

Diaspora Mobilization in the Wake of the Syrian Civil War

*The Syrian Anti-Regime Diaspora's Struggle for
Influence in the US and the UK*

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Master Thesis

Fall 2016

Department of Comparative Politics

University of Bergen

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2016

Title: Diaspora Mobilization in the Wake of the Syrian Civil War

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Print: Christian Michelsens Institute

Abstract

This thesis seeks to analyze the Syrian diaspora's political mobilization emerging in the United States and the United Kingdom after the inception of the 2011 uprising. Despite extensive mobilization, the diaspora has been unable to exert influence on host state policies. Providing an original look at diaspora politics, this thesis employs social movement impact theory in an effort to answer an often-neglected question in diaspora and social movement research: why movements fail. The thesis attempts to cover this research gap by answering the following research question: *Why has the Syrian diaspora failed to influence host state policies in the United States and the United Kingdom?*

The thesis makes three separate sets of theoretical propositions based on the works of other social movement scholars. One emphasizes internal factors, such as mobilization structures, while the remaining two emphasize external factors, such as national political context and discursive opportunities respectively. To evaluate these propositions, the thesis engages in the strategy of paired comparison and utilizes primary data gathered through fieldwork conducted in both case countries and secondary source material.

The findings suggest that there is no "magic bullet" when it comes to explaining failure to impact host state policies. Both internal and external factors offer convincing narratives of the diaspora's lack of impact. In terms of internal factors, both cases reflect two different trajectories. In the US, the Syrian diaspora's uncoordinated and fractionalized mobilization limited its influence. In the UK, the diaspora was better coordinated, but lacked a strong lobby needed to achieve influence. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that external factors, such as shifting policy alignment, divided elites, insufficiently influential allies, unfavorable public opinion, and lack of discursive opportunities, had constraining effects on the diaspora's ability to influence policies.

The thesis demonstrates the need to consider both internal and external factors when studying movement outcomes. It shows the utility of studying how movements fail and how social movement theory can be incorporated into diaspora politics.

Key words: Syria, diaspora politics, mobilization, social movement, impact, strategy of paired comparison

Acknowledgements

A long process, filled with joy and despair is now coming to an end. Writing this thesis has been a challenging and difficult enterprise, yet rewarding in so many ways. Chr. Michelsen Institute has allowed me to take part in a truly engaging academic environment throughout the project – an invaluable asset. Furthermore, I would never stand a chance of completing the thesis if it had not been for the support of a number of individuals. Let me therefore spend the rest of this section to thank all of you.

I would like to thank my supervisor at the University of Bergen, Teije Hidde Donker, for “pulling me through the wall” as he said he would. Where I saw only problems, he saw solutions.

I am also indebted to my contact person at the Chr. Michelsen Institute, Kjetil Selvik, who’s door was always open. His inspiration is part of the reason I decided to study Syria and the Syrian diaspora.

I would like to express gratitude to all of my informants, without whom, this thesis would not exist. I can only hope that I did our illuminating conversations justice.

A thank you goes out to all of the students in the CMI dungeon. Extensive coffee breaks and awkward discussions have made this adventure substantially more pleasant. Lisa-Marie provided me with excellent feedback throughout the process. Vegard Kolnes, in particular, has always been supportive and without the need of much convincing, decided to repay his debt by reading my entire thesis. His constructive thoughts have been vital since the beginning of the project.

A warm thank you goes out to my family who has always been there for me. I am particularly grateful for my parents’ love and support. They have kept me on my feet and helped me weather the storm. By allowing me to express my frustration at their own expense, they have facilitated a steady progression on what seemed like an endless journey.

Last, but definitely not least, I want to thank Gai Le. Her devotion to my project has been unique. On both a personal and professional level, she has always been at the ready. Correcting language mistakes the last week was only one very small act of support. It is dwarfed in comparison to her much needed forbearance during my limitless tirades of frustration.

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Abbreviations

AFS = Association of Free Syrians
APPG = All-Party Parliament Group
ASO = American Syriac Organization
Daesh = al-Dawlah al-Islamīyah fī al-‘Irāq wa-al-Shām
FSA = Free Syrian Army
ISIS = Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KH = Kurds House
MP = Member of Parliament
NSM = New Social Movements
SMO = Social Movement Organization
SAA = Syrian American Alliance
SAC = Syrian American Council
SAMS = Syrian American Medical Association
SAY = Syrian Association of Yorkshire
SCP = Syrian Christians for Peace
SEO = Syrian Expatriates Organization
SETF = Syrian Emergency Task Force
SSC = Syria Solidarity Campaign
SSN = Syrian Society of Nottinghamshire
SWS = Syrian Welsh Society
RRS = Rethink Rebuild Society
UFS = United for a Free Syria
PJS = Peace & Justice for Syria
PPA = Political Process Approach
UK = United Kingdom
US = United States

1 Introduction

In March and April of 2011, a wave of contentious mobilization erupted. The tranquility of regular days evolved into disruptive and loud protests, demanding that freedom, pluralism and democracy replace the authoritarian regime that indisputably had held the reins of power for more than four decades. Displays of placards requesting that Bashar al-Assad step down as President were accompanied by countless Syrian flags and chants that rang the streets and nearby neighborhoods. Disguised as ordinary people, members of the security establishment covertly captured photographs as evidence of the demonstrations to document what they perceived as illegitimate challenges to authorities. Later, these photographs would be used as tools of repression in order to intimidate and threaten the protestors and their relatives to never again cross the regime.

Yet, the effect of scare tactics was limited; with each attempt to shut down the non-violent protests, the activists became more motivated to continue. As the demonstrators carried on with their peaceful activities, they found their numbers increasing exponentially with each anti-regime rally. These numbers included young and old, men and women, Muslim and Christian, Alawi and Kurd, who together mobilized in support and solidarity with the Syrian revolution. Coordinated through an unprecedented surge of new organizations, the mobilization that occurred was adamant to affect and change the political status quo.

If you had guessed that this short excerpt was from the early protests of the Syrian revolution¹ in cities like Aleppo, Damascus, Deraa, Hama or Homs, you would most certainly have been right. Such events and similar response from the security apparatus were typical for the early stages of the anti-regime mobilization. However, the actual stage where this particular story took place was in Washington, D.C. in the United States. The wave of protests that emerged in Syria had also encouraged the expatriate community all around the world to mobilize against the Assad-regime and his inner circles. As such, the natural target for these mobs were the Syrian delegations and their embassies. Until their closures in 2012 and 2014, the Syrian embassies in both the United States and the United Kingdom were central points for mostly peaceful, but assertive, and direct political mobilization. After the expulsion of the foreign missions, the most frequent target for mobilization changed to host state policy-makers.

¹ I will use revolution, uprising, crisis and civil war as terms to cover different aspects of the situation that developed in Syria in 2011. I do not treat them as synonymous, but rather as expressions of the precarious conflict in Syria.

Amongst the expatriates, the United States and the United Kingdom are believed to hold the key to a solution to the political and humanitarian crisis in Syria.

1.1 Research puzzle and question

The diaspora² has since the beginning of the uprising been able to sustain such contentious activities as those mentioned above while concurrently developing professional advocacy organizations. As a social movement, the Syrian diaspora has gone to great lengths in their efforts to influence the developments in their homeland and convince host states to support their cause. Mobilizing mass demonstrations, organizing conferences, issuing press releases, and lobbying policy-makers are only some of the political activities the diaspora has been engaging in since 2011.

Yet, the political mobilization of the Syrian diaspora has, to a large extent, been unsuccessful. For example, they have not been able to pressure US or UK governments to: (1) facilitate the ousting of the Assad-regime, (2) arming moderate rebels to fight the Assad-regime, (3) guarantee civilian protection, (4) humanitarian intervention, (5) remove obstacles hindering money transfer, or, (6) substantially increase refugee resettlement rates.³ These points have all been advocated for by various Syrian diaspora organizations and been mobilized for through contentious activities.⁴

Even within the diaspora itself, there are doubts about the value and achievements of political mobilization. One member of the Syrian diaspora maintained that the organized efforts to sway policies, both domestic and foreign, have so far been fruitless. While discussing the extensive mobilization by Syrians in Washington, D.C. he argued: “Not a lot of them are doing any meaningful work, in my humble opinion” (Informant 2, 2015). Another who had distanced herself from the political mobilization of the diaspora explained her disengagement with this argument: “It’s not gonna mean anything. Doing advocacy isn’t going to do any damn thing” (Informant 5, 2015).

² In this thesis, I am analyzing the anti-regime diaspora. For reasons concerning data collection, I do not include the pro-regime tenets in the communal groups under study. Furthermore, I do not seek to cover the Syrian opposition in its entirety.

³ Both the US and the UK have increased pledges and resettlement rates since the growth of the refugee crisis. The numbers are however small in comparison to for example Sweden and Germany.

⁴ Political objectives and outcomes are summarized in chapter 5.

In Britain, a leading figure in one of the established political organization frowned when asked what had come of their persistent political engagement over the course of the conflict. She argued it was a depressing question and concluded “Unfortunately, [there are] no direct achievements in policy [...] I think the main issue across the board is that the Syrian voice is not being listened to” (Informant 13, 2016).

In her powerful statement at the humanitarian aid conference organized in London early 2016, the activist Rouba Mhaissen urged the international community to include Syrians in development strategies and processes of aid implementation: “Speak *to* us, please; not only about us. Don’t speak only in our names” (Sawa for Development & Aid 2016). Supporting her argument, a coalition of Syrian civil society organizations issued a statement criticizing the underrepresentation of Syrians at the conference. They also added that the opportunities for policy recommendations were strictly limited and that important and complex questions were not sufficiently debated with Syrian diaspora organizations (Rethink Rebuild Society 2016b). The lack of policy achievements through political mobilization and the limited inclusion in political processes testaments to the Syrian diaspora’s lack of political influence in the United States and the United Kingdom.

On the other hand, theory on diaspora politics often points to policy achievements and effects of diaspora mobilization in contemporary politics. Scholars have for example frequently pointed out that diasporas tend to significantly impact homeland and host state politics through organizing social movements and advocacy groups (Huntington 1997; Ambrosio 2002; Lyons and Mandaville 2012). This is because of their unique position at the nexus of homeland and host state and the vast beneficial developments instigated by increased globalization. Ample attention has therefore been devoted to questions of effects and outcomes of diaspora mobilization, emphasizing in particular their *political* importance in a variety of cases (Vertovec 2005).

Walt and Mearsheimer (2007), for example, have argued that the Israeli lobby exerts strong influence on American foreign policy-making. They argue that it is one of the single most powerful mobilized interests in the country. Furthermore, Vanderbush (2014) has demonstrated how the Iraqi-diaspora was able to convince, not only the public, but also members of Congress that ousting Saddam Hussein were in America’s interests. While not being instrumental in the decision to intervene in Kosovo in 1998, the Kosovar-Albanian diaspora in the UK exerted some influence on both policy-makers and the public by providing them with extensive evidence of the crisis (Koinova 2013, 445–46). Much of this strand of research has thus

specifically revolved around host state policy-making and how diasporas function as ethnic or diasporic lobbies with substantial political clout or at least some degree of influence. Indeed, the studies of diaspora mobilization have tended to accentuate cases where diasporas to some extent have been able to successfully shape host state policies.

Arguably, the aforementioned research has done so without paying sufficient attention to cases where diasporas fail to affect host countries, in other words, the negative cases.⁵ With few exceptions,⁶ diaspora *research* has almost taken for granted that diaspora groups affect both processes and outcomes in contemporary politics, given a convergence of interests is present (Østergaard-Nielsen 2006). At the very least, they have deemed interesting only the cases where diasporas do have an impact and largely neglected those in which no effect can be observed. It might therefore seem puzzling why the Syrian diaspora, even according to themselves, has not been able to influence host state politics despite extensive mobilization and some extent of mutual interests between mobilizers and targets. The research question of this thesis builds upon this puzzle. By employing concepts and tools developed in social movement theory, I intend to answer the following research question:

Why has the Syrian diaspora failed to influence⁷ host state policies in the United States and the United Kingdom?

1.2 Why is this research important?

I argue that this research is important for a number of reasons. For one, diasporas are important. While it was often stated that studies of diasporas were confined to a limited number of “classic” cases, such as the Jewish or Armenian diasporas, this is no longer true. There now exists a wide range of studies that covers an extensive array of cases. Furthermore, crucial theoretical developments have been made on the topics of diaspora formation, diaspora identities, diaspora political mobilization and diaspora impact in conflict situations. With other words, the increasingly acknowledged global influence of such groups among both academics and policy-makers is a strong indicator of the growing importance of diaspora politics in general (Vertovec 2005; Adamson 2016). Globalization and the development of new communication technologies are oft-cited reasons for why diasporas are more significant now compared to several decades

⁵ Cases that are still relevant, but have negative dependent variables (see chapter 4).

⁶ The study of the Ethiopian and Haitian diasporas in the US by Lyons (2014) and Erikson (2014) respectively.

⁷ I will use lack of impact, influence and outcome interchangeably throughout the rest of the thesis to allow for linguistic diversity.

ago (Sheffer 1995; Adamson 2005). This is unlikely to change in the near future. It is thus important to continue devoting research to diaspora politics, of which this thesis intend to do.

Second, an important rationale for this research is that it aims to demonstrate the usefulness of combining social movement impact theory and diaspora politics. By treating the extensive mobilization by the Syrian diaspora in the US and the UK as forms of social movements, we can generate knowledge on the question of why mobilized diasporas fail in their quest of political influence. As I shall return to in the theory chapter (chapter 2), other researchers have also suggested to connect these two otherwise separated fields of study. Unique in this thesis is that it aims use social movement theories to explain impact – or rather the lack of it – instead of using it to explain how they are formed as others have done (Sökefeld 2006; Adamson 2012). Yet, I do not see my contribution in contradiction to these important works, but rather as an extension or another piece in the larger puzzle concerning diasporas.

Third, I approach an unorthodox element of social movement theory – lack of impact. It was claimed in the 1990s that questions of *impact* more broadly had received only scant attention by social scientists (Giugni 1998). While this is no longer true, there is still a substantial caveat in much of the recently emerged research on movement impact that it predominantly focus on cases of movement impact. Little attention has been devoted to the question of why movements fail to impact decision-makers. Furthermore, none have tried to ask specifically why *diasporas* fail to impact policies, to my knowledge. A probable explanation for this shortcoming in social movement impact studies lies in its inherently challenging undertaking. Nonetheless, by scrutinizing those cases where we can observe mobilization, but no apparent policy impact, we can increase the robustness of our existing findings. Alternatively, we can correct misgivings in our current theoretical developments. Thus, I see this thesis as an important building block in our endeavors to properly understand why movements, and in particular diaspora movements, fail to impact host state policies. It is an ambitious enterprise that I hope can supplement existing literature on social movement impact and diaspora politics.

Lastly, I intend to shed light on a largely understudied empirical case, the Syrian diaspora. It was noted not long ago, in an attempt to demystify Syria, that the Middle Eastern country remains poorly understood (Lawson 2012). So too does the Syrian diaspora. This might not seem all that surprising considering that the Syrian diaspora is still very much in the making, and, as we shall see, largely been nonexistent as a community prior to the Syrian uprising. Along with only a handful of recent studies (Jörum 2015; Moss 2016; Baeza and Pinto 2016),

this thesis also has an empirical imperative; to shed light on an understudied case of diaspora mobilization that is both recent and still ongoing.

1.3 Findings of the thesis

My findings indicate first and foremost that the Syrian diaspora's failure to influence host state policies in the United States and the United Kingdom is due to a composite and complex set of factors. While one of the most debated aspects in movement impact theory revolves around the question of whether internal or external explanations best account for the outcome, my empirical evidence suggests that we need to revisit this more apparent than real division (Giugni 1999). There is no "magic bullet" that determines movement outcomes. Both internal and external aspects jointly tells the story. We must therefore be careful in our assessments and conclusions of what explains both movement influence *and* the absence of it.

Furthermore, by utilizing the strategy of paired comparison, this thesis has found that the Syrian diaspora in the US and the UK reflect two different movement trajectories with respect to internal factors. In the Syrian-American community, conservative connections and ties to the regime amongst the diaspora's "early risers" functioned as a constraint on the ability to garner widespread support within the community. Reflected in the plethora of different communal SMOs established in the wake of the Syrian uprising in 2011 is the ethnic and sectarian cleavages that have existed in Syria (and in the diaspora) for a long period of time. With the uprising, these elements became manifested through an uncoordinated and fractionalized Syrian mobilization. Strengthening the element of fractionalization was the role of personal agendas and elite rivalries. Ambitious "one-man shows" and competition for attention furthered cleavages. In turn, these elements have made it difficult for policy-makers to know who to listen to in the diaspora and who serves as a legitimate representative of the expatriate community and Syrians more broadly. It has thus reduced the diaspora's political influence.

