of government and security buildings in line with patterns of military control.

The clearest example of this claim is the mosque. Mosques repeatedly appear across most causal pathways to mobilisation, but the qualitative analysis shows that they play different roles across phases. Mosques are often interpreted through the lens of social conservatism, suggesting that early mobilisers gathered around mosques because of the centrality of religion to their collective action. However, an alternative explanation, grounded in spatial dynamics, treats mosques not only as religious infrastructure but also as spontaneous gathering nodes that compensated for the scarcity of accessible public spaces and the absence of organised social actors capable of selecting protest venues strategically and communicating them to affiliates. Friday prayers offered a routinised occasion that allowed people to gather without prior coordination. In Hama and Deir-ez-Zor, protestors frequently assembled at mosques in anticipation of mobilisation; when no protest materialised, they moved to nearby mosques to merge with other groups. For mosques to function as spontaneous infrastructural assemblages, density alone was insufficient; they also needed to be embedded within specific spatial configurations: adjacency to a strategic square or major traffic node, providing visibility during early phases, and location within a dense social and urban fabric, providing solidarity and protection in the event of repression.

As repression intensified and came to be deliberately directed against mosques, their function shifted from assembly node to component of a fortified morphology. Embeddedness in a dense cluster of interconnected mosques in areas with a lighter state presence enabled mobilisation to be sustained in Hama, particularly where this cluster was set within a dense street network that offered escape routes. The role of mosques also varied across urban typologies, including the old city, informal areas, and regulated, less-dense areas. This permits both an empirical

analysis of mosques' role and a more general theorisation of when density matters and what it must be combined with. As mobilisation became more organised and localised, dedicated protest squares emerged in mobilised neighbourhoods, returning mosques to more conventional religious functions, and frequently, to the role of departure points for funerals. While the condition appears in the same QCA pathway, the mechanisms associated with mosques shifted from brokerage and co-presence to tactical evasion.

The urban density offers a further example of refunctioning across phases. During the initial phase, urban density facilitated the diffusion of protests and enabled rapid co-presence. During the consolidation phase, its function shifted toward a fortified morphology that protected activists from security forces and, in later stages, sheltered FSA cells, which in turn protected protest squares. Yet, as several neighbourhoods suggested, density is not inherently an enabler of mobilisation; it can also be embedded in state linkages and operate as a demobilising force or as a vehicle of in-group policing that pre-empts mobilisation (Mazur, 2021). Density may therefore have either enabling or constraining effects. Proximity to central squares was among the most volatile conditions, with its causal weight shifting rapidly over time. It went from a decisive enabler of mobilisation in the initial phase, when demonstrators sought to occupy central squares, to an operationally neutral factor in later phases, once the regime had concentrated overwhelming forces at major nodes. The role of social cohesion likewise shifted from a facilitator of information exchange and trust-based recruitment to a basis of solidarity and resistance to regime infiltration in later phases.

The effect of government buildings and security headquarters on mobilisation requires comparable scrutiny. Such buildings operated as nodes of repression: militarised and fortified, equipped with checkpoints and snipers, and were thereby transformed into central instruments of demobilisation. An equally important role was also played by government buildings as mechanisms of social, economic, and political governance, embedding demobilisation factors in everyday life. Their positioning shaped social structures, access to the state, and local economic dependence on the state through public employment and service provision, thereby conditioning (de)mobilisation capacities.

Two analytical conclusions follow from this discussion. First, it underscores a central argument of the QCA literature derived from critical realism (Rutten, 2022): configurational results are not themselves mechanisms but empirical manifestations of mechanisms that can be specified only through in-depth analysis of individual cases. The same configuration may index different

causal processes depending on the phase of the event in which it appears. Second, the findings provide the spatial preconditions for mechanisms developed in the mainstream literature on contentious politics (McAdam et al., 2001), the nodes at which individuals encounter one another for diffusion to operate, and the physical spaces in which assemblies are accommodated for co-presence to occur. This research demonstrates that these preconditions are unevenly distributed at the micro-level across the city, resulting in divergent outcomes in the operationalisation of mechanisms over time and space. Therefore, the question shifts from the absolute correlation of socio-spatial variables with mobilisation to how those variables interact, for whom, and at which phase of the event.