In the Syrian-British community, the limited size and funding have produced constraints on the diaspora's ability to fund organized political activities. In addition, its strong focus on internal solidarity and cohesion have produced a weak political lobby, serving as a substantial constraint on its ability to promote the diaspora's interests in London. While being able to coordinate their efforts better than its Syrian-American counterparts, the aforementioned factors have also made its expression less professionalized and more "activist". As such, it has developed a completely different organizational mode. In spite of better coordination, they have not been

able to exert influence on Britain's Syria-policy because of its weak lobby has thus been better suited at affecting perceptions of the conflict rather than influencing policies.

Despite different trajectories, my findings do identify one shared element. Namely the lack of civil society experience in Syria. The effect of repression from abroad, limited acknowledgement of differences in education, and subsequently low levels of trust prevented the diaspora from mobilizing prior to the revolution. This has particularly had a strong effect on the development of cleavages in the Syrian-American community, but also made the process of diaspora construction difficult in the Syrian-British community.

My findings also illustrate how a variety of commonly employed contextual variables presents opportunities and constraints. The empirical evidence reflects similar challenges in the political processes for both the Syrian-American and the Syrian-British diaspora. While both diaspora's have had access to respective systems, they have faced substantial constraints on the remaining indicators. A shifting policy alignment produced reduced the level of interest convergence and thus constrained the diaspora's ability to influence host state policies. Both diasporas had notable political allies, but as argued, they were not influential *enough*. Furthermore, there is evidence of partisan splits on both sides of the Atlantic. The partisan rivalry have prevented consensus on the Syrian issue which has limited the diaspora's room for influence. While public opinion have largely been aligned opposite to the diaspora, the evidence presented have some validity issues. Keeping this in mind, the thesis find that public opinion has been unfavorable and thus a constraint on the diaspora's ability to influence respective host states.

The last element of this thesis shows that the political discourse of non-intervention has been a crucial component, limiting the diaspora's ability to frame the Syria crisis as similar to Kosovo in 1998 or Libya in 2011. Extensive war fatigue is part of this explanation. Furthermore, the rise of terrorist organizations, such as *Jabhat al-Nusra* and *Daesh*,⁸ has moved the discourse into one dominantly about anti-terrorism. One that constrains the diaspora's ability to frame what they argue is the root cause of the problem, the Assad-regime.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

In the next chapter (2), I will go through the theoretical framework and the concepts that, together, constitutes the spine of the thesis. It includes a short discussion of the concept of

⁸ *Daesh* (al-Dawlah al-Islamīyah fī al-‘Irāq wa-al-Shām) is an Arabic acronym for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) who control large areas in Northern and Eastern Syria.

diaspora to illustrate how the Syrian expatriate community applies. Furthermore, I present a literature review on social movement theory and carefully conceptualize social movement impact. The last section of this chapter is the analytical framework and illustrates how I intend to analyze the two cases of diaspora mobilization. I separate between internal and external variables in an effort to follow conventional research on social movement impact as well as to isolate organizational and contextual variables. For each of these components, I will present sets of questions that, based on theoretical arguments, opens up for a number of possible explanations to why the diaspora has failed to impact host state policies.

In chapter 3, I will elaborate on the research design, covering methodological considerations and challenges, choice of strategy (paired comparison) and the process of data collection. The limits of the study will permeate through this chapter in an effort to provide for transparency.

In chapter 4, I contextualize the thesis by providing a brief summary of Syrian migratory history and politics. I do not intend to detail any of these aspects, but rather try to put the Syrian diaspora in perspective. This means that I provide a short introduction to the political developments in Syria, presenting a timeline from just before the revolution to present time.

In chapter 5, I present a narrative of the diaspora's political mobilization and identify their mobilization goals. I then move on to answer the questions set out in the theory chapter by alternating between the two cases of diaspora mobilization as I cover first internal and then external explanations.

Concluding, in chapter 6, the main findings of the thesis will be covered and discussed with respect to its theoretical implications. I also point to the consequences of failing to impact host state policies as well as direct the reader to what may be future avenues of research on the topic.

2 Theory and Concepts: Diaspora Mobilization and Social Movement Theory

2.1 Introduction

In general terms, the fundamental goal of science is to “[...] discover new things about the world and to appraise the truth-value of extant propositions about the world” (Gerring 2012, 27). This means, firstly, that any given research project is aimed towards generating new knowledge that feeds back to the sciences (in this case, the social sciences), and secondly, that it critically evaluates existing literature and its claims on how reality looks like. This project is no different in this respect. To assess and explain diaspora impact on host state politics (or the lack thereof), presenting an overview of central concepts and the development of them is required. Scholars have also pointed out that this is central in order to identify the contribution of one’s research (George and Bennett 2005, 70).

Consequently, this particular chapter will attempt to shed light on the theoretical framework on which the empirical analysis is based. As such, the chapter is divided into three separate parts. In the first part, I conceptualize diaspora, account for the main tenets of academic discourse on the phenomena, and briefly situate the Syrian expatriate community in the two countries as a case of it.⁹ To affect home state policies, the community must channel its interest as a somewhat coherent social force – a diaspora. The diasporic collective identity is a necessary component for political mobilization. Secondly, I turn briefly to diasporas and national political mobilization. Thirdly, social movement theory will serve as a theoretical bridge, linking diaspora engagement during conflict, with the fundamental research question of *impact*. This includes a review of previous and current theories on social movements – how they arise and how they matter in politics. By proposing reasons for the lack of political influence, I will highlight which variables are of theoretical significance in this particular case, as suggested by George and Bennett (2005, 69).

⁹ I cover this aspect more in-depth in chapter 4.

2.2 The development of diaspora studies

The study of diaspora entered the research agenda of the social sciences in the mid-1970s and proliferated exponentially in the 1980s (Brubaker 2005, 1). Since then, scholars from a variety of academic disciplines have devoted more and more attention to the concept as it developed in tandem with an increasingly more globalized and transnational world. Most can agree that “[...] diaspora has to do with *dislocation*, with having left particular places and living elsewhere, or with simply being ‘out of place’” (Sökefeld 2006, 265). Nevertheless, an unfortunate tendency has been that “diaspora”, much due to its multidisciplinary features, has been used with little agreement on theoretical conceptualization in contemporary academic discourse. It is even sometimes used interchangeably with transnationalism, which reflects a different intellectual genealogy (Bauböck and Faist 2010, 9).

For the purposes of this thesis, I think it is paramount to make an effort to bring clarity to the concept. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, designating Syrians mobilizing abroad as a case of diaspora mobilization requires empirical justification, rooted in theorized conceptualization. Secondly, as has been noted by some scholars, the development of diasporas and the manner of which they engage in national politics resemble processes of social movement emergence and politicization (Sökefeld 2006; Sökefeld 2008; Adamson 2012). While they tend to emphasize diasporas as transnational identity communities (which they certainly are), I stress the contextual boundedness of the Syrian diaspora within the United States and the United Kingdom. Their mobilization efforts have been largely focused on producing favorable political outcomes through national political processes. In dealing with the theoretical aspects of diasporas, I briefly touch upon the essentialist and constructivist debate, and how the Syrian diaspora conforms with a necessary and sufficient conceptualization of the term.

The essentialist currents of diaspora theory perceive diasporas as emerging generally through the process of migration across national borders. Originally, the concept was based almost exclusively on its historical origins. With roots in the paradigmatic case of the Jews, the classical perspective regarded diasporas as a social entity emerging through a process of victimization and subsequent dispersion or migratory processes (Sheffer 2003, 9). The actual word literally means “dispersion” or “to sow over or scatter” in Greek and is, perhaps, the most widely recognized feature of diasporas today.

The very identity of Jews and similar social groups was fundamentally based on a cataclysmic event or a traumatizing historical experience (Cohen 2008, 1). The Exodus and the “myth” of

exile, oppression and moral degradation served as a strong constitutive factor for the development of a collective consciousness for the Jews (Safran 1991, 83). As such, succinct designation of diasporas conformed with the idea of grievances developed through experiences of victimization. African Americans and Armenians have been treated as diasporas based on this and similar criteria (Shepperson 1966; Tölölyan 2002). Other scholars of the essentialist current have downplayed the need for a traumatizing experience. Some maintain that migration in search for labor (Weiner 1986) or trading opportunities (Fallers 1962; Curtin 1984) also develop diaspora communities. If we extend the concept of diaspora to include these elements, the Mexican diaspora in the United States and the Chinese diaspora in most corners of the world are notable examples.

The most fundamental critique of the essentialist strand of diaspora theory came from social constructivists (Sökefeld 2006; Sökefeld 2008; Adamson 2012). While retaining the need for migration and dispersion, this alone was not a sufficient condition qualifying migrants as diaspora. Indeed, social constructivists claimed that diasporas had to be politically and socially mobilized by strategic actors. Such mobilization would reify identity and loyalty towards the homeland and thus develop a distinctive community within the national context of the host state. The in-between experience of these organized migrants resembled the idea of “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983). While it is empirically difficult to assess imaginary bonds to the homeland, some scholars maintain it is possible to observe such identities through analyzing discourse (Sökefeld 2006). By taking note of established diasporic organizations and examining their activities and intentions, such social constructions become clear. The cases under study here reveals explicit political identities based on a combination of Syrian heritage and criticism towards the existing regime. As noted by Adamson (2012), such political identity can be used by diaspora groups as a source of empowerment. In this way, diasporas are both the result of social and political mobilization, and important devices for mobilizing for political purposes.

I employ Brubaker’s (2005) notion of a diaspora which, to a certain extent, reflects consensus in the literature. Conceptualizing diaspora through the logic of necessary and sufficient conditions suggests that if one of the three following indicators are absent, the empirical phenomenon being studied is correspondingly absent (Goertz 2005). The indicators that are necessary and sufficient conditions to consider a minority community a diaspora are:

- (1) Dispersion
- (2) Homeland orientation

(3) Boundary-maintenance¹⁰

In my view, these three indicators are indispensable to qualify a group as a diaspora in any meaningful sense of the word. It limits inclusivity and avoids extensive conceptual stretching (Sartori 1970). As such, I retain a conceptualization that allows for conceptual travelling the application of the concept on new cases (D. Collier and Mahon 1993). Dispersion follows what has been previously stated and includes some form of migration. Homeland orientation is based on the notion of the homeland as a dominant source of value, identity and loyalty. The orientation can, as several scholars have stated, reflect a real or imagined homeland¹¹ (Safran 1991; Tölölyan 1996; Baser and Swain 2008). Lastly, boundary-maintenance is a condition that accounts for the preservation of an identity separate from the host country. This can be the result of resistance to assimilation or the inability to properly integrate in the new society. Boundary-maintenance has also served as an important element in sustaining collective identities in social movements (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Melucci 1996; Polletta and Jasper 2001). These necessary and sufficient conditions qualify the Syrian expatriate community as a diaspora in both the United States and the United Kingdom, but only after 2011. I will cover this more extensively in the background chapter (4). I now turn to political mobilization of diasporas.

2.2.1 Diasporas and *national* political mobilization

It has been claimed that diasporas should be treated as significant political actors in modern political analysis because they tend to serve as an important linkage between host state and homeland politics (Hall, Kostic, and Swain 2007, 9). Proliferation of communication tools and enhanced transportation has served to facilitate close ties between diasporas and homeland communities, making them particularly vital during conflict situations. The impetus for studying diasporas as political actors was predominantly based on a notion that their activities had been overlooked by scholars of conflict and contentious politics (Smith 2007). This is no longer the case.

Today, there is an impressive body of literature that study diasporas as political actors in international relations and political science. Much of which revolves around the question of

¹⁰ Boundaries and maintaining them have been noted to be of particular importance for diasporas engaged in the political sphere (Sheffer 2003, 11). It should also be mentioned that the boundaries overlaps with a wider network of Arabs and Muslims. This thesis focuses however exclusively on those who render themselves specifically Syrian.

¹¹ The Kurdish diaspora is an example of such a group without a recognized, sovereign territory.

whether they facilitate peace-building and alleviate the hardship of war (Newland and Patrick 2004; Spear 2006; Fagen and Bump 2006; Cochrane 2007; Hall and Swain 2007; Baser and Swain 2008; Mohamoud and Osman 2008), or impede peace processes by sustaining conflict (Bruinessen 1998; Lorton 2000; Byman et al. 2001; Hockenos 2003; P. Collier and Hoeffler 2004).

Diasporas are then perceived as operating on the transnational level, transcending national boundaries and mobilizing at the venues that are most promising at a given time, be it the US Congress or the United Nations (Lyons 2014). While the above is true in most cases, including the Syrian diaspora, it often blurs the distinction between mobilization claims at the national and international levels. Furthermore, focusing on transnational mobilization makes it difficult to explore the particular interactions between the diaspora and the host state at the national level. As impact on national policy is of interest here, I thus emphasize the national level of diaspora engagement principally.

It is also important to stress that diasporas rarely are homogenous entities. By that I mean that diasporas rarely act as one in politics (Vertovec 2005). There are, for example, often multiple and often competing conceptions of the homeland within one and the same diaspora (Bush 2007, 18). This is also the same for social movements, to which I now turn.

2.3 Social movement theory – connecting diasporas and social movements

The plethora of academic work on diasporas from various scholarly disciplines have rarely, if at all, connected with social movement theory. The most notable exceptions are Eccarius-Kelly (2002), Adamson (Adamson 2005; Adamson 2013), Koinova (2011; Koinova 2013), Jörum (2015) and Amarasingam (2015). This might come as a surprise as diasporas are, on the one hand, the result and visible evidence of a social mobilization process, and on the other, continuously pursue their interests and issue their claims towards politicians and others deemed important in their everyday activities. As Adamson contends, diasporas are inherently social constructs – “[...] one can hypothesize that they are constructed by political entrepreneurs who are acting rationally and strategically through the strategic deployment of identity frames and categories” (2012, 32). This perspective establishes that the toolkit developed by the social movement literature can prove useful in understanding diasporas as being the outcome of

strategically determined mobilization projects. Such community organizations, fundamentally based on shared identities, are not simply a natural consequence of migration.

One, if not *the* single most important contribution in this respect, is Sökefeld's works that focus primarily on critiquing the essentialist approach in diaspora theory. He claims that the collective identity on which such groups are based, are in essence initiated, sustained and constrained/obstructed by similar processes as is experienced by social movements (Sökefeld 2006; Sökefeld 2008). *Political opportunities and constraints, mobilization structures and practices, and framing of issues* are all useful concepts for understanding the intricate process of identification and materialization of a diaspora, and how they may or may not affect host state policies. Additionally, I will add that this theoretical framework is useful for understanding the concurrent interest claims on the national and international level regarding the homeland crisis in the instance of the Syrian diaspora.

Thus far, I hope to have made the case for incorporating diaspora into the social movement literature. The following sub-chapters will attempt to delve into the highly contested mire of social movement studies, and assess independent variables suitable to explain why the Syrian diaspora in the United States and the United Kingdom have lacked impact on the respective countries' politics. These sections will also deal with the discourse and the more general disciplinary developments of social movement theory. By using established ideas from the synthesized political process approach¹² (PPA) that includes political opportunities, mobilization structures and framing processes (e.g. McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996), I seek to explore theoretical propositions that can possibly explain the absence of political impact in the context of diaspora mobilization. The propositions I refine for the purposes of this thesis are principally divided into two, distinguishing between *internal* and *external* explanations. This dichotomy determines whether the effect on propensity for impact are endogenous or exogenous to the movement. One can think of internal explanations as closely related to mobilization structures, whereas external explanations encompasses both political opportunities/constraints and framing processes. A further elaboration on this distinction will follow subsequently. I now turn to the topic of social movement definition.

¹² I acknowledge the existence of more recent theories on social movements, such as the dynamic approach that emphasize interaction contexts, mechanisms and processes in contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tarrow and Tilly 2006) and the strategic approach that highlights actors' dilemmas and choices in particular political contexts (Jasper 2006; Fligstein and McAdam 2011). The choice of focusing narrowly on the political process approach serves to limit the scope of the analysis and allows for the usage of rigidly conceptualized and established indicators. Furthermore, it allows for systematic theoretical exploration of internal and external variables that have reduced the diasporas ability to influence host state politics.

2.3.1 Social movements defined

Social movements are fundamentally about the development of collective action, intended on producing some kind of political and/or social change. It has traditionally been regarded first and foremost as cases of grassroots or more generally as “bottom-up” mobilization, but recent contributions – and the previous paragraph – allude to strategic choices made by social movement entrepreneurs or key actors (Jasper 2004; Jasper 2006). There exists a wide range of definitions, some compatible and, perhaps an equal number, incompatible, with respect to details on movements’ actions and targets. What is crucial for this thesis is to ensure that the wide range of political, social, economic and cultural activities in the diaspora is covered, while simultaneously retaining some degree of conceptual rigidity.