Neighbourhoods as a distinct infrastructure of mobilisation

One of the main theoretical contributions of this research is to move the discussion of the spatiality of social movements beyond the city scale that dominates the comparative study of revolutionary cities (Beissinger, 2022; Said, 2023). That literature treats urban space as a medium in which collective action occurs, but pays little attention to whether different parts of the city constitute different trajectories. The principal question of this research concerned intra-city divergent outcomes, holding city-level variables, such as regime type, security apparatus, and location, constant. Accordingly, the neighbourhood emerges as a distinct configuration in its own right, rather than as a smaller sample of the city, with its own distinct urban morphology, social demography, and relation to the state. This underscores the claim that the neighbourhood is the actual scale at which the infrastructures of mobilisation exist. These infrastructures include the gathering nodes, the marching and escaping routes, and the state's physical and symbolic presence. At this level of analysis, neighbourhoods within the same city belong to substantially different infrastructures of contention. This is not to claim that the national or city-level analyses are incorrect; rather, they are insufficient to capture micro-variation, even though macro-level opportunity structures remain a necessary condition for any revolutionary contention.

Mobilisation under repressive constraints as a distinct analytical object

Engagement with repressive contexts in the study of contentious politics typically follows one of two analytical frames: repression as a parameter of the political opportunity structure (McAdam et al., 2001; Tarrow, 2011), or repression as a co-outcome of contention, in which state violence and mobilisation shape one another through escalation and adaptation (Chenoweth & Ulfelder, 2017; Berman et al., 2024). While this research engages with both

frames, it builds on the first frame to argue that repression is not a constant parameter across the city, but a spatially differentiated structural condition. This was captured through proximity to security and government buildings, escalation patterns across different phases, and the legacy of violence for each city. However, repression was not treated as a standalone outcome variable: protest events remained the main operational anchor, while repressive events supplied the context against which these protest events were interpreted.

Mobilisation under repressive constraint is not simply a weaker version of the study of mobilisation in democratic settings, where frequency and visibility of protests are central. It is a question of how revolutionary contention is produced and sustained under severe repression and spatially uneven state violence. Therefore, the causal pathways identified in Chapter 5 should be read as pathways to mobilisation under constraint, rather than pathways to mobilisation in general. For instance, a dense network of mosques might still function as a gathering node in other contexts, but not as a substitute for formal associational infrastructure. Equally, conditions that operated as mobilisation suppressors, notably proximity to government and security buildings, did not constitute measures of repression in themselves, but rather of their spatial anchoring. Just as urban density does not guarantee mobilisation outcomes, proximity to repression infrastructure is not necessarily associated with repression outcomes. Finally, the regime's violent interventions, such as security campaigns, the installation of checkpoints, and, ultimately, the bombardment of residential areas, shaped the phased dynamics of the uprising. These dynamics do not represent a natural life cycle of a revolutionary episode but a trajectory of mobilisation that was constrained and diminished by regime intervention.

The principal contribution of this research is as much methodological as theoretical. It treats repression neither as an undefined constraining condition nor a symmetrical outcome equal to mobilisation, but as a spatially differentiated structural condition that shapes the landscape across which mobilisation operates. Methodologically, this requires that repressive infrastructures be conceptualised at the sub-city level, and that phase transitions be conceptualised as the product of regime intervention rather than of generic escalation.

## Scope conditions

The study contributes to debates on the spatiality of social movements by examining closely a complex case of a leaderless uprising embedded in local settings. It advances an analytical

framework for examining how protests are facilitated or constrained by contextual factors operating under repressive regimes, weak organisational structures, and heterogeneous urban environments. Rather than only incorporating spatial thinking into the analysis of contentious politics, the framework developed here operationalises space as a causal dimension shaping mobilisation outcome (Sewell, 2001). Theoretically, it contributes to debates on social movements in the Global South by demonstrating how patterns of mobilisation and demobilisation vary across time and socio-spatial configurations. It underscores the importance of geography not only as a container of events, but as a primary analytical lens through which contention itself is produced and transformed. This perspective enables a rethinking of factors commonly associated with mobilisation across time and space, and of how their roles shift when combined with other conditions.

The transferability of the findings follows the logic of limited historical generalisation (Rihoux & Lobe, 2009): they are neither law-like nor merely descriptive of the Syrian case, but transferable to other cases that share key features with those of this study. This is consistent with the configuration method, which identifies sufficient pathways rather than universal laws and treats causality as a generative mechanism shaped by contextual conditions (Rutten, 2022). That said, some findings remain specific to mid-sized Syrian cities and to the Assad regime; others are likely to recur in comparable repressive urban settings; and a third set can contribute to the overall study of social movements and urban revolutions. Distinguishing between the different tiers of findings allows the study to make claims about generalisation and contingency regarding case-specificity and modelling choices.

Several elements remain specific to the security, political and social infrastructure of the Assad regime and have limited transferability. The most notable example is the security geography that produced the deep embeddedness of repressive infrastructures across Syrian cities, characterised by high levels of visibility and surveillance. This type of authoritarian control architecture had a direct impact on activists' calculus of mobilisation, distinguishing it from other authoritarian regimes that rely on digital surveillance, or on a combination of decentralised informant networks and centralised security nodes. At the organisational level, the Syrian uprising's embedding in local social structures partially compensated for the dismantling of formal associational infrastructure over more than four decades. Accordingly, the theoretical and analytical framework was adapted to take account of the tribal configurations of Daraa and Deir-ez-Zor, the confessional memory and family-based structure of Hama's old quarters, and the tribal geographies that connect Deir-ez-Zor with its

countryside. These configurations may not be directly interchangeable with other sectarian, kinship, or ethnic structures elsewhere, but they can be adapted both theoretically and operationally.

Cases that share some of this research's enabling conditions, such as Iran, Belarus, Sudan, Algeria, and others, could benefit directly from the framework developed here to generate testable propositions. The enabling conditions in question include authoritarian rule, the fragmentation of associational structures, uneven repressive capacity across urban areas, and the inability to occupy central squares for sustained periods. In such cases, the specific configurational structure, including the combination of conditions identified in the Syrian QCA, would need to be re-theorised and redesigned, while benefiting from the configurational logic and from the neighbourhood scale of analysis.

Finally, a further set of findings can contribute directly to the study of social movements and urban revolutions across contexts. First, political opportunity is spatially uneven at the sub-city level, thereby refining the analytical lens of city-level opportunity-structure scholarship. Second, the spatial preconditions of mobilising mechanisms are themselves unevenly distributed at the sub-city scale. Third, neighbourhoods are conceptualised as distinct infrastructures of contention, not as smaller units of city-level dynamics. Fourth, the causal effect of mechanisms is not flat but performs a shifting function across phases of the event. Together, these four findings could inform further research on the spatiality of revolutionary mobilisation across contexts characterised by varying regime types and configurational structures.

## Limitations and future research

This section addresses the principal constraints of the research, its methodological limitations, and the avenues for further research that its findings and dataset open up.

Three practical constraints should be discussed and kept in mind when engaging with the findings and methodological choices. First, the scarcity of accurate and comprehensive local-level data. Applying this framework in a context marked by limited literature and unreliable data required substantial preparatory work, notably the construction of original datasets for both the site (neighbourhood-level socio-spatial indicators across mid-sized cities) and the event (protests). A considerable part of the dissertation was devoted to constructing this dataset, which encompasses cities' socio-spatial indicators and the protest events that unfolded during

the first two years of the Syrian Revolution. It is the researcher's intention to make this dataset publicly accessible in the future to support further research on Syrian contention and comparable cases. Second, the absence of precise neighbourhood boundaries presented a significant challenge, given the historical, social, and planning complexities of Syrian cities. The socio-spatial mapping methodology developed in Chapter 4 sought to maximise the internal homogeneity of neighbourhoods by selecting the least contested and most representative boundaries; the analysis also alternated between centroid- and boundary-based spatial measures in order to test sensitivity to these choices. Nonetheless, this limitation should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings and their generalisability. Third, the inability to conduct direct fieldwork in the three cities, due to security concerns, precluded in-person observation of urban typologies and face-to-face engagement with interviewees. However, this limitation was partially offset through extensive visual observation of protest videos, systematic examination of satellite imagery, and in-depth interviews, combined with the researcher's contextual knowledge. Further research conducted under safer conditions following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 will likely recover some of the analytical dimensions inaccessible to remote methods.

The research's findings, dataset, and questions deliberately left several directions open. The most notable is the systematic study of repression as a distinct outcome, with its own spatial and temporal patterns. While mobilisation was analysed under a repressive environment, repression itself was not treated as a dependent variable. It could be disaggregated by type, timing, intensity, and socio-spatial characteristics of the neighbourhood in which it was deployed. On this basis, the mobilisation-repression interaction could be modelled directly, without treating either as the structural condition of the other.