By considering these prerequisites, Tarrow's definition of social movements seems fruitful: “[S]ocial movements are [...] defined as collective challenges, based on *common purposes* and *social solidarities*, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities” (Tarrow 2011, 9). Essential here is the emphasis on common purposes and social solidarities – these are main building blocks for social movements in general, but perhaps for diaspora mobilization in particular. In the case of the Syrian diaspora, a sense of common purpose and solidarity with “Syrian brethren” both abroad and at home has been indispensable for mobilization to take place.

I also maintain that the diaspora movements under study in this thesis employ a wide range of tools to advance their claims towards policy-makers. While the traditional literature on social movements tend to emphasize protest activities as a functional definition of social movements, more recent accounts accept the notion of more organized means of influence such as lobbyism (Diani 1992; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004; della Porta and Diani 2006). This definition of social movements¹³ thus capture the extensive activities the Syrian diaspora engages in without limiting its collective action repertoire to traditional extra-institutional means (Gamson and Meyer 1996, 283) or actions otherwise considered to be outside organizational channels of influence (Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004, 11). As will be discussed in the empirical chapter (chapter 6), the Syrian diaspora has used a wide range of tools from the contentious toolbox, among them, direct lobbyism. These are various strategic approaches social movements have at their disposal when engaging with policy processes.

¹³ We are close to engage in conceptual stretching, but this choice is legitimate based on the work of the aforementioned researchers.

2.3.2 Grievance and irrational collective behavior

The study of social movements evolved primarily as a critique of the grievance literature that stipulated that grassroots uprisings and mass mobilizations emerged as a result of social atomization (Kornhauser 1959), relative deprivation (Gurr 1970), or “disturbed states of mind” as stated by McAdam in his review of this this strand of thought (1982, 7). In this literature, the vast expansion of popular movements and their threat to the political *status quo* was a causally developed consequence of personal frustration (Klandermans 1984). Structural strain, it was maintained, produced widespread socio-psychological dissonance, which in turn produced irrational motivation for people to challenge powerholders in the form of social movements.

However, the references to these kinds of social mobilizations can be traced back to some of the most influential classics on the matter of collective action, namely Marx (1983), who in a similar fashion understood the grievances of the working class as sufficient for collective mobilization of the proletariat against the capitalists. Yet, this ignored vital questions regarding the mobilization process, and as Tarrow points out, underrated the requirements of sufficient resources, the cultural dimensions of mobilization, and, perhaps most fundamentally, politics (Tarrow 2011, 17). *How* would this mobilization take form and be sustained, i.e. how would mobilizers overcome what Olson (1965) coined the “collective action paradox” where, in the absence of any real sanction or benefit, collective action would be nearly impossible? Additionally, the amount of cases where strain has not led to any form of social mobilization is ample. “Social insurgency is only an occasional phenomenon [...]” (McAdam 1982, 11). This critique was the stimulus of an immense development of the social movement studies.

2.3.3 Resource mobilization

A turn in the literature was the marked emphasis on availability of resources for mobilization to take place. It emerged, on the one hand, as a challenge to the conception of movements as simply a result of frustration, and on the other, as a challenge to the partly erroneous logic presented by Olson. There had to be an issue with the assumptions in the paradox of collective action as the 1960-70s witnessed a surge of so-called New Social Movements (NSM). Demonstrations arose and included individuals with no particular prospect for gain or loss in it. The argument was that by being in possession of resources, both material and immaterial, grievances could more effectively be converted into movement activity. Aggregation of money

and a sustained relationship with notable actors (e.g. media or authorities) are respective examples (Oberschall 1973; McCarthy and Zald 1977).

The argument also claimed that *organization* was crucial (Gamson 1990). The movement more effectively materialized through the establishment of a relatively rigid and more professionalized Social Movement Organization (SMO). Such organizations would identify goals in accordance with the broader movement's preferences and consequently pursue them politically (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1218; Zald and McCarthy 1987). It seemed, however, that this approach conflated SMOs somewhat with interest groups.¹⁴ It overstated the organizational aspect of social movements and "[...] the centrality of deliberate strategic decisions [...]" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 15). Other critics have pointed to culture as another missing element in the resource mobilizations approach (Williams 2004).

For the purpose of this thesis, the development of SMOs have been vital for the Syrian diaspora's ability to sustain their political mobilization and allocate financial resources. I treat such organizations as a central element in connecting social networks within the diaspora and organize strategic approaches to the political processes in respective host countries. While they might call themselves "Syrian advocacy organizations" or "interest groups", they are here considered formalized SMOs. I thus avoid artificially homogenizing the Syrian diaspora. Furthermore, it allows us to better understand the internal dynamics of diaspora politics, as argued by Bush (2007). As will be discussed in depth below, SMOs have also been a critical discussion point in the literature on social movement impact.

2.3.4 Political process theory

McAdam (1982) offered, in his proposed framework for analyzing social movements, a macro perspective on the development of social movements. This view built largely on Eisinger's (1973) conception of political opportunity structures and Tilly's (1978) classic on conditions for "contentious events" in terms of both opportunity and threats. The basic idea was that social movement actors did not materialize in a political vacuum. On the contrary, mobilization was a response to opportunities provided by institutional arrangements within the polity. These institutional arrangements affected the propensity for the development of any collective action. By lowering the costs of collective action, political opportunities triggered social mobilization.

¹⁴ For an extensive discussion on the distinction between SMOs, interest groups and other forms of organization for interest articulation, see Andrews and Edwards (2004).

Such political opportunities functioned as resources *external* to the movement itself and subsequently influenced the choice of strategic approach and which tools to use among the repertoire of contention.

In contrast to the resource mobilization theory, the political process model emphasized political and historical factors, or structures, that defined “the rules of the game” (Meyer 2004, 128). These rules tended to be particular *institutional* structures. McAdam maintained that these structures of political opportunities (rules) varied greatly over time, which consequently accounted for the “ebb and flow” characteristics of movement activity (1982, 40–41). A central advantage of the political process model was that it situated social movement activity within an institutional framework. It effectively linked collective action and institutionalized politics (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 3). Additionally, it combined the organizational aspects of social movements, claiming that opportunities would not be seized in the absence of sufficient organization. The development of shared understanding of movement cause and identity functioned as mediation between structure and organization. The approach proved to be popular and was embraced to such an extent that it was rendered “hegemonic” amongst scholars of social movements (Goodwin and Jasper 1999, 28).

Much because of its popularity, considerable effort has been put into defining political opportunity structures. For example, in his efforts to explain variation in riot intensity in American cities, Eisinger (1973) employed a broad conceptualization. He identified the local political opportunity structure as “[...] a function of the degree to which groups are likely to be able to gain access to power and to manipulate the political system” (Eisinger 1973, 25). Such opportunities were based on the distinction between open and closed features of local institutional arrangements. Systems that allowed conventional political input were rendered open, whereas those that denied political participation were treated as closed. Eisinger’s findings suggested a curvilinear relationship between protest activity and degree of openness. Fully open or fully closed structures discouraged such mobilization because disruptive behavior would be either preempted or repressed.

Expanding the conception of political opportunity, Kitschelt (1986) also built on the notion of open and closed features of political institutions. Different from Eisinger, he distinguished between two dimensions of opportunities: input structures and output structures. Input structures mirrored the degree of openness in the political system as pointed out in the previous paragraph. Output structures, on the other hand, concerned policy implementation capacity. Combined, input and output structures “[...] determine the overall responsiveness of politics to

social movements” (Kitschelt 1986, 63). As will be elaborated upon below, Kitschelt’s treatment of opportunity structures was also important for the study of social movement impact.

McAdam et al. noted in 1996 that the opportunity structures had become an increasingly wide concept subject to substantial conceptual stretching (Sartori 1970). Various authors employed their own conceptualizations of opportunities when the dimensions suggested by others did not fit their particular case (D. Collier and Mahon 1993). This prompted Gamson and Meyer’s critique that political opportunity structure was in danger of becoming an “all-encompassing fudge-factor” covering all facets of the political context (1996, 275). In fact, political opportunity structures resembled less a single explanatory variable than a cluster of variables (Tarrow 1988, 430).

As such, Tarrow (2011) offered a synthesis of political opportunities.¹⁵ In his theoretical contribution on the broader trends of contentious politics and the “social movement sector” (Tarrow 1988), he identified a cluster of four indicators that constituted the overall political opportunity structure of a particular political context. These indicators sought to explain the general emergence of political mobilization and not of particular groups. A perceived change on any of the indicators would likely trigger mobilization on a variety of issues. It would provide a “window of opportunity” for movements to emerge:

- (1) Increased access to the political system
- (2) Shifting alignments within the political system
- (3) Divided political elites
- (4) Presence of elite allies

I argue that these indicators are useful for the empirical investigation of the Syrian diaspora’s mobilization because they allow for the observation of particular political factors that may have reduced their prospects for political impact. As such, they may function as opportunities or constraints for the diaspora in each individual host state. I will specify these indicators in section 2.6.2.

Despite its popularity, the political process model has also been subject to substantial critique (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Meyer 2004; Meyer and Minkoff 2004).

¹⁵ McAdam (1996a) produced a similar synthesis. It built upon Tarrow’s indicators in addition to those of Brockett (1991), Kriesi et al. (1992), and Rucht (1996). It is similar to the one presented here with the exception of propensity for repression. This indicator has been excluded because it was not applicable to the paired comparison of this thesis.

Some of the critique concerned inaccurate conceptualization, as covered above. Others also argued that the political process model, and its adherents, over-emphasized structural factors and ignored, or at the very least, paid insufficient attention to strategy and agency (Goodwin and Jasper 1999, 29). Effectively reducing all factors to questions about structure overlooked actors and the interaction between actors, such as that between movement participants and targets for mobilization. This and similar dynamics were not part of what they maintained was an overly structural and invariant model. In an effort to assess this critique, central scholars of the political process model have made attempts at studying dynamics and mechanisms within contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tarrow and Tilly 2006).

Criticism also pointed towards the perspective that opportunity structures proposed to explain variation in entire movement cycles. Consequently, Meyer and Minkoff (2004) argued for a distinction between structural aspects of opportunities and those that were issue-specific. Issue-specific opportunities did not apply for all movements. As such, particular opportunity indicators such as media coverage and prevailing discourse, and public opinion, encourage mobilization for certain collective actors. The expanded notion of opportunity structure allowed for the inclusion of non-political features.

Kriesi's (2004) effort at refining the political process model included a broader array of opportunities including these elements. Whereas this has been critiqued for allowing virtually all aspects of the context to be included in analyses of opportunity structures (Goldstone and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 2011), I maintain that an expanded notion of opportunity structure is needed to answer the research question in this thesis. Overlooking or ignoring certain elements of opportunity would risk attributing excessive explanatory power to other variables and thus result in a biased or spurious conclusion (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994; Landman 2013). While some may be less tangible and harder to observe, the use of various sources of data alleviates in part some of this issue. Data triangulation corrects some of the inadequacies and errors of observation from only one type of source. I will discuss the elements of opportunity that can explain the lack of impact from the Syrian diaspora below, but first a word on framing and frame alignment processes.

2.3.5 Framing and frame alignment processes

Framing and frame alignment processes emerged within social movement studies as a critique both to grievance and resource mobilization theories. It also served as a corrective to the

structural political process theories. Theories of “framing” or “frame alignment processes”, as proposed by Snow and colleagues, attempted to produce a new and better understanding of how support and participation in social movements developed (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Snow and Benford 1992; Benford and Snow 2000). The process of framing deals with how movements give meaning to and interpret events in order to generate linkages between social movement organizations and individuals.

“Frame” was a concept borrowed from Goffman which denoted a “schemata of interpretation” that would enable individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences within their life space and the world at large” (Goffman 1974, 21; Benford and Snow 2000, 614). “Framing”, then, means “the conscious, strategic efforts of movement groups too fashion meaningful accounts of themselves and the issues at hand in order to motivate and legitimate their efforts” (McAdam 1996a, 6). In McAdam’s (1982) analysis of the Civil Rights movement, the process of “cognitive liberation” illustrated the importance of a common idea to foster mobilization. In this particular case, the movement framed their situation as unjust which, subsequently, garnered support and extensive popular mobilization for the cause.

As with other disciplinary development in social movement theory, frame alignment processes have not been without critique. Empirical work on collective action frames have had a tendency to place emphasis on statements, writings and speeches at the cost of studying movement actions. As such, actions and tactical choices made by social movement actors have been downplayed in favor of what McAdam (1996b, 341) calls “the ideational bias”. Resonant ideas are often encoded in a group’s activities. It has also been argued that the “cultural turn” in social science carries limited value if its corrective to the structural paradigm fails to connect its cultural components with the political process.

By including framing within the broader political context as suggested by some authors (Kriesi 2004), the cultural aspect can help explain both the emergence and outcome of social movements. I argue that discursive elements of political opportunity works as an avenue where framing becomes empirically observable. By analyzing the diaspora movements’ framing processes against the backdrop of a broader political discourse, we can demonstrate its effect on prospects for impact. The notion of discursive opportunities will be discussed in more detail below.

2.4 The impact of social movements

Social movement studies have since their inception been aimed towards uncovering factors that are more or less conducive to the rise of popular movements. Less systematic research has been conducted on how these mobilizations matter in the polity they arise, and whether they have any significant impact or not. Several authors have pointed to this deficiency within the literature (Berkowitz 1974; Gurr 1970; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988; Tarrow 1993). This might seem puzzling since questions of if and how much social movements matter is important precisely because we assume that they can influence politics and society (Amenta et al. 2010, 292). This is not to say that questions related to impact have been disregarded completely in earlier publications.

Gamson's (1990) widely cited work has been treated as a seminal contribution to the question of how and when social movements matter. It has for more than four decades been considered the most ambitious effort to analyze social movement impact (Giugni 1999). Even though it sparked a rich discussion on the topic, questions of impact have had a firm backseat role in social movement studies in comparison to their emergence. Thus, little systematic research of movement impact has been the consequence (Giugni 1998, 371).

Contributions since the turn of the millennium have attempted to rectify this shortcoming. The surge of scholarly publication on the end result of mobilization processes bear witness to this (Amenta et al. 2010, 288). It is in the interest of this thesis to add to this particular aspect as well, to provide an alternative view that explores variables that may negatively affect prospects for impact when it comes to instances of diaspora mobilization, and specifically the Syrian diaspora. The following section will first dissect issues related to assessing social movement impact then, secondly, uncover the main debates regarding movement impact and attempt to produce viable operationalizations that seem conducive for the purposes of the empirical analysis. This is done carefully as I acknowledge Goertz's argument that conceptualization of both dependent and independent variables have implications for assessing causality and making scientific inference (2005, 19). Lastly, I will deduct propositions in an effort to explain why the Syrian diaspora movement has been unable to exert influence on host state politics.

2.5 Conceptualizing impact and the absence of impact

The study of social movement outcomes invites for a challenging theoretical balancing act. How do social movements matter and how do we know *if* they matter at all? The latter question relates to the establishment of causality between social mobilization and impact, which is a difficult task (Rucht 1992; Giugni 1998). This will be dealt with at length in chapter 3. Despite the complexity of assessing causality, the primary reason for studying social movements is precisely because we assume they represent an important force for social and political change (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988, 727).

It has also been argued that a critical problem in the study of social movement outcomes stem from the issue of conceptualizing success (Amenta and Young 1999; Burstein 1999; Kriesi et al. 1995). The success of movements have been of primary interest in the study of social movement impact, however, the lack of consensus on definitions have produced substantial variation in the treatment of the phenomena in the literature. Underscoring this point, Tarrow notes that “a number of taxonomies have been produced – almost as many as there are studies of the subject” (2011, 215).

I will here assess seminal contributions to this topic in an effort to produce a conceptualization of impact that conforms with the purposes of this thesis, namely the study of *no* impact. The methodological option of studying no effect is a promising avenue that can help improve our understanding of the link between social movements and impact, as argued by Giugni (1999 xxiv). It is important to stress that no impact is also an effect. As such, cases that show no impact are negative cases where the outcome of interest was possible (Goertz 2005, 178). These social movements could have theoretically affected host state policies and are consequently not irrelevant cases, cases that should be neglected because impact was an impossible outcome (this will be elaborated upon in chapter 3). I now turn to a discussion of social movement success because a clarification of this concept is a necessary precursor to understand failure or no impact.

2.5.1 Social movement success

Based on the notion of success, Gamson (1990, 28–29) developed a twofold conceptualization of social movement success. To be rendered successful, social movements had to be perceived by its political adversaries as valid representatives of a legitimate cause. As such, movement

success was based on the idea of “acceptance” by other political actors. The other aspect of success emphasized the acquisition of “new advantages” for the social movement constituency. Achieving a particular policy change with benefits for the social movement constituency was considered a success.

A similar, albeit alternative view of success was suggested by Schumaker (1975). Defining success in terms of political responsiveness, he proposed to categorize success through five ordinal stages: access, agenda, policy, output, impact. The distinction between adoption of legislation (policy), the enforcement of legislation (output), and whether legislation had the intended effect (impact), were the most notable developments to conceptualization of social movement outcomes. This was because it emphasized the political process and downplayed the acquisition of visible benefits that was the focal point of Gamson’s definition (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995, 282).

In an effort to expand on these authors’ conceptualization of movement success, some scholars introduced a structural dimension of social movement success (Gurr 1980; Kitschelt 1986; Burstein 1985; Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995). In certain instances, social movements are interested in changing fundamental political structures in society. By altering institutional arrangements, such achievements would not only benefit themselves, but everyone within the polity (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995, 283). As Amenta and colleagues note (2010), the extension of democratic rights and practices have been the most frequent structural impacts produced by social movements. The acquisition of voting rights for women and the political inclusion of African Americans in the American politics serve as examples (McAdam 1982; McCammon et al. 2001).

It is important to note that structure-level impacts have received less attention in the literature compared to policy gains. In this thesis, structural impact is left out of the equation for two reasons. Firstly, the diaspora’s political motivation and intentions has never been to change political structures of their host states. The purposes of mobilization has been aimed primarily to change the host state’s policy approach to the homeland conflict. Secondly, changing structures is not a realistic possibility of their mobilization. Indeed, the movement’s relatively limited constituency largely excludes this as a plausible outcome.

Having been the focal point of studies of movement outcomes, defining social movement impact in terms of successful policy or structural change has not been without criticism. “By any standard, “success” and “failure” hardly describe most of the effects” (Tilly 1999, 268).

Giugni (1999) raises three particular concerns when it comes to limiting social movement impact to measures of success. Firstly, a focus on success or failure assumes that social movements consist of homogeneous actors with identical goals and motives. This ignores the vast complexity of most social movements and disregards the cross-cutting identities that constitutes them (as noted above, this also applies to diaspora). As has been noted by some authors, movement goals are dynamic; they change over time and they tend to vary among different SMOs and individuals to focus on within a particular movement (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995). Additionally, incremental successes and failures tend to make movements adjust their strategies and objectives (Gupta 2009). Secondly, achievement of goals and realization of failure is in the eye of the beholder. Observers and participants of social movements may identify this aspect differently. In addition, challengers within a given social movement may also perceive their success of mobilization on different terms. It is, therefore, crucial to conceptualize impact objectively in an effort to reduce ambiguity. Thirdly, success or failure overstates contender's intentions. In some instances, the social movement's impact are unintentional.¹⁶

By studying success and failure exclusively, we limit the consideration of many other possible political and societal impacts (Amenta et al. 2010, 290). This has urged scholars to focus more explicitly on the wide range of different *consequences* of social mobilization (Rucht 1992; Andrews 1997; Giugni 1998; Giugni 1999; Amenta and Young 1999; Tilly 1999; Amenta, Caren, and Olasky 2002; Amenta, Caren, and Olasky 2005; Giugni 2004; Amenta et al. 2010; Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016).

Rucht (1992) offers a conceptualization of movement consequences that distinguishes between two dimensions: internal or external effects, and intended or unintended effects. This is a useful way of looking at mobilization because it allows for the assessment of impact on participants of movements and their identity (Melucci 1996; Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016) along with external political aspects such as those covered previously. It is also useful since it accentuates the distinction between goal-related subjective outcomes and objective effects. For example, the introduction of new legislation that conforms to social movement claims are often intentional consequences of their mobilization. On the other hand, higher levels of repression and the establishment of powerful counter-movements are usually unintended.

¹⁶ Unintentional, but may be positive as well as negative for the movement in question (Giugni 1999).

Due to the peculiar difficulties of studying absence of impact, I employ a conceptually narrow and tangible definition of movement outcomes. This is to prevent the fuzziness of studying less tangible conceptions such as general awareness among politicians and the public, and cultural effects. Policy changes are easier to measure, hence why it has served as the focal point in the movement impact literature (Burstein 1985; Amenta, Carruthers, and Zylan 1992; Tarrow 1993; Costain and Majstorovic 1994; Burstein and Linton 2002). While studying policy change is a legitimate task in itself, when concerned with extensive social mobilization with *no* political effect, policy change is virtually the *only* plausible approach. This way we can track movement goals and compare them empirically with political processes.¹⁷ Despite the issues of determining movement goals as discussed above, this approach facilitates a rigid exploration of causal mechanisms.

In Rucht's terms (1992), I argue for a delimitation of social movement impact that stress the *external* (policy change) and *intended* (goals) effects.¹⁸ No impact is then in this thesis the absence of either of these two elements. This conceptualization is then concerned with the diaspora movement's "leverage over political processes and the increase in political returns" political mobilization yields (Amenta et al. 2010, 290). To identify movement goals, I employ a dichotomous typology of *ideal* and *pragmatic* goals. This resembles Beckwith's (2016) general and specific goals, which allows us to separate objectives based on its scope. I treat the question of causality in the methods chapter (3).

Having carefully conceptualized impact and no impact for the purposes of this thesis, I now turn to questions of which explanations are best suited to explain this particular outcome. The proposed independent variables build on existing literature on this topic and reflect the larger debates on social movement emergence covered above.

2.6 Analytical framework – What can explain the lack of impact?

In this section, I will lay out some theoretical propositions, which highlight possible explanations for the Syrian diaspora movement's absence of political influence. This is done by separating *internal* and *external* factors in an effort to isolate organizational and contextual

¹⁷ It is important to note that movement goals are dynamic; they may be altered as the context changes.

¹⁸ Intended effects or goals are assessed in section 5.2.3. These are formally stated objectives of SMOs (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995, 282).

explanations and construct a selection of testable theoretical inquiries.¹⁹ Although scholars have called for greater incorporation of these two groups of explanations, separating them here is more for the interest of clarification and systematic deduction of possible explanations. I do not claim that internal and external explanations should be kept apart. On the contrary, I follow conventional social movement impact literature in bridging these two groups of explanations. The distinction between them tends to be more apparent than real. For example, movement-controlled variables often depend very much on the context in which the movement is situated (Giugni 1999, xx).

2.6.1 Internal explanations – Mobilization structures

One of the primary findings in Gamson's *Strategy of Social Protest* (1990) was that effectiveness of popular movements were largely dependent on the degree of organization within a movement. By studying American movements between 1800 and 1945, he found that highly bureaucratized, centralized and unfractionalized movements tended to produce favorable outcomes, corresponding to some predetermined goals. This followed the logic of the resource mobilization theory, stipulating that organizational strength would more effectively enable the translation of grievances into movement activity. For movements to achieve their goals, this was simply a necessity (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

A number of scholarly publications have yielded similar findings that highlight the importance of organizational aspects of movements. Shorter and Tilly (1974), in their research on strikes in France, find that organizational variables significantly affects prospect for movement impact. Furthermore, Staggenborg (1988), in her analysis of the pro-choice movement in the United States, argues that professionalization and increased organizational formalization, at the very least, has consequences for movement sustainability in the longer run.

More recent contributions also support these claims. Ganz (2000) contends that social movement organizations with strategic resources are more likely to prevail whereas Andrews (2004) stress resourceful movement infrastructures as crucial explanations for policy implementation induced by the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Similarly, Martin (2007; 2008), in his studies of the revitalized labor movement in the US, finds that the organization and bureaucratization of SMOs have major implications for movement outcomes. Another

¹⁹ These theoretical inquiries are not testable in a quantitative "hypothesis-testing"-sense. They are merely suggestive questions that serve the purpose of guiding the empirical analysis.

study that similarly stresses the importance of movement-level variables in explaining outcomes is that of Olzak and Ryo (2007). They find in their study of black civil rights organizations that organizational diversity is key for reaching desirable policy outcomes. In particular, tactical diversity, they claim, is positively correlated with the likelihood of desirable movement outcomes.

Despite its popularity, the tradition of explaining movement outcomes by emphasizing movement-controlled variables has not been accepted without due criticism. Perhaps the most widely cited scholarly contribution in this respect, is that of Piven and Cloward (1977). Arguing in contradiction to Gamson's (1990) claims, they contend that well-organized and structured social movements are precisely the reasons why they fail to achieve political impact. Avoiding strong organizations was deemed crucial to maintain the disruptive potential of social movements which, they both tended to agree, were effective to achieve political influence.

Additional critique of the organizational explanations of impact tapped into the methodological flaws of Gamson's (1990) study. Goldstone (1980) criticized Gamson for basing his assessment on weak assumptions and that his assertions were spurious. By a reanalysis of the original data, Goldstone (1980) could find no significant indications that organization was key for favorable social movement impact.

The relative inconclusiveness of theory at this point makes it interesting to propose internal movement variables as explanations for the Syrian diaspora's absence of political influence. Plausibly, the diaspora's organizational and bureaucratic features along with its relative size can explain why it has been unsuccessful in its attempts to impact host state policies. I use internal explanations as a means to inquire into how particular internal developments have affected the diaspora's influence. While theory on internal explanations tend to focus specifically on questions of organization and resources, it will be interesting to see how the diaspora reflect these elements and if both diasporas show similar or different developmental trajectories, despite sharing the same outcome. In terms of internal explanations, I thus make the following proposition:

Internal factors, specifically mobilization structures, explain why the Syrian diaspora in the US and the UK failed to impact host state policies.

2.6.2 External explanations – National political context

Another strand of scholars have critiqued the social movement impact studies for paying disproportionately much attention to movement-level variables. Explaining political impact, or the lack thereof, must be done by looking at variables external to the movement. This follows the discussed political process theory which suggests that political context is the main element influencing movements' prospects for impact once challengers are mobilized (Amenta et al. 2010, 298). For example, Kitschelt (1986), in his analysis of the anti-nuclear movement in four European countries, concluded that political opportunity structures were important factors that determined impact of social movements. If the polity had some degree of responsiveness to external claims and strong state capacity to implement policies, then movement impact was much more probable. In their study of new social movements in Western Europe, Kriesi and his collaborators (1995) correspondingly found that political opportunity structures related to cleavage structures and state strength, strongly affect prospects for collective action impact.

In assessing external explanations, or political context,²⁰ I draw on Tarrow's conception of political opportunity structures as established above. To reiterate, the indicators he identified were *access*, *policy alignment*, *divided elites*, and *influential allies*. In addition to these, I add *public opinion*.

Increased *access* to the political system followed the established theories on political opportunity, as covered above (Eisinger 1973; Kitschelt 1986). Access to central avenues for contentious activities as well as to important stakeholders is crucial to influence politics. Without it, movements are likely to be unsuccessful. For example, McAdam (1982) argues that a favorable political opportunity structure produce expanded political access which consequently increases the likelihood of collective action. In turn, this improves their bargaining position and increase the prospect of political impact.

Shifting alignments within the political system often relates to the change of power holders. This factor was connected to democratic procedures within democracies, most frequently elections. By altering those in power, new opportunities could emerge for movements. Particular parties or political constellations were more or less receptive of movement claims on certain issues than others. Over the course of the Syrian conflict, there has not been an alteration

²⁰ The literature is unclear when it comes to distinctions between political context and political opportunity structures. I use political context as the overarching cluster of variables and political opportunity structures as a variable with several indicators.

of political alignment in neither the US nor the UK. While political alignments can in some cases be an important factor, in others, *shifting policy alignments* can be crucial. I argue that by looking specifically at how host states change their policy approach, we can better understand movement impact or the absence of it.

Divisions within and among political elites is an indicator understood as important to spur greater collective mobilization. Splits lead to the emergence of new alliance partners for social movements, increasing the incentives to mobilize. On the other hand, elites may see an opportunity to regain power by aligning with the movement (Tarrow 2011, 166). *Divided elites* are in terms of impact seen as an opportunity for movements to gain important allies that can further their cause (Piven and Cloward 1977). The effects of both shifting alignments and elite division has been pointed out as central factors for the successful mobilization of farmworkers in the United States (Jenkins and Perrow 1977), and the opposition movements in Latin America in the 1970s (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986).

The importance of support, or relational as opposed to pure structural conceptions of opportunity structures, have been stressed by some scholars. Tarrow (2011) contends that the presence of *influential allies* are crucial for movement impact. Having friends within the political establishment greatly increase political leverage and simultaneously reduce the chance of repression or being ignored altogether. The idea of support and alliance structures was first systematically studied by Lipsky (1968) who maintained that third parties were important for movements to be successful in the long run. While presuming that social movements were inherently powerless, having support as a political resource was deemed essential to influence politics. In his studies of racial riots, Schumaker (1975) in a similar vein conclude that policy responsiveness was indeed affected by the presence of political support.

While support by influential allies are important for social movements, so are the support from the public. A sympathetic *public opinion* is important because garnering broad support can yield additional political capital. The interest of reelection makes public opinion particularly important for political elites (Elster 1992, 177). Strong support by the public can thus exert additional pressure on lawmakers to accept claims made by movement actors. Some of the most extensive studies of social movements and public opinion is that of Paul Burstein (1979; 1985; 1998). For example, in his studies of the Civil Rights movement and anti-discrimination legislation, Burstein concludes that popular support for equality combined with broad demonstrations produced extensive policy changes on the matter. In the absence of public support, movement success was highly improbable. In their analysis of women's right

legislation, Costain and Majstorovic (1994) find that legislative change was the result of joint action by social movements and public opinion. McAdam and Su (2002) similarly show how movements influenced congressional voting on the Vietnam war in conjunction with changes in public opinion.

More recent contributions on the topic has been that of Giugni (2004) who emphasize how public opinion together with opportunity structures, including support of allied elites increased the likelihood of policy impact by the ecology, antinuclear and peace movements in the United States, Italy and Switzerland. In context of the Syrian civil war, the role of the diaspora in framing the conflict through various media has had major impact on the public's perspectives in Finland, the Netherlands, Russia, Sweden and Turkey, as argued by Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013). As contended, this can in turn affect policy-makers' decisions.

Summarized from the previous paragraphs, a favorable political context would allow the Syrian diaspora movements to more effectively issue their claims toward the political elite and subsequently increase the prospects for policy influence. In the empirical analysis, I will identify the indicators mentioned above as either *opportunities* or *constraints* according to how they affect the movement's prospects for impact. In line with the theoretical arguments presented, external explanations can thus be rooted in the following proposition:

External factors, specifically national political context, explain why the Syrian diaspora in the US and the UK failed to impact host state policies.

2.6.3 External explanations – Framing the political discourse

It is also important that we pay ample attention to the cultural dimension of external variables when we deal with political context. A central criticism to the political opportunity structure is that it deals inadequately with cultural and discursive factors. As such, the inclusion of elite strategies and social cleavage structures into models of political opportunities have attempted to alleviate this theoretical shortcoming (Kriesi et al. 1995; Kriesi 2004). The segment of social movement research that introduced frame alignment models have showed the importance of developing movement frames that effectively link a movement with proponents through symbolic expressions that resonate with its constituencies (Snow et al. 1986). The drawback of these studies lie in their inability to explain why some frames succeed and others fail (Koopmans and Statham 1999, 228).

In their studies of the development of the modern extreme right in Germany and Italy, Koopmans and Statham (1999) and Koopmans and Olzok (2004) theorize and concludes that discursive opportunity structures can help explain social movement impact. In their view, discursive opportunity serves as a bridge between the institutional and the cultural dimensions of political context. Defined as the ideas which are rendered sensible, realistic and legitimate within a certain polity at a specific time, this conceptual innovation can help us understand the resonance of ideas in a given political and institutional setting (Koopmans and Statham 1999). It thus tackles the critique referred to above of disentangling framing and political processes. Through discursive opportunity structures, these two elements are connected.

In their application of discursive opportunities, Koopmans and Statham (1999) finds that a favorable combination of institutional and discursive opportunities are necessary preconditions for movement impact, whilst independently neither of them are sufficient explanations. A more recent and supportive contribution argues that the cultural context limits social movements' ability to affect public policy. The discursive elements of the context constrained the US women's jury movement's political influence (McCammon et al. 2007). In Indonesia, two social movements were able to diffuse their messages into the public sphere through the use of both public and social media. The positive representation in these avenues allowed the movements to garner both public and political support. Their ideas resonated well at that given time in Indonesian politics (Molaei 2015).

I would argue that discursive opportunities as understood by Koopmans and Statham (1999) are not entirely different from the concept of public opinion. In quantitative terms, we can expect these two elements to be positively correlated. If the public supports the claims of a social movement, it is a signal of discursive opportunities because the broader population renders the claims to some extent sensible, realistic and legitimate. Note that I do not equal these two variables. Public opinion can be very different from the opinions of powerholders. Which claims are considered sensible, realistic and legitimate may thus diverge between these targets of social movements.