While the study provided insights into how specific combinations of factors facilitated or hindered political mobilisation, it did not quantitatively assess the extent to which each factor predicted mobilisation. Nor did it measure the spatial dependencies of protest, such as diffusion dynamics, clustering effects, or mobilisation spillovers across adjacent neighbourhoods. Comparatively little attention was devoted to systematically analysing the non-occurrence of protest, beyond accounting for the decline in neighbourhoods that had previously been active. These areas represent possible avenues for further analysis. The second direction concerns the spatial dependencies of protest, which configurational analysis does not capture. The datasets generated here could support the application of spatial statistical methods (autocorrelation analysis, spatial regression, point-pattern analysis) to examine the extent to which independent

variables affected protest onset, how mobilisation diffused across adjacent neighbourhoods, and how the spatial arrangement of infrastructure and urban form shaped protest intensity and protestors' spatial behaviour.

A third possible project could focus on neighbourhood social networks, analysing the patterns of recruitment empirically, the framing of mobilisation, and the varying capacities to sustain collective action across different forms, densities, and hierarchies of social groups. This could build on the scholarship on spatial social networks, which treats social structures and information flow as key predictors of mobilisation patterns. The spatial analysis of protest squares themselves is a fourth possible extension. This could investigate how the micro-urban settings of protest sites, such as the layout of protest squares, their connectivity, surrounding built environment, and associated social networks shape spatial protest capacities and behaviour Additionally, just as mobilisation requires scrutiny, further attention should also be directed to the variation in repression: its tactics, intensity, and repertoires across different socio-spatial configurations.

This work has been an attempt to develop a framework adequate to the complexity of a social phenomenon such as the Syrian Revolution, with its temporal and geographical diffusion. This work aims to open new discussions about how social movements are analysed beyond the major cities in the Global North, and about how politics is practised, negotiated and co-opted by people within their local spaces. It has aimed to contribute to the scholarship of urban revolution and to the wider literature on social movements by analysing collective action at the scale at which ordinary people actually encounter their regimes and practice politics: the local street and the neighbourhood.

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## APPENDIX A. List of Interviewees

### Hama

1. **Interviewee#1**, a civilian activist from the Ba'ath neighbourhood, attended protests in Ba'ath and Bab Qibli. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 1 December 2023.
2. **Interviewee#2,** a female civilian activist and a current human rights researcher. She was a member of the Bab Qibli Coordination Committee. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 11 November 2023.
3. **Interviewee#3**, a resident of Qusur and Tareq Halab, participated in protests in Hader and Tareq Haleb. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 17 November 2023.
4. **Interviewee#4**, he fled Hama during the 1980s events, not to return. Before leaving the city, he lived in several neighbourhoods between the Souk and Hader districts. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 26 November 2023.
5. **Interviewee#5,** a high school teacher and a civilian activist from the Wadi Hawarneh neighbourhood. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 8 November 2023.
6. **Interviewee#6**, a retired public servant who lives in rural Hama. For several years, he commuted to work in Hama City daily. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 6 December 2023.
7. **Interviewee#7**, a resident of Mahatta and Bab Qibli, and a civilian activist in both neighbourhoods. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 21 November 2023.
8. **Interviewee#8**, a civilian activist from rural Hama who frequently commuted to Hama. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 15 October 2023
9. **Interviewee#9,** a civilian activist from rural Hama who frequently commuted to Hama**.** The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 17 October 2023.

### Deir-ez-Zor

1. **Interviewee#10**, a female activist from Ourfi neighbourhood who routinely protested in Sheikh Yassin and Joubeleh. She led several education and civil society initiatives. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 1 June 2020.
2. **Interviewee#11,** a civilian activist from Hamidiyeh and a member of the Deir-ez-Zor Coordination Committee. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 15 November 2020
3. **Interviewee#12,** a former member of the Deir-ez-Zor Local Council and a civilian and humanitarian activist. He participated in protests in the Ourfi neighbourhood. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 20 May 2020
4. **Interviewee#13,** a resident of Hawiqa, and a civilian and humanitarian activist. He participated in protests in Sheikh Yassin. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 1 May 2020
5. **Interviewee#14,** a researcher in the history of Deir-ez-Zor, specialised in the tribal and urban history of the city and the broader region. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 16 May 2020
6. **Interviewee#15,** a civilian activist and a resident of the Hawiqa neighbourhood. Two interviews were conducted via WhatsApp call on 29 April 2020 and 6 May 2020
7. **Interviewee#16**, a civilian and media activist from Joubeleh neighbourhood. He participated in protests and documented human rights violations in several neighbourhoods across the city. Two interviews were conducted via WhatsApp call on 30 April 2020 and 8 May 2020.