While Koopmans and Statham (1999) and Koopmans and Olzok (2004) seeks to draw culture into political opportunity structures, I intend to keep them somewhat separate here for the purpose of analytical clarity. Indeed, it is not part of the traditional aspects of political opportunity and while serving as a theoretical bridge still, I maintain its explanatory power is best viewed under the rubric of framing. In relation to the puzzle of this thesis, the guiding theoretical proposition can thus be formulated:

External factors, specifically discursive opportunities, explain why the Syrian diaspora in the US and the UK failed to impact host state policies.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has provided a theoretical background which the analysis of the Syrian diaspora in the United States and the United Kingdom will be based on. By providing a brief overview of the development of diaspora theory and diasporas political mobilization, I hope to have illustrated the vast activities such expatriate communities may engage in and their potential political consequences. Treating them as social movements in a contentious relation with respective host states allow for a deep analysis of organizational strategies and how contextual variables, both domestic and international, may limit the movement's prospect for impact. It is imperative to note that these suggestive explanations are by no means mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the interplay of mobilization structures, national political context, and international political context can explain the absence of political impact. I will now move on to a discussion of the methods used as well as the broader methodological pillars of which this thesis rests.

3 Method and Research Design

3.1 Introduction

Choosing the best research design in any given research relies on the phenomenon studied and on the specific research question. It is thus necessary to question the value of the scientific approach we opt for in relation to the primary inquiry. The researcher must carefully consider, on the one hand, the particular choices made in the research process itself and, on the other, evaluate them *vis-à-vis* the general strategies and criteria that governs the entire scientific research enterprise. This reflects the primary distinction between method and methodology as proposed by Gerring (2012, 6).

The following chapter will consequently rest upon this distinction, prudently assess the choices made in the research process to ensure validity and transparency, and simultaneously touch upon the broader methodological questions in the social sciences. The assessment will include a justification of research design that binds together the theoretical foundation of this thesis with the procedures concerning data collection and analysis. Since I employ a paired comparison case study, I will first introduce case study research and then connect this to the paired comparison approach. This approach reaps the benefit of rich description found in case studies while adding a comparative element that offers important nuance and explanatory power. It is also necessary to provide an unbiased presentation of the method. Consequently, I therefore discuss both its strengths and shortcomings. Lastly, this chapter will shed light on the process of data collection, focusing on different aspects of the interview-process while highlighting some of the drawbacks of the data material. It should be clear that I employ a Weberian logic of research that aims at uncovering complex mechanisms and generate dense knowledge about specific processes and cases through the use of a narrative instrument of analysis (Mahoney 1999; della Porta 2008, 203). One may argue this is the only way to understand social mobilization.

3.2 The research question and its implication for the research design

As the research centers around the Syrian diaspora in the United States and the United Kingdom, the design implies a paired comparison case study. To reiterate, the research question

I intend to answer is: *Why has the Syrian diaspora failed to influence host state policies in the United States and the United Kingdom?* The objective of the thesis suggests attribution of causal mechanisms (*why* question) and thus it lends itself well to the use of a case study approach (Yin 2009, 9). Additionally, due to the complexity and intricate dynamics of the elements being investigated, the case study research as a type of qualitative approach trumps the use of advanced statistical methods, since such research enterprises are primarily concerned with parsimony and generalizability. With this choice, I go against the main-stream trend of modern social science, which tends to favor complex quantitative tools (George and Bennett 2005, 3). Supporting the choice of engaging in such methodological procedures is that social movement research tends to be frequently conducted in a case-study fashion. Most of these studies have been dedicated to research on particular movements or their dynamics over time. They have almost been inseparable from the nature of case studies (Snow and Trom 2002, 146). I therefore find it reasonable to follow the traditional “state of the art” in social movement theory and engage in case study procedures, albeit a comparative one.

As the goal is to obtain a holistic understanding of the Syrian diaspora movement and its inability to affect politics, the case study approach is deemed appropriate. It is a historically interpretive and causally analytic enterprise (Ragin 2014, 35), which allows us to study this contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin 2009, 18). That I employ case studies in a comparative fashion is a strength that allows for retaining the benefits of single case studies and concurrently reduce the probability of drawing incorrect conclusions. The data collected and the procedures for obtaining them reflects the methodological choice, as will be elaborated upon later.

3.2.1 What is a case and what is a case study?

There has been widespread conceptual confusion when it comes to defining the case and the case study approach in social sciences. Treating case study research as synonymous to the broader category of qualitative research, or the more limited ethnographic method of data collection or process-tracing procedures, simply distorts the uniqueness of the approach. It is considered a definitional flaw by some scholars (Yin 2009, 17). In this thesis, a case can be defined theoretically as “an instance of a class of events” (George and Bennett 2005, 17). As such, it refers to research on a scientific, bounded phenomenon that is subject to a larger category of similar phenomena – a single instance or a variant of something (Snow and Trom

2002, 147). The Syrian diaspora in their respective host states are thus cases of diaspora mobilization, which have failed to obtain substantial policy influence.

As Creswell notes (2012, 97), the case study can also be viewed as a *methodology* covering the procedure of scientific inquiry more broadly rather than being simply a method, or a tool, that helps us understand social phenomena. As such, it is neither the opposite of, nor incompatible with quantitative research tools. Despite traditionally resonating better with qualitative scholars, the case study may in fact employ both statistical methods and be based on a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative evidence. Indeed, the case study enterprise has been considered an “all-encompassing research method – covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (Yin 2009, 18).

Gerring’s (2004) suggested definition of the case study reflects the aforementioned propositions, but specifies that the *study* of cases is an intensive industry which seeks to understand the larger category of cases. The intensity of such studies is a testament to its requirement of extensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied. I would argue that research on the Syrian diaspora could also generate valuable information that could serve well for similar case studies in the future. In this sense it can be of analytical value because it allows us to generalize theoretical propositions rather than producing statistical generalizations (Yin 2009, 15).

3.1 The comparative method

The comparative method is generally considered as distinct from the statistical method, mostly due to the difference in number of observations included in the research. The statistical method consistently demands large-N data that allows for advanced statistical manipulation in order to infer causal relations and extend results to the wider population. This demand is also its Achilles-heel, as smaller samples tend to provide statistically insignificant results, rendering the research enterprise questionable. The comparative method and the strategy of paired comparison can be useful tools under such circumstances and, depending on the social inquiry upon which the research builds, are sometimes superior to statistical methods. It is often considered the preferred strategy for political and social scientists studying institutions and macropolitical phenomena, where the number of cases tend to be few – usually between two and twenty (della Porta 2008, 202). The comparison between two cases and the overarching

meso- and macrostructural focus in this thesis reflect these conditions, thus making it a fruitful approach.

3.1.1 The strategy of paired comparison

Employing the strategy of paired comparison is conducive to the goal of answering the research question put forth in this thesis. Despite being little theorized, it is a widely used strategic approach in comparative analysis (Tarrow 2010b, 230). Seminal contributions to the social sciences ranging from Tocqueville's comparison between the United States (2006) and France (2008) to Putnam's (1994) analysis of Northern and Southern Italy, all engage in the strategy of paired comparison. It is therefore reasonable to assess its virtues and caveats.

It is important to stress that the strategy of paired comparison is not only a residual category of multiple or single case studies or a degenerate version of large-N comparison. It is a comparative method in its own right (Tarrow 2010b, 232). Substantial literature on qualitative research mentions paired comparison but these contributions often confine the approach to just another variant of case studies, advise researchers to engage in other methods, or simply avoid explaining its theoretical and practical utility altogether (Przeworski and Teune 1970; King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). This is because it is deemed inferior to other methods that provide a higher degree of confidence (Smelser 1976, 157). King, Keohane and Verba argue that paired comparisons, along with case studies in general, can yield valid causal inferences, but that they tend to remain largely descriptive and unable to sufficiently explain outcomes (1994, 45).

I contend that paired comparisons, including this research, indeed do have descriptive elements, but that these elements can be used in an interpretative fashion to suggest causal links between the independent and dependent variable. To an extent, this corresponds to the notion of process-tracing, a technique that attempts to trace links between variables and allow for the inference of causality without the use of large-N comparison (Tilly 1997; George and Bennett 2005; Bennett 2010; Tarrow 2010a). While I do not engage directly in the method of process-tracing, I identify such mechanisms to provide suggestive answers as to why the diaspora has failed in its aim to affect host state policies. This does not, however eradicate the issue of equifinality, a situation of multiple causal paths (George and Bennett 2005, 20; Gerring 2012, 226). Equifinality remains a possibility and is a persistent problem when studying complex social processes such as social movements (Wagemann 2014, 52). I thus stress that the causal linkages explored in this thesis are suggestive.

Furthermore, it should be noted that paired comparisons also have other distinctive, positive attributes that can aid us in theoretical development as well as pitfalls and shortcomings, of which the researcher must be aware in order to prevent diluting the value of the research altogether. As Sidney Tarrow (2010b) maintains, some of its features are naturally shared with case studies, such as the intimacy of analysis, the insistence on deep background knowledge, and the facilitation of causal-process analysis. It thus retains some of the most pertinent and crucial advantages of case studies in that it still fosters “thick description” of complex social phenomena (Geertz 1973). It opens up for analyzing potential causal mechanisms in the studied cases (George and Bennett 2005, 21). Moreover, it adds three additional features that strengthens the case study toolbox for qualitative researchers.

Firstly, and similarly to experimental studies, the strategy of paired comparison provides the ability to compare the impact of a single variable or mechanism on outcomes of interest. This is distinct from single-case studies in that it allows for *comparison* of the cause-of-effect relationship in the two cases. This increases the robustness of the findings. Secondly, paired comparisons can help eliminate the possibility that the dependent variable can have occurred even in the absence of the independent variable. This substantially increases the inferential power of the paired comparison strategy. Thirdly, by engaging in dual-process tracing, we can prevent overestimation of variables, as is a common issue with single-case studies (Tarrow 2010b, 244).

In sum, the paired comparison approach offers a combination of rich, descriptive analysis without presenting too strong of an analytical challenge that multicase research does. We can tease out general theoretical propositions and evaluate them through rigorous empirical narration. While it would be ideal to employ the strategy of most-similar-systems design or most-different-systems design to be able to single out converging or diverging elements of the two cases, these strategies are unsuited. The two cases do have similarities and differences that receive due attention in the empirical chapter, but they do not correspond to fixed and predetermined categories. By using the paired comparison approach, we can highlight observed similarities and differences by analyzing complex empirical material (Tarrow 2010b, 243).

3.1.2 Cases under study

Having discussed the central concepts of diaspora and social movement, I will now turn to exploring the cases in this study. The Syrian diaspora can be perceived as a case of multiple

larger classes. Thus, active choices need to be made in order to delimit the scope of the research. This is unproblematic and rather a necessity for any kind of research enterprise. The overarching research question and the theoretical proposals in the theory chapter are useful tools in this regard because they help determine what classes are relevant for the purpose of the thesis (George and Bennett 2005, 18).

The class of which the cases under study are cases of is *social movements*. Furthermore, the cases are instances of diaspora-organized social movements, which then acts as a sub-category of social movements. To meet the ultimate research objective of theorizing why such movements fail to influence host state policies, the particular cases of Syrian anti-regime diaspora in the US and the UK serves as particular instances of this type of collective mobilization. As such, they correspond to the definitions of *diaspora* and *social movement* as presented in chapter 2.

3.2 Methodological challenges

3.2.1 Selection bias – a natural consequence of the research question

Selecting cases on the dependent variable has been a source of critique to case studies and paired comparison case studies (Geddes 1990; King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). This is called selection bias and occurs when the “[...] selection process in either the design of the study or the real-world phenomena under investigation results in inferences that suffer from systematic error” (D. Collier and Mahoney 1996, 59). Thus, by using the outcome on the dependent variable as guidance for case selection is inherently problematic because it affects the answers we get from the analysis.

I do acknowledge that this thesis does have a case selection bias. However, this problem must neither be overstated nor understated. While the choice of the Syrian anti-regime diaspora correspond to the notion of having invariant dependent variables, they both illustrate an understudied social process that cannot be chosen by random sampling. I seek to study the particular occurrence of a phenomenon (no influence), which inherently means selecting on the dependent variable. The outcome *is* the occurrence of the phenomenon. Studying the absence of political impact requires the choice of cases where we observe “no effect”. As such, the cases in this study are negative cases and not *irrelevant* cases, a selection problem that is much more

severe. Negative cases are used to test theorized propositions while irrelevant cases are not useful for testing theory at all (Goertz 2005, 159).

Furthermore, selecting cases on the dependent variable is sometimes a fruitful way to discover potential causal paths and variables that lead to the outcome on the dependent variable (George and Bennett 2005, 23). Testing the theoretical propositions put forth in this thesis can be done at a later stage against cases which do have variance on the dependent variable.

3.2.2 Causality in social movement impact research

It has been noted by several authors that linking social movement action to identified policy changes is a demanding task (Giugni 1999). If not outright impossible, identifying causal relationships in this field is challenging because we cannot be certain of whether the outcome could have been there in the absence of movement activity. As such, a variety of social factors unknown to the analyst can, in many instances, be the variable x that lead to the outcome y . This was what I defined as equifinality above. In order to deal with the causality-issues in social movement impact research, Giugni (1999) proposes several methodological choices. This thesis follows some of these suggestions, which arguably strengthens the validity of the propositions. However, I stress that the goal in this thesis is merely to *propose* theoretical explanations for the lack of movement impact, not generalize these findings to the wider population of movements.

Firstly, I gather data not only on movement-particular variables, but also on contextual elements such as political structures and other actors. “By gathering data widely, we can control for the role of other actors and, hence, make a better assessment of the movement’s actual impact on the observed change” (Giugni 1999). In this thesis, that would be the absence of change rather than observed change. The most relevant actors are political elites within the executive administrations as well as within the legislatures. By doing this, I can, to a certain extent, control for the role of other actors, easing the difficulty of measuring actually observed movement strategies and its absence of impact. There are however data limitations on external elements, as accounted for in the next section.

Secondly, the dynamic approach employed in this research allows for singling out which important mechanisms can help explain the outcome under study. Analyzing the Syrian diaspora in a temporal manner strengthens the chance of deriving which mechanisms lead to

the studied outcome. As argued by Amenta et al. (2010, 300), historical analyses of processes are the best way to examine movement influence and, arguably, the absence of it.

Thirdly, studying how social movements fail to impact policies is an original way to theorize about movement impact. Studying only cases where movements do impact policies ignores the other side of the question, which may hide certain sets of explanations. Without generalizing my findings, I can contribute to the social movement impact literature by linking mechanisms to movement impact *failure*.

3.3 The process of data collection

To conduct this research, data has been compiled through extensive use of primary and secondary sources. Material from primary sources are predominantly in-depth interviews and conversations with members of the Syrian diaspora. These sources have provided the research with a unique opportunity to analyze internal dynamics within the diaspora while simultaneously revealing political perceptions and beliefs. To increase the reliability of the research and to verify the consistency of presented arguments, secondary source material has been used. This part of the data contains newspaper articles, reports, official statements and briefs, and information gathered from online sites otherwise rendered important for the research question. By triangulating different types of evidence, the findings are likely to be more convincing and accurate (Yin 2009, 116). Secondary data thus confirm and augment evidence collected from primary sources. Overall, it strengthens the accuracy of the research enterprise.

It must be noted, however, that the data has clear limitations. Interview data yield valid information on internal aspects of the movements, but are imperfect to account for the broader national political contexts. A natural consequence of the collected data is that the internal variables discussed in the theory chapter receives greater attention compared to external variables. Alternative sources help alleviate this shortcoming, but it remains a drawback of the research as it would clearly have benefited from interviews of mobilization targets. Additionally, the information from interviews concerning external variables reflect perspectives and attitudes. They may not necessarily represent an unbiased assessment of reality.

3.3.1 Fieldwork experience and interviews

The collection of data from primary sources took place between November 2015 and January 2016. I had two trips to London and one visit to Washington, D.C. in order to interview informants. Particularly two issues challenged my ability to acquire informants for the research project. The first was that most of my interviews were conducted close to the Christmas holidays and simultaneously with the Syrian opposition conference held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. These two factors made it increasingly difficult to get hold of notable movement actors.

To approach the Syrian diaspora, I used several different strategies. Firstly, I sampled purposefully by using the strategy of snowballing or chaining (Creswell 2012, 158). This strategy entails using informants to acquire access to other informants. This was especially important in the beginning of the process due to the limitation of my network within the Syrian diaspora. Secondly, I targeted individuals I identified as important by their affiliation with different SMOs. E-mails and direct phone calls as means of direct contact were effective in the pursuit of certain individuals. Phone calls were particularly effective because it reduced refusal rates substantially. Talking with potential informants on the phone made it more difficult for them to turn down my commitment.

Overall, the impression was that the diaspora was responsive, but occupied. Responsive based on the number of replies relative to the outreach, but occupied because of the difficulty I experienced scheduling interviews. In total, I conducted 14 in-depth interviews²¹ for the research project. These interviews were semi-structured and contained open-ended questions that facilitated conversation. In this way, the informants could discuss themes they themselves deemed important regarding the overarching topic and simultaneously establish rapport, which is important in qualitative interviews (Leech 2002; Diccico-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). Additionally, it allowed me as researcher to explore deep social and personal matters, such as emotional bonds to the diaspora and the homeland as well as internal dynamics of the diaspora's political mobilization. Open-ended inquiries also maximizes the response validity of interviews (Aberbach and Rockman 2002).

It should be noted that the research was subject to what Woliver (2002) calls serendipity. One of my informants allowed me to participate in a diaspora-organized event while I was in the

²¹ The data gathered from primary sources are unfortunately imbalanced. Ideally, the number of informants would be equal for both cases. However, I conducted 10 interviews with informants in the Syrian diaspora in the US and 4 in the UK. While the number reflects disparity, it does not reveal anything about the quality of the data.

field in Washington, D.C. This fortunate event allowed me to extend my network and schedule additional interviews with important diaspora figures. While this is suboptimal from a scientific point of view, it still plays a big role in fieldwork research.

4 Background – Syrian Migration and the Uprising

In this chapter, I provide a brief political timeline of the Syrian conflict, paying particular attention to its gradual development and to host state response. I then illuminate the formation of Syrian diasporas in the two respective host countries, focusing primarily on migratory history and how the Arab uprisings were a crucial window of opportunity to mobilize both latent identity and political views towards the regime. Finally, I highlight some characteristics of the Syrian diaspora in the US and the UK after its formation. By putting these elements in perspective, I argue we will get a more holistic picture of the Syrian diaspora's attempts at influencing host state policies. It also provides the reader with a necessary introduction to two diaspora communities that have remained largely unstudied until recently.

4.1 The Syrian uprising in 2011 and host state response

The eruption of nation-wide protests in Syria in 2011 caught many scholars by surprise. Even the Syrian regime, that argued that Syria's exceptionalism in defying Israel and the US granted them with immunity to the regional upheavals, were surprised to see internal unrest. In their perspective, the regime reflected the views of the Syrian people (Lundgren-Jörum 2012). When protests spread from the Daraa Governorate to Latakia, Homs, Idlib and Deir ez-Zor, it posed the most serious threat to the Assad regime in decades (Leenders 2013). Responding with brutal force, the conflict soon turned violent with the emergence of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), made up of army defectors and civilian resistance fighters, and supported by the diaspora. Seizing Aleppo in Northern Syria, the rebel-fighters gained the upper hand in the conflict in 2012. At this point, it resembled a civil war rather than merely social unrest. A number of foreign fighters entered the fray, both on the rebel and regime side, further escalating levels of violence and increasing the number of casualties. The diaspora called desperately for greater support to the opposition fighters, but expressed frustration on the level of Western assistance: "you can't stop barrel bombs with fruit baskets" (McKelvey 2015). With help from Iranian militias, Hezbollah and the Russian air force, the Syrian regime regained much territory previously lost to the opposition. This transpired while Islamist insurgents increasingly provided the conflict with a radical expression, threatening to the original tenets of the revolution.

In terms of host state response and attitude towards the uprising, the US and the UK have, since its inception, vocally supported the revolution. Both have arguably had a persistently tense relationship to the Syrian Arab Republic. In 2002, for example, the US included Syria on the list of states that made up the “axis of evil”, a group of states allegedly sponsoring terrorism, leading to the introduction of economic sanctions. When the uprising began, most Western countries intensified these sanctions. While not outright supporting the opposition through military means,²² the question of humanitarian intervention and the implementation of no-fly zones have emerged at several points in the conflict. Most notably after the Assad regime in 2013, had reportedly used chemical weapons in Ghouta, a Damascene suburb. As we shall see later, the diaspora mobilized extensively for a humanitarian intervention and the implementation of a no-fly zone. Later that year, the US and Russia struck a deal that allowed experts to facilitate the removal of Assad’s chemical weapons arsenal. With the establishment of *Daesh* in 2014, a coalition of western countries, including the US and the UK, initiated an extensive airstrike campaign. Furthermore, they trained rebel factions to fight the extremist group but with little success (Moss 2016). Russia’s direct involvement in 2015 to fight terrorism alongside the Assad regime has made the Syrian conflict increasingly more complex. To avoid direct confrontation with Russia, the US and the UK are primarily concerned with the expansion of *Daesh* and other radical insurgents. While still calling for Assad’s resignation, both host countries have yet showed little will to actively facilitate its occurrence.

4.2 Syrian migration to the US and the UK

Since the conflict developed into full-scale war in 2011-2012, the vast humanitarian consequences have triggered waves of refugee flows outwards from Syria. In particular, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey were subject to hordes of refugees fleeing the conflict. In 2015, the number of refugees in these countries amounted to approximately four million (UNHCR 2015). Furthermore, many Syrians have travelled to Europe in search of asylum, settling mostly in Germany and Sweden, the two most receptive countries in the region. While these people have left their homeland predominantly as conflict-generated migrants, or refugees, Syrians have been crossing borders for much longer than simply since the emergence of the Syrian war and for a variety of reasons. I will therefore highlight some of the migratory trends towards the host countries in order to provide a nuanced perspective on the Syrian diaspora’s profile. It

²² There has been some support, for example CIA’s covert supply of arms to the FSA (Moss 2016). However, this support is very limited.

should be noted that migration data from the region is somewhat unreliable, in part because of temporality of data collection and poor documentation (al Khouri 2004, 21; Baldwin-Edwards 2005, 11; Sadeldine 2005, 266). However, we can still identify some broader trends.

The first Syrians to migrate to the host countries were leaving the region in pursuit of economic opportunities or as a result of land disputes, inter-tribal fighting or religious conflicts in the early 20th century (Schaefer 2008, 1291–92). As such, many of them, in particular those traveling to the US, were Arab Christians coming from what is modern day Lebanon. Syrians migrating to the UK at this time came mostly from the Aleppo textile industry and settled in Manchester together with other Arab communities. More recent arrivals have, similar to present day refugees, fled conflict, most notably in light of the brutal crackdown of the 1979-1982 Muslim Brotherhood uprising that culminated in the Hama massacre. Many of these were religious figures who went into exile after the Muslim Brotherhood were organizationally eradicated. Also parts of the intellectual elite left on the basis of political disagreements with Hafez al-Assad's regime. The intricate use of force, random disappearances, and other intimidation policies forced them to migrate from Syria to countries like the US and the UK (Sadeldine 2005; Qayyum 2011). Furthermore, the opportunities presented to skilled workers and entrepreneurs and favorable visa regulations have facilitated migration. With higher living standards, both the US and the UK were attractive, particularly between 1950 and 1990 (Sadeldine 2005, 270). Alongside these migrants have been Syrians seeking to advance their education. Despite intending to return to Syria as professionals, many of those who ventured abroad to study have remained in the host countries. Some have suggested that this has been on the basis of Syria's mandatory military service (Beitin 2012). This has also been a strong incentive for younger generations to leave Syria.

In sum, the Syrian expatriate communities in both host countries have emigrated from Syria for a variety of reasons and for the past century. It is thus important to emphasize that the diaspora constitutes a much more complex set of individuals than simply political refugees from the current war. It is a mixture of both old and recent, and voluntary and involuntary migrants. I now turn to a brief assessment of the formation of the Syrian diaspora and its most central characteristics. I argue that these characteristics largely reflect the migratory trends.

4.3 Formation of Syrian diaspora and some of its characteristics

In order to meet the necessary and sufficient conditions set out in the theory chapter, the Syrian expatriate communities must reflect all of the following indicators; dispersion, homeland orientation and boundary-maintenance (Brubaker 2005). Prior to the uprising in 2011, these conditions were only partially met. By highlighting the migratory trends towards the respective host countries, I illustrated in the previous paragraph how the Syrian expatriate communities, by default, qualify as a dispersed population. They have crossed state borders and dispersed from their original “center” (Safran 1991). With the exception of descendants from the earliest wave of Syrians migrating to the US and the UK who, according to one scholar, underwent a successful shift to Americanization (Gualtieri 2009, 157), most other Syrian migrants have retained a distinct identity vis-à-vis host countries. As such, boundary-maintenance through a resistance to fully integrate have occurred in both host countries. However, I would argue that in terms of homeland orientation, these communities have not sufficiently qualified. While many Syrians (including most of those interviewed) have returned to Syria frequently, their dominant source of value, identity and loyalty has arguably not been with Syria. Abroad, the homeland orientation has predominantly been based on an identification with the much broader and global Arab and Muslim diasporas – at least for the majority of the Syrian migrants. Their overlapping networks have led Syrians abroad to associate themselves with pan-Arab or pan-Islamic organizations instead of a national identity as “Syrians” (Jörum 2015; International Alert 2015). Syrian minorities, such as Syriac Christians and Kurds have kept to themselves and maintained their identity through exclusive cultural and religious organizations. As I will argue in the empirical analysis, historical conditions, such as the lack of a breathing civil society in Syria, along with the extensive reach of the Syrian security apparatus and a neglect of ethnic, religious and regional diversity in the education system, have all contributed to the absence of a Syrian diaspora prior to 2011.

The 2011 uprising produced a “window of opportunity” for these communities to capitalize on their Syrian heritage. This has been identified by other observers as well, some referring to the regional upheavals as a “diaspora spring” (Khan 2012). As argued by Jörum (2015), it remains a fact that the Arab uprisings were a starting point for many diasporas. As indicated in the previous section, many Syrians who had ventured abroad had done so for political reasons. They were thus particularly interested in identifying with their homeland in order to provide

support to the revolution. Furthermore, the groups who sought to affect policies in the host country, and subsequently conflict dynamics in the homeland, had an imperative to identify as Syrians. It was a prerequisite to become a legitimate voice of Syrians. However, as we shall see in the analysis, instead of organizing collectively on a Syrian identity only, other fragments of identity remained important, fostering cleavages in the US, for example. In the UK, greater acknowledgement of these differences led to a strong focus on community development to overcome these differences.

The fundamental issue is that the “Syrian identity” as an indicator for homeland orientation did not emerge until 2011. While the expatriate community had existed for a long time, there was little identification as Syrian, but rather a recognition of other identity labels. Also the Assad-regime realized the disconnect between expatriates and Syria and thus attempted to foster a stronger connection by establishing a Ministry of Expatriates in 2002 (Beitin 2012). Yet, it had little effect – particularly amongst those in opposition to the regime. While Syrian expatriates are not something new, the Syrian *diaspora* is.

It was reported prior to the uprising that the number of Syrians living abroad (worldwide) equaled the population of Syria, approximately 20 million (Beitin 2012, 2). Since neither of the host countries in this study have been the preferred destination for Syrian migrants, the diasporas are arguably relatively small. According to one report, the number of Syrians in the US amounted to 86,000 in 2014 (Zong 2015). However, this report does not consider the vast amount of second and third generation Syrians who are entitled to American citizenship, provided they are born in the country. As such, it is unable to capture the Syrian community – including those who are American but who for example after 2011 have increasingly connected with their Syrian heritage. Two of my informants estimated the number of Syrians to be somewhere around 250,000 to 400,000 (Informant 2, 2015; Informant 3, 2015). The only numbers I was able to obtain suggests that the Syrian community in the UK amounts to approximately 20,000 (International Alert 2015). While the numbers are unreliable, they still indicate that the Syrian diaspora in both host countries are relatively small, especially in comparison to other immigrant groups. The figures are likely to change in the near future due to new refugee resettlements.

In the US, most Syrians have settled in and around Chicago (Illinois), Detroit (Michigan) and in several cities in Texas and California (Zong 2015). Due to Washington, D.C. being a center for American policy-making, those engaged in politics have also been drawn to Virginia and

Maryland, neighboring Washington, D.C. In the UK, most of the diaspora are based in London and Manchester (International Alert 2015).

In terms of socio-economic status, the two diasporas are characterized by relatively high education levels and, at least in the US, high income levels. In the US, Syrian immigrants have higher family incomes in comparison with other immigrant groups (Zong 2015). Much of this stems from the large amount of Syrian physicians who ventured abroad. As one informant put it, “in all US towns there is a US Postal Office, a McDonalds, and a Syrian physician” (Informant 9, 2015). While having the same educational background and much of the same occupational profile, the income levels are lower for the diaspora in the UK. This has arguably had an effect on political mobilization, as we shall see later. Nonetheless, the Syrian diaspora in both countries are reasonably affluent. Having briefly discussed the Syrian uprising, the development of Syrian diasporas and some of its characteristics, I now turn to the empirical analysis.

5 Empirical Analysis

5.1 Introduction

In this section, I will provide an introduction to the mobilization efforts of the Syrian diaspora in the United States and the United Kingdom. This entails a coverage of their contentious and more formal political activities in the period following the Syrian uprising in 2011, the SMOs involved and their political objectives. I maintain that it is essential to understand the characteristics of their widespread mobilization efforts in order to assess the lack of significant policy impact. I will then draw on this to present a more specified analysis, discussing the cases in light of internal and external explanations as suggested in the theoretical chapter.

5.2 The development of political mobilization in the Syrian diaspora

Ever since the early risers in the Syrian uprising began protesting against the Ba’thist regime in the drowsy provincial town of Daraa in 2011 (Leenders 2013, 274–76), the diaspora in the United States and the United Kingdom has been engaged in a variety of forms of political mobilization in their host countries. Although not united in their political message from the outset, the attention devoted to developments in the homeland has since been noticeable. Five years of persistent mobilization against the regime in Syria has been paralleled by five years of consistent political mobilization in the two host countries. The methods for making claims have been a mixed use of indirect and direct channels of influence, ranging from extremes such as protest marches and demonstrations to formal political lobbying. As such, the diaspora has been vibrant on the political scene in their host countries, using a modern repertoire of collective action to encourage changes in host state policies.

Consequently, in the following section, I will describe the political mobilization in the two host countries that focuses on contentious and formal political mobilization. This distinction corresponds to social movements’ various strategic approaches to the policy process. The development of contentious mobilization has advanced from direct political aims to one that merely stands in solidarity. Advocacy and lobbying by a wide range of SMOs amount for the main modes of interest articulation and policy pursuit for the anti-regime diaspora in the

respective host countries today. Nevertheless, as we will see, the political gains have been marginal at best.

5.2.1 Contentious political mobilization – demonstrations and protests

As illustrated in the introduction, political mobilization in the diaspora developed in tandem with the Syrian uprising. When protests erupted in Daraa and spread to major cities like Aleppo and Idlib, similar protests developed in the diaspora in the US and the UK. Initial demonstrations and protests occurred predominantly outside the Syrian embassies in London and Washington D.C. in March and April of 2011. The principal claims reflected the calls for democracy, freedom and dignity put forth in the homeland. In addition, the mobilizers in the diaspora called particularly for the closure of the embassies and the expulsion of the Syrian diplomatic missions. In a strategic effort to influence national decision-makers, the diaspora movements also organized rallies that targeted political institutions such as Congress and the White House in the US, and Downing Street in the UK. While carrying the same overarching oppositional message, these rallies called for lawmakers and the two administrations to engage more directly in Syrian affairs in order to prevent indiscriminate killing of civilians. Despite asking for assertive and interventionist foreign policies, the diaspora was not asking for large-scale military intervention. As I will describe in section 5.2.3, the call for western involvement was limited to humanitarian intervention and increased pressure on the Assad-regime through increased economic sanctions and the use of diplomatic means.

It must be emphasized that in the early days of the Syrian uprising, extensive counter-mobilization by regime-sympathizers also took place. As one participant of the diaspora opposition explains: “[...] people were fingering to each other from both sides, throwing sometimes quarters and money on each other” (Informant 2, 2015). These tensions existed, and still does in the diaspora, but the presence of pro-regime supporters on the public scene has diminished in correlation with increased violence in the homeland. The condemnation of the regime’s brutality and the vocal support for the opposition has largely closed the doors for pro-regime activism and lobbyism in both of the host countries.