8. **Interviewee#17,** a civilian and media activist from the Oumal neighbourhood. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 4 May 2020
9. **Interviewee#18**, a resident of Abu Abed neighbourhood, participated in protests before joining the Free Syrian Army cells in Joubeleh, before leaving the country in 2016. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 3 May 2020
10. **Interviewee#19,** a civilian activist from the Jourah neighbourhood, and a member of the religious Committee of Deir-ez-Zor city. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 8 December 2020.

**Daraa**

1. **Interviewee#20,** a civilian activist from the Qusur neighbourhood, relocated to Daraa Balad during the revolution. The interview was conducted via two WhatsApp calls on 18 February 2020 and 4 March 2020
2. **Interviewee#21**, a shop owner in Daraa Mahatta and a civilian activist, originally from rural Daraa. Currently an economic researcher. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 24 February 2020
3. **Interviewee#22,** a resident of Daraa Balad and participant in the protests there. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 6 March 2020
4. **Interviewee#23,** a civilian activist in Tareq Sadd and Daraa Camp, was the head of the Camp's Media Office. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 20 February 2020
5. **Interviewee#24,** a civilian activist from the Shamal Khat neighbourhood, documented human rights violations in Daraa Mahatta before relocating to Tareq Sadd. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 21 February 2020
6. **Interviewee#25,** a media activist from the Sahari neighbourhood and Tareq Sadd. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp call on 23 February 2020
7. **Interviewee#26,** a civilian activist from Daraa Balad. Written communication via WhatsApp on 18 February 2020
8. **Interviewee#27**, former head of the education office in Daraa, and later a commander of a Free Syrian Army group. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp on 3 March 2020.