While the anti-regime protests have occurred with high frequency within both the US and the UK context, the organized marches and rallies seem to draw variable participation from the Syrian diaspora. Throughout 2011 and 2012 several events were organized in both London and

Washington, D.C.; some organized by the diaspora itself, others coordinated by human rights activists and general supporters of the Syrian revolution.²³ On average, demonstrations tend to draw approximately 1000-1500 attendees from the Syrian communities (Informant 2, 2015; Informant 3, 2015). However, I would argue that these numbers are largely unreliable. It is inherently difficult to assess the exact numbers of participants in such demonstrations. Yet, as one diaspora activist notes, despite the limited number of active supporters on street rallies, “[...] the rest of them, they do support, with their heart, but they try not to be visible” (Informant 3, 2015). Another participant offered a more nuanced view: “[...] some people don’t oppose the work, but they don’t believe it will go anywhere, so they are just not engaged at all. [M]ore people were involved in the beginning [...] and when they realized it was a marathon, not a sprint, [people] ran out of steam” (Informant 5, 2015). Some participants also come from other communal or ethnic groups, bolstering the number of protestors. For example, Libyans participated to show solidarity and support in the American context (Voice of America 2016). Correspondingly, a notable figure in the UK diaspora activist community said that the supporters of the Syrian revolution have increased over the course of its development. She maintains, “a lot of the efforts have come from non-Syrians” (Informant 10, 2016).

Besides carrying a political message in an attempt to influence host state politics, the organized demonstrations also express a strong sentiment of solidarity. The largest demonstrations that gained most attention and media coverage were the commemorations of the anniversary of the March 15 uprising. Usually organized as collaborative efforts among Syrian SMOs, these events seek to draw broader attention to the Syrian crisis and show visible support to those still fighting in the homeland. Whereas the political message to host country decision-makers remain an important impetus for mobilization, sympathy through symbolism has become increasingly important for the diaspora movements. They reify the revolutionary characteristics of their struggle, despite observers claiming the revolution descended to civil war already during the summer of 2012 (Holliday 2013). To an extent, the contentious aspect of the diaspora’s mobilization has become less about politics and more about solidarity. Raising the banners of solidarity is also a symbolic frame that larger segments of the diaspora can support and sympathize with. Internal disagreement on what host state policies to advocate for can explain this trend. I will elaborate on internal explanations further below.

²³ For example, the protests at the Syrian embassy in London in September 2011 was originally coordinated by Amnesty International (Jones 2011).

5.2.2 Formal political mobilization – SMO advocacy and lobbying

Less publicly visible, compared to street demonstrations, has been the development of extensive SMOs and advocacy organizations. These organizations served an imperative role in the political mobilization of the diaspora and the particularization and formalization of the diaspora’s interest claims. As the uprising developed in the homeland, these organizations emerged exponentially (Informant 2, 2015; Informant 4, 2015). The sudden increase in organizations can be attributed to the diverse demands of the heterogeneous Syrian expatriate community in the host lands as well as covering the organizational gap in the diaspora. Table 1 below gives a brief overview of the SMOs, that through my fieldwork and analysis, appear to be the most politically active and popular. It is by no means an extensive nor exhaustive list of Syrian anti-regime SMOs within the two diasporas; there exists a wide range of purely humanitarian groups focusing on aid, but still align with the opposition. Most notably, the ones organized in the extensive American humanitarian collaborative efforts called the American Relief Coalition for Syria (ARCS). There is also a number of student initiatives that are excluded from this list, such as Students Organize for Syria (SOS) in the US and Oxford Solidarity for Syria (OSS) in the UK.

Table 1: A selection of important Syrian anti-regime SMOs and advocacy organizations in the diaspora

Syrian SMOs in the United States	Syrian SMOs in the United Kingdom
Syrian American Council (SAC)	Rethink Rebuild Society (RRS)
Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS)	Syria Solidarity UK
Syrian Emergency Task Force (SETF)	Syrian Association of Yorkshire (SAY)
United for a Free Syria (UFS)	Syrian Welsh Society (SWS)
Association of Free Syrians (AFS)	Kurds House (KH)
Syrian Christians for Peace (SCP)	Peace & Justice for Syria (PJS)
American Syriac Organization (ASO)	Syrian Society of Nottinghamshire (SSN)
Syrian Expatriates Organization (SEO)	Scotland4Syria
Syrian American Alliance (SAA)	Syria Solidarity Campaign (SSC)

The Syrian SMOs perform three political functions in their efforts to impact host state policies according to their goals. Firstly, these organizations engage in media activities to portray themselves as legitimate makers of claims on behalf of the Syrian diaspora. By issuing press

releases and appearing in media to comment on internal developments in Syria, they seek to set the political agenda of decision-makers and the public (Andrews and Edwards 2004). They also play a key role in shaping the image of the Syrian conflict (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti 2013). In the US and UK context, media appearances have been an important aspect of their work. The Syrian American Council's (SAC) representatives appear frequently in national and international media to comment on events within Syria and to stress their political views on behalf of the Syrian community. Correspondingly, the Rethink Rebuild Society (RRS), among others, performs a similar role in the UK. The diaspora engage in media work in an effort to change the narrative of the conflict to one that corresponds with their anti-regime sentiment. "The way that the media works is that the narrative shifts very easily. And the media doesn't portray Syria as an uprising anymore, but now we talk about it in the context of other issues, like the refugee crisis or *Daesh*" (Informant 13, 2016). As such, it is crucial for them to not only set the agenda, but to change the existing narrative they perceive as an obstacle to the diaspora's interests. This will be covered more in-depth in section 5.5 on discourse framing.

Secondly, these organizations formulate policy options through briefs and direct interactions with policy-makers. For example, in 2013, SAC developed an extensive review of current American foreign policy towards Syria and offered solutions they deemed to be in line with the regional interests of the US and the Syrian-American community's political views (Ghanem and Hunt 2013). On the UK side, the RRS produced a similar brief that seeks to create common ground for UK policy-makers and how they should devise effective policies towards Syria (Rethink Rebuild Society 2015b). Additionally, these SMOs arrange meetings with Congressmen and Members of Parliament to issue their claims and lobby the political establishment directly (Informant 3, 2015; Informant 13, 2016). These activities contribute to the legitimization of the diaspora as representatives for Syrians. As such, they strive to become "accepted" as an actor in the policy process, following Gamson's (1990) typology of social movement success. As the analysis below will show, this has been a challenging aspect of the diaspora's mobilization in both the US and the UK.

Thirdly, the SMOs are important because they organize collective action. Political rallies and marches, as covered above, are usually organized through coordination between several of the important SMOs listed below. For example, the recent March 15 anniversary events in the US was organized by more than 30 different Syrian political, humanitarian and community organizations (Informant 7, 2015). The coordination is based on a notion that "size matters", which has, by some social movement scholars, been claimed to be important for political impact

(DeNardo 1985; Amenta et al. 2014). The nature of collaboration and coordination between different SMOs within the Syrian diaspora, or rather the absence of it within formal political mobilization, will be discussed more extensively in the discussion section below.

5.2.3 Political objectives – ideal and pragmatic goals

The diaspora in both cases have a wide set of political goals. As noted previously, such goals are dynamic and vary internally in social movements. Different SMOs often have different goals and these also tend to vary over time (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995). This section demonstrates this. I employ a typology of social movement goals that separates ideal goals from pragmatic goals.²⁴ It partially reflects the distinction between general and specific goals, which corresponds to a notion of particularity in movement objectives (Beckwith 2016, 61).

Ideal goals are ultimate visions that, if achieved, would radically reorder movement intentions and aims. These goals can be considered as overarching goals that help maintain movement coherence because of their general character. These goals are also the most difficult ones to achieve since they can be structural in character and because they are sometimes outside of the national political sphere the movement aims to influence. As such, pragmatic goals are often a sub-set of achievable goals that increase the prospects of reaching ideal goals. These are often much easier to achieve because they are more specific and, in some cases, easier for national policy-makers to implement.

Pragmatic goals are sometimes also a source of internal conflict within a social movement. They may reflect the perceptions of the SMO and sympathizers and not always that of the wider movement. I maintain that this distinction is useful because it allows for a particularization of policy-specific aims and thus differentiate between goals that are directly transferable to the national political processes and those that are outside the direct reach of these decision-makers. I will illustrate these differences subsequently by highlighting some of the ideal and pragmatic goals held by the Syrian diaspora SMOs, particularly SAC in the US and RRS in the UK.

Ideal goals

The ideal goals of the Syrian diaspora have been developed since the outset of the Syrian uprising in 2011. These have been relatively stable over the past five years with only minor

²⁴ This typology is a simple tool that allows for a rough systematization of the diaspora's political aspirations.

changes based on the intensification of violence and political developments in the host countries. These frames are legitimate and resonate well within the politically mobilized diaspora. Due to their solidarity approach to the revolution and general anti-regime sentiment, many of the SMOs have mission statements that is to develop a pluralistic, free, inclusive and democratic Syria. These goals are held by several organizations, such as SAC, SETF and UFS in the US. SAC, for example, state that their mission is to “empower the Syrian-American community to organize and advocate for a free, democratic, and pluralistic Syria through American support” (Syrian American Council 2016). While not having a mission statement seeking democracy and freedom as explicitly as SAC, the RRS in the UK seek to strengthen the position of Syrians within their host community. As such, their ideal goals are based more on improving the perception of the Syrian community in the host state through the empowerment of Syrians politically and socially (Rethink Rebuild Society 2016a). However, their political perspectives become clear when media appearances and press releases are scrutinized. RRS maintains that the brutal dictatorship of the Assad-regime is the root cause of the Syrian conflict (Informant 13, 2016). These SMOs are thus similar with respect to their ideal goals.

Pragmatic goals

The pragmatic goals serve as examples of concrete policy proposals that are being advocated for. While freedom and democracy in Syria are end-goals in their own right, pragmatic goals can be identified as policy options that need to be in place for the ideal goal to be achieved. Several proposals have been made over the past five years, and these have also fluctuated according to developments on the ground in Syria. I identify several particular goals advocated by the diaspora in the US and the UK. These are listed in Table 2 below, along with a brief summary of outcome.

Pragmatic goals seems to be the most widely contested internally – particularly the issues concerning support to the moderate military opposition. Thus, I do not claim that the entire diaspora supports this, but rather illustrate that some of these groups consider it an important policy and have thus mobilized in favor of it. The remaining pragmatic goals are less contested in the diaspora. The subsequent analysis do not intend to scrutinize the policy process for each of these goals separately. Such a task would be too demanding in terms of data collection and require greater intimacy to the actual processes. Instead, these goals serve as an indication of what has been attempted, and combined with ideal goals, will permeate through the evaluation of internal and external explanations as set out in the theory chapter.

Table 2: Political objectives of the Syrian diaspora and outcome

Type of goal	Political objective	Outcome
Ideal	Facilitate the ousting of the Assad-regime.	<i>Failure:</i> The Assad-regime continues to reign in Syria and, with the help of Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, gained a strong hold on key areas. Neither the US nor the UK have been convinced to bring about regime-change in Syria.
Pragmatic	Arming moderate rebels to fight the Assad-regime.	<i>Failure:</i> Rebels have not been armed for defeating the Assad-regime, but to fight <i>Daesh</i> . This happened as a response to the beheading of US journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff and not because of diaspora mobilization.
Pragmatic	Guarantee civilian protection. ²⁵	<i>Failure:</i> Implementing no-fly zones have been debated, but the vote in the UK parliament failed, and in the US, Obama pulled back his initiated Congress vote.
Pragmatic	Humanitarian intervention.	<i>Failure:</i> The US and the UK have considered intervening following the responsibility to protect doctrine, but neither have been convinced to do so.
Pragmatic	Remove obstacles hindering money transfer (<i>hawala</i>).	<i>Failure:</i> Syrian bank accounts are closed. Host states fear that Syrians in the diaspora may support terrorist groups in the homeland trumps.
Pragmatic	Substantially increase refugee resettlement rates.	<i>Failure:</i> Both host countries have increased refugee numbers since 2011, but the diaspora do not consider it substantial. They have not been able to convince policy makers to increase these numbers.

²⁵ The Syrian diaspora advocates for civilian protection through three different policies. 1) Safe zone: civilian areas protected and secured by ground troops, similar to safe areas implemented in Bosnia in 1993. 2) No-fly zone: areas with no regime aerial activity allowed (enforced by international coalition), such as employed in Libya in 2011. 3) No-bombing zone: ban on aerial bombardment enforced by ships in the Mediterranean (The Syria Campaign 2016)

5.3 Internal explanations – Mobilization structures

To demonstrate the rationale for this section of the thesis, I will reiterate the proposition made in the theory chapter is appropriate:

Internal factors, specifically mobilization structures, explain why the Syrian diaspora in the US and the UK failed to impact host state policies.

As such, the objective here is to lay out the characteristics of mobilization structures with the intention to scrutinize its effects on the diasporas political influence. Evidently, the dynamics of mobilization has had an important effect in both cases of diaspora mobilization, but as the analysis will show, done so differently. Different trajectories seem to have led to similar outcomes. I will first analyze one element that is common for both cases, namely the absence of civil society experience in Syria. I will then proceed with each case to illustrate mentioned trajectories and link them to the main questions of this section.

5.3.1 Shared internal factors explaining the lack of influence – Lack of civil society experience

Despite having been in the US and the UK for a relatively long period of time, it is remarkable how little Syrian mobilization existed before the uprising, both on a political, professional and civil society level. Several of my informants in both cases have pointed to an important aspect that in itself is both historical and contextual; the imbalance between state and civil society, or as claimed by some, the complete absence of a proper civil society in Syria under Baathist rule (Informant 6, 2015; Informant 13). As argued by Hinnebusch, (1993) the strong Baathist state developing after the tumultuous 1960s “[...] deadened the fragile political life of the pluralist era and narrowed the autonomy of the civil society.” Indeed, the period prior to the Baath era saw relatively strong social mobilization and organization. However, Baathist rule coopted most aspects of the emerging civil society, including popular and professional associations. It pursued redistributive policies that kept social distinctions at bay and built a cross-sectarian support-base, most notably with wealthy Sunni business elites (Ismail 2012; Haddad 2012; Haddad and Wind 2014). It also deterred people from developing new and independent organizations through tactical repressive measures:

When I got imprisoned, they told me that gathering was not allowed in Syria. I told them, “We were just friends sitting together, and it was not even a secret. The door was open.”

He replied, “Do you understand me? It is forbidden to sit three together”. [...] If they see that you are three together, they get afraid that you may be doing something organized (Informant 4, 2015).

The quote might seem as an exaggeration of the extent to which civil society was strategically muted, but it nonetheless illustrates the repressive tactics and deterrence of individuals and indicate how these strategies fostered a sense of fear for organizing anything outside the immediate social sphere. As claimed by several informants, years of being under an oppressive regime ingrained a reluctance to mobilize at all in fear of being turned in and delivered to the hands of the security forces: “We have an expression in Syria that ‘the walls have ears’” (Informant 2, 2015). This referred to the notion that all who expressed criticism towards the regime would be heard and reported. The fear that even your closest relatives could turn on you ultimately nurtured a culture of skepticism and lack of trust in civil society. Under the extensive array of emergency laws instigated in the 1960s under Hafez al-Assad’s rule, arbitrary arrests and detention effectively suspended all personal liberties (Ghadry 2005). It limited individual ability to perform civil and political activities and decreased motivations for social mobilization altogether. Consequently, this had ramification for those who remained in Syria *and* those who migrated to other countries. Low levels of trust has endured in the diaspora and limited efforts to organize collectively.

Furthermore, the fear of the security apparatus have extended beyond merely the borders of Syria. Evidence from Amnesty International (2011) and as argued by several scholars (Qayyum 2011; Jörum 2015), the *Mukhabaraat*²⁶ have had extensive methods of keeping Syrian civil society within diaspora communities at bay and preventing it from blooming. Repressive capacities that have traditionally been treated as confined to national borders in social movement theory is, in this case, transnational and extensive. It has produced an even stronger infringement on Syrians’ ability to engage in organized activities.

In the US, for example, the Syrian security apparatus worked through the Washington, D.C. embassy, enlisting supporters of the regime in the diaspora to deter fellow Syrians from engaging in opposition activities (Informant 2, 2015). Before the closure of the embassy, Mohamad Anas Haitham Soueid, a Syrian expatriate living in Virginia, was convicted for having collected recordings of Syrian protestors demonstrating in front of the embassy, and subsequently provided the material to the Syrian *Mukhabaraat* (Federal Bureau of Investigation

²⁶ Arabic term for “intelligence”. Used as common term for the extensive Syrian security apparatus.

2012). Being active on the political scene would not only put yourself at risk, but also family and friends back in the homeland:

Some decided not to get involved [politically] because they feared the revenge of the government on their family back home. I hesitated in the beginning, because I have eight brothers and sisters and their wives and kids [...] If [the security apparatus] knew I was involved against the government with any activities, they would go after my family [...] (Informant 3, 2015).