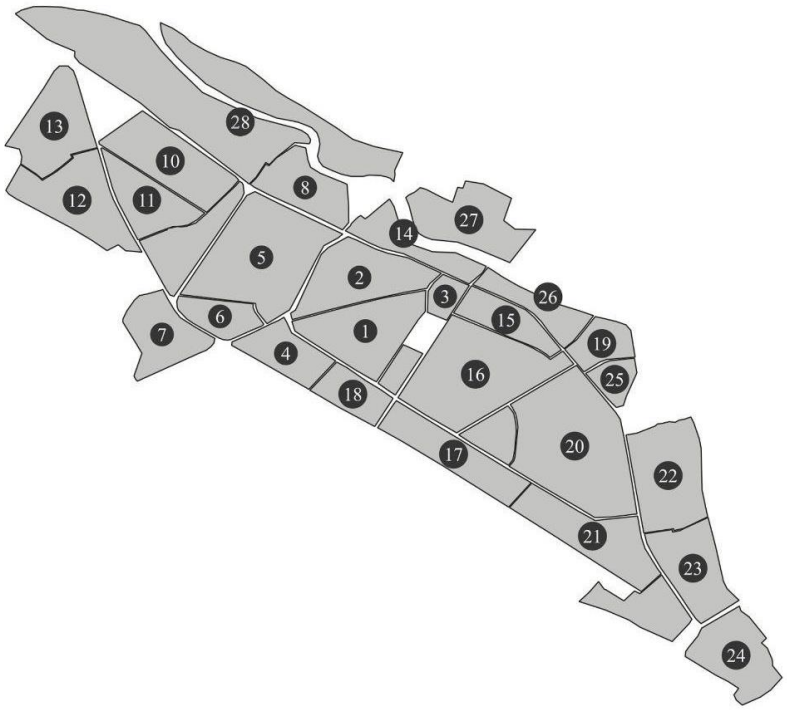
## APPENDIX B. Interview Transcripts

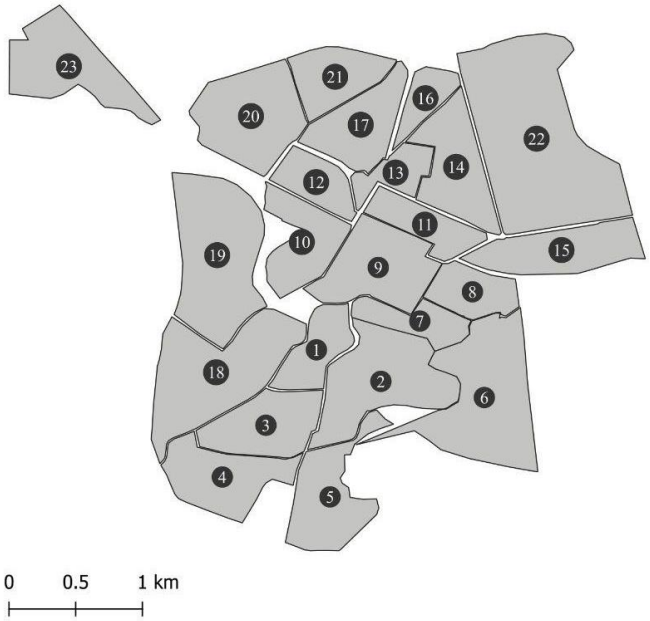

1. SMI_Interview#1. (2021, January 3). *Interview transcript* [Unpublished manuscript]. Syrian Memory Institute.
2. SMI_Interview#2. (2020, October 18). *Interview transcript* [Unpublished manuscript]. Syrian Memory Institute.
3. SMI_Interview#3. (2020, October 9). *Interview transcript* [Unpublished manuscript]. Syrian Memory Institute.
4. SMI_Interview#4. (2021, January 26). *Interview transcript* [Unpublished manuscript]. Syrian Memory Institute.
5. SMI_Interview#5. (2020, March 16). *Interview transcript* [Unpublished manuscript]. Syrian Memory Institute.
6. SMI_Interview#6. (2020, May 12). *Interview transcript* [Unpublished manuscript]. Syrian Memory Institute.
7. SMI_Interview#7. (2021, January 15). *Interview transcript* [Unpublished manuscript]. Syrian Memory Institute.

8. SMI_Interview#8. (2020, November 26). *Interview transcript* [Unpublished manuscript]. Syrian Memory Institute.
9. SMI_Interview#9. (2021, March 18). *Interview transcript* [Unpublished manuscript]. Syrian Memory Institute.

## APPENDIX C. Neighbourhoods of Deir-Ez-Zor, Daraa and Hama

1 Joubeleh
2 Ba'ajeen
3 Abu Abed
4 Mowazafyen
5 Qosour
6 Villat
7 Houryyeh
8 Ghazi Ayyash
10 Jourah
11 Alwadi
12 Tab Jourah
13 Dahyeh
14 Rushdyyeh
15 Sheikh Yassin
16 Hamedyyeh
17 Oumal
18 Ourfi
19 Kanamat
20 Old Mataar
21 Rasafeh
22 Industrial Area
23 Tahtouh
24 Harabish
25 Khasarat
26 Aradi
27 Wesertn Hawyeqah
28 Eastern Hawyeqah






1 Karak
2 Abbasyyeh
3 Souq Sweidan
4 Arba'en
5 Bihaar
6 Eastern Tareq Sad
7 Western Tareq Sad
8 Daraa Camp
9 Souq Daraa
10 Sahari
11 Shmaal Khat
12 Mataar
13 Governmental Square
14 Kashif
15 Industrial Area
16 Qusour
17 Sabeel
18 Manshyyeh
19 Sajneh
20 Tareq Tafas
21 Miftara
22 Baath
23 Dahyyet Daraa


1 A'idoon
2 Alaylyat
3 Aljob
4 Amiriyeh
5 Andalus
6 Arbaeen
7 Asi
8 Ba'ath
9 bab al jisr
10 Bab al-Nasr
11 Bab Qibli
12 Bain Hayreen
13 Barazyeh
14 Baroudyyeh
15 Bashoura
16 Bayaad
17 Bernawi
18 Dabaghah
19 Dahiet Abi Fedaa
20 East Janoub Mala'ab
21 Ein al-Louzeh
22 Farrayeh
23 Gharb al-Mashtal
24 Hader
25 Hama Castle
26 Hama University
27 Hamedyeh
28 Haret Alsamak
29 Industrial Area
30 Janoob al-Malaab
31 Janoub Thakaneh
32 Jarajmeh
33 Karm Hourani
34 Kazou
35 Kilanyyeh
36 Madineh
37 Mahatah
38 Majra Zyadeh
39 Manakh
40 Masaken
42 Masaken Al-Thobbat
43 Mashaa al-Arbaeen
44 Mashaa al-Forosyeh
45 Mashaa Tab
46 Nasr
47 Qusour
48 Sabunia
49 Sakkhaneh
50 Shamalyyeh
51 Shariah
52 Sharqyyeh
53 Sheer
54 Shiekh Anbar
55 Souk Hal
56 Souk Shajarah
57 Ta'wnyyeh
58 Tareeq Halab
59 Tareq Mesyyaf
60 Tishrin District
61 Twahid
62 Wadi al-Jawz
63 Wadi Hawarneh