It is not just fear of the security apparatus that has prevented the emergence of a civil society. Arguably, the structure of the educational system has had a limiting effect. In the education system, school curriculums have systematically undermined Syria's ethnic, religious and regional diversity. As part of its political ideal of equality, the regime intended to downplay divergent traditions, unique languages and customary differences between communal groups and front the idea of a general Arab national identity. The lack of cultural knowledge was ultimately reinforced by school curriculums that refrained from explaining diversity and, rather than promoting it as a source of strength, disregarded it completely: "The regime didn't really encourage Syrians to know each other. Our curriculum doesn't explain anything about Syria's diversity" (Informant 12, 2016). As argued by Landis (2003), the regime had committed itself to eliminate all differences.

When Syrian Kurdish protests against political discrimination²⁷ erupted in Al Qamishli in the northeastern part of Syria in 2004, non-Kurdish Syrians in other areas of the country did not understand. A common assumption was that the Kurdish question only existed in neighboring Iraq or Turkey. It thus seemed puzzling for many Syrians to observe this in their own country (Informant 12, 2016). The consequences was that discovery of differences in the diaspora was interpreted as division rather than just simply diversity. A diversity that could have been used strategically to promote the diaspora voice as united, but that on the contrary, signaled deep-rooted cleavages, particularly in the US. Whereas diversity was unproblematic prior to 2011, the uprising invoked a serious rift. "When there is no crisis, it is easy to overlook certain things, but when a crisis happens, everybody apparently discovers his original hat" (Informant 12, 2016).

In an attempt to address this issue, recent diaspora initiatives tried to establish Syrian organizations that focus exclusively on civil society competence, both in the diaspora and in

²⁷ Marginalization from politics and ineligible for Syrian citizenship (Gambill 2004).

certain parts of Syria. Through advocating non-violence, resistance to radicalization, and greater social coherence, they seek to form a future Syria that, instead of resembling fracture and division, resembles unity through a common Syrian identity. One activist for example claimed that besides being principally against the regime, another objective was to develop a pluralistic Syrian society with equal access to citizenship, without discrimination of gender, ethnicities, sects or any denomination of cultural adherence (Informant 6, 2015). Such a project emerged after both the Syrian opposition (the Syrian National Council) and the Syrian-American diaspora failed to develop united and inclusive institutions. It reinforces the argument that no civil society had emerged in Syria and the acknowledgment of its importance for nation building in a future Syria.

In sum, the absence of civil society experience has been an element that prevented the rise of Syrian-based organizations in both the US and the UK. There has been little mutual trust within the Syrian expatriate communities based on the fear of the security apparatus, both at home and abroad and the neglect of ethnic, religious, and regional diversity in the education system. As alluded to in the background chapter, Syrians have identified less as Syrians and more through other categories such as Arab or Muslim, or particular cultural or religious minority associations. While the Syrian uprising changed this element, the surge of new organizations reflected low trust-levels, causing fractures – particularly in the Syrian-American community. In the UK, these issues seemed to be acknowledged, and as we shall see, fostered a greater focus on community reconstruction.

5.3.2 Internal factors explaining the lack of influence of the Syrian-American diaspora

The development of Syrian-American community organizations can help explain why their mobilization attempts have had limited impact on American politics. Internal factors reveal how the community, within a short amount of time, developed a plethora of political organizations intended on affecting national political processes. These expressions of the Syrian-American community were new and unprecedented. Prior to the uprising in 2011, only two formal community organizations representing the diaspora had developed in the US, one based on professional ties and originally apolitical, the other a grassroots initiative with the intention of promoting diaspora interests and forge closer ties between the US and Syria on a political level.

A community with limited civil society experience, dormant sectarian and religious divisions, and low social capital faced substantial mobilization hurdles from the outset. Despite being a resourceful community financially, the Syrian-American diaspora has been unable to cultivate organizational coherence and coordination. The proliferation of organizations after the uprising lead to a polythetic movement structure, consisting of similar organizations, pursuing similar goals, but working separately instead of collectively. This has reduced their legitimacy as *the* voice of Syrians within the American political sphere and diminished their degree of acceptance as a legitimate claims-maker on behalf of Syrian-Americans. I will substantiate these claims below by discussing the empirical evidence collected through my fieldwork.

Due to limited political mobilization prior to 2011, the political insurrection in Syria created a sense of urgency to develop political organizations within the diaspora. Dormant opposition figures that had generally remained apolitical since arriving in the US decided to return to politics and support the popular uprisings. This was done through establishing new political organizations that, on the one hand, claimed to represent a broad constituency of likeminded Syrians in the US (i.e. the diaspora), and on the other, representing the anti-regime movement within Syria itself. With the exception of SAMS and SAC, the groups mentioned in Table 1 were all established and developed immediately after the beginning of the uprising. The creation of these organizations can be attributed to the initial belief that Syria would experience a smooth transition, similar to that of Tunisia (Informant 4, 2015). As I will argue below, there were also personal impetuses and motives for the exponential growth of political organizations.

The rather surprising but important observable feature of these groups are the similarity of their goals and political activities, yet notable heterogeneity. It has been noted by several scholars within diaspora theory that diasporas rarely are homogenous entities (Sheffer 2003; Brubaker 2005; Bush 2007). Indeed, the political expressions of the diaspora through these organizations (and others who have since vanished) reflect an even stronger separation between different Syrian identities than one would perhaps expect. Albeit the organizations would claim to be inclusive, the names of some of them suggest exclusivity (e.g. Syrian *Christians* for Peace, American *Syriac* Organization). In light of increased political mobilization after 2011, one informant claimed the following about the manifestation of dormant identity characteristics:

Syria doesn't cover who you are anymore. It is not enough to say that you're Syrian. At one point or another you have to let it slip very clearly that you are a Syrian-American, coming from this area, representing this faction... It is not going to be Syrian-American,

it is going to be Syrian-Alawi-American, Syrian-Christian-American. It is going to be a complex sense of identity... Syrian-Sunni-Aleppo-American (Informant 12, 2016).

There are several probable answers to why the cleavage structures grew in the diaspora. Furthermore, going through these elements might provide some answers to why efforts at mobilizing to affect US policies has been unsuccessful. The fundamental argument of this section is that divisions within the diaspora have reduced the host state's inclination to support their claims. It has reduced the diaspora's credibility and reliability. After all, being accepted and rendered a legitimate voice by the targets of mobilization is crucial to obtain political gains (Gamson 1990). I identify three particular reasons for this development: 1) absence of civil society in the homeland historically, and its effect on the Syrian-US diaspora, 2) the conservative connections and regime-linkages of the early risers in the diaspora and, 3) personal agendas and strong personalities.

Conservative connections and regime-linkages of the “early risers”

Contrary to the initial spark of mobilization within Syria, much of the so-called “early risers” in the diaspora had strong conservative connections. Most notably with links to the organizationally eradicated Syrian Muslim Brotherhood²⁸ and conservative Salafist shaykhs such as Adnan al-Aroor who's radical perspectives became popular amongst some parts of the opposition (Lefèvre 2013, 185–86). Despite the highly diverse and heterogeneous features of the Syrian diaspora, the community largely reflects conservative elements and a strong Islamic identity (Informant 12, 2016). This is perhaps not all that surprising, considering Syria's predominantly Muslim population and the Syrian regime's history of dealing with Islamist activism, serving as an important factor for outward migration to the US. Arguably, the strong conservative link of the early risers in the diaspora have produced tensions between minorities in the community, in turn catalyzing division and prompted a struggle for ownership of the uprising and a contest to represent the Syrian diaspora. The linkages to the Syrian regime has also fueled this development. Thus, internal struggles in the now defunct National Salvation Front (NSF)²⁹ and the affiliations of previous leadership of SAC, its Sunni dominance and their rather opportunistic conduct reflect these elements.

²⁸ The promulgation of Law No. 49 in 1980 deemed membership of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood a punishable offence (Pierret 2014).

²⁹ Not only a Syrian-American diaspora organization. It was an attempt to construct a common, unified opposition from abroad following the defection of Abdel Halim Khaddam, former Vice President to Bashar al-Assad and long-time accomplice of Hafez al-Assad. The following story relates to its efforts to set up shop in Washington D.C. and involved the Syrian-American community to a large extent.

By delving into the early failings of the US-branch of the NSF, the conservative-liberal tension becomes perceptible. Already in 2006, the NSF was established as a transnational opposition organization who sought to pressure the Assad-regime and eventually was at the ready to assume control in the event of a political transition. It was a collaborative effort between the exiled Muslim Brotherhood leader, Ali Sadreddine al-Bayanouni and former Vice President of Syria, Abdel Halim Khaddam.

Despite stressing liberal values including political and intellectual pluralism, conservative currents and internal tensions limited its ability to ally itself with the US government. To increase the level of inclusivity and representation in the organization, a member of the NSF initiative in the US suggested to instate an eleven-member council that would include both of the aforementioned individuals along with a representative of both Kurdish and Christian diaspora minorities. The head of the council were to be elected. This plan was devised in an effort to increase perceived legitimacy by US authorities – it was a given that the Bush-administration at the time could not meet with an organization led by conservative figures only. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood was an unthinkable partner for a US-administration. Khaddam, who thought the plan was a way to oust him from the organization rejected it immediately (Informant 12, 2016). The NSF-branch in the US could not organize an internal election in fear of watering out the inner cluster of conservative leaders. It would jeopardize their position as powerful leaders of the organization.

It was already at the time known that NSF had issues of representation that produced grievances among other parts of the political opposition. Without a proper mechanism of selecting the leadership, opposition figures in the Syrian-American diaspora gave only conditional support to the NSF, substantially hampering its ability to gain audience with the White House. “We could have had something that was very crucial. We could have had a government in exile, even in 2007. It would have been legitimized, but it failed” (Informant 12, 2016). Arguably, within the American context, the NSF attempted to produce a diaspora coalition that could be legitimized for the Bush-administration, similar to what the Iraqi diaspora had done in lieu of the alliance that produced the impetus for the Iraq invasion in 2003. The fact that the NSF initiative seemed reluctant to develop American support in the first place also suggests it had strong conservative currents. A liberal advisor to the NSF argued that, prior to the 2011 revolution, anti-regime mobilization was led by historical opposition figures who left Syria for political reasons in the past. “There was a lot of shady figures around, not having a lot of contact inside Syria and as left-wing and Islamist intellectuals were very weary of contact with the

Americans” (Informant 12, 2016). The conservative linkages between the NSF and the old Syrian opposition was in and of itself problematic for generating an alliance with the US government. Along with the conservative elements of the Syrian American Council and linkages to the Syrian government during its inception, the early anti-regime mobilizers had issues generating grassroots support both within Syria and in the Syrian-American diaspora.

The Syrian American Council, then called Syrian American Congress, held its constitutive meeting in Chicago in 2006. Despite having developed into a rigid and vocal oppositional force against the Assad-regime since 2011, it reflected in its early stages a much more modest political alignment. One informant blatantly claimed that at the time of formation, the diaspora organization was “pro-Assad, and pro-Embassy. It was full of propaganda” (Informant 2, 2015). He supported this argument by referring to those invited from Syria to participate in the SAC meetings. Several were Syrian government officials, among them Bouthaina Shaaban³⁰, key advisor to Assad and a candid defender of the regime. Another informant, who took part in the first meetings of SAC in 2006 and 2007 contended that “[SAC] didn’t really align themselves with the opposition nor with the regime. They chose a mix of identities... they aligned themselves with ‘the reform’” (Informant 9, 2015). In a sense, it was the only thing possible at the time. Arguably, repressive measures were an important limitation to SAC’s political expression in the beginning. A member of SAC maintained that at an early stage, they pitched in the idea of gradual democratic change: “we brought in opposition figures to slowly try to test the waters” (Informant 7, 2015). It nonetheless developed a skepticism from members of the diaspora. Despite being a strong organization, it was perceived as opportunistic rather than serious (Informant 12, 2016).

Consequently, once protests emerged in Syria, the Syrian-American community withheld absolute support of SAC’s mission. Since it was the only *political* diaspora organization in existence prior to 2011, Syrian-Americans were left with three options: 1) accept and collaborate with SAC despite their shortcomings, 2) establish a new diaspora organization, or 3) abstain from political mobilization. To work under SAC’s umbrella was problematic for many because they did not see past the strong connection to the Syrian regime in SAC’s past. It was also challenging to accept SAC’s inherent Sunni-dominance from the outset (Informant 12, 2016). Similar to the NSF, the Sunni-dominance of SAC emanated from the conservative linkages of its previous members. Louay Safi, fellow at Georgetown University and Najib

³⁰ Bouthaina Shaaban has appeared at numerous occasions on Western TV in defence of the Syrian regime.

Ghadbian, Associate Professor of political science at the University of Arkansas, have both been linked to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and served various roles within SAC (Hassan 2013). Another informant also alluded to the Muslim Brotherhood connection. The self-imposed exile of Brotherhood-members after the Hama massacre in 1982 had allowed them to come to terms with not returning to Syria while it was under Assad rule. As such, these figures were the most active on the political scene in the diaspora (Informant 4, 2015).

It is important not to overstate the Muslim Brotherhood connection, but it is reasonable to assume it served as an obstacle to SAC's dominance in the diaspora. Especially when one considers how other religious or sectarian segments of the diaspora seemed to edge for the second option of those mentioned above, despite sharing SAC's political alignment towards the Assad-regime after 2011. Consequently, SAC's dubious linkages to the regime, its strong Sunni and Muslim Brotherhood currents, and its perceived opportunistic behavior served as an impetus to establish new organizations. NSF, as a particularly early attempt at forging an opposition in the diaspora, also suffered from its previous connections as well as internal struggles. This way, the broader segment of the diaspora saw its interests better represented towards the US government through establishing new organizations. Another element that has been crucial for the manifestation of cleavage structures in the political mobilization of the Syrian-American diaspora has been the importance of individual diaspora figures and their personalities and personal agendas

Personal agendas and strong personalities

“Everybody wants to be a leader, everybody wants to be a hero, everybody wants to... ” (Informant 2, 2015). This quote is illustrative of a major issue in the Syrian-American community. Part of the reason for the development of cleavage structures in the Syrian-American diaspora is the importance of individuals and their agendas. In order to mobilize a diaspora, political entrepreneurs engage in strategic social identity construction (Adamson 2012). In the Syrian-American community, social identity construction seems to have been an absent strategy and resembled, to a higher degree, opportunism and ambition. This is evident through the development of tension within and between organizations and between individuals. As one informant claimed: “Some actors here think that they will go back to Syria as masters or that some of them will be the President of the new Syria” (Informant 11, 2016). The rich, but confusing landscape of diaspora organizations reflects this individual sentiment. “I'm sure you've heard of the term ‘one-man-show’ or ‘one-man-organization’. Lots of these organizations are one or two persons” (Informant 2, 2015). He also added that much of this

mobilization was around resourceful individuals, most often physicians or doctors who had the financial means to organize independently.

This laid the basis for many of the organizations mentioned above. They are the product of low civil society experience and the tensions mentioned in the preceding sections, but also the product of ambitions. Individuals within the mobilized diaspora have had a tendency to elevate themselves and claim expertise they may not actually possess. Aptly, an informant called this “résumé inflation syndrome”. Participating in newspaper discussions and panels, members of the diaspora would claim knowledge of particular conditions in the homeland they essentially knew little about. The informant, who had been imprisoned and tortured in Syria based on his dissident activities, argued frustratingly that he would often end up in panels on Syrian civil society debating with individuals who would claim it had been breathing and well (Informant 2, 2015). These individuals would often introduce themselves as holding Ph.Ds. from Syria, but once arriving in the US often found themselves studying for an MA. This can certainly be based on the lack of recognition of Syrian Universities in the US, but the informant insisted that even Ph.Ds. in medicine was used as a sign of expertise on Syrian affairs. Furthermore, many of them had been living in the diaspora for quite some time and had little personal experience with civil society in the homeland (Informant 2, 2015).

Between organizations, another informant claimed “human politics” was a robust explanation for the development of cleavages in the diaspora. By “human politics” he referred to the intra-diaspora differences that emerged, not based on political views, sectarian or religious belonging, but those of individual personalities. “There’s a lot of politics as in most communities. There are a lot of egos and a lot of organizations... It’s individual, sort of... this person do not like this person. It is sort of like human politics” (Informant 5, 2015). Arguably, this supports the claims of one-man-shows alluded to above. Disagreements in the pursuit of personal interests has undeniably been an important factor for the development of a fractured Syrian-American political mobilization. The internal struggles in the NSF prior to the revolution may also indicate similar, micro-level feuds. For the grassroots in the Syrian diaspora, it has produced hesitation to give any one organization undivided support. I would argue that the need for SAC to convey through statements that it is the oldest and most sizeable diaspora organization is indicative of a struggle to maintain a strong position, both vis-à-vis decision-makers in Washington, D.C., but also in the Syrian-American community. Ultimately, it has contributed to a professionalized political expression, but an expression characterized by competing elites.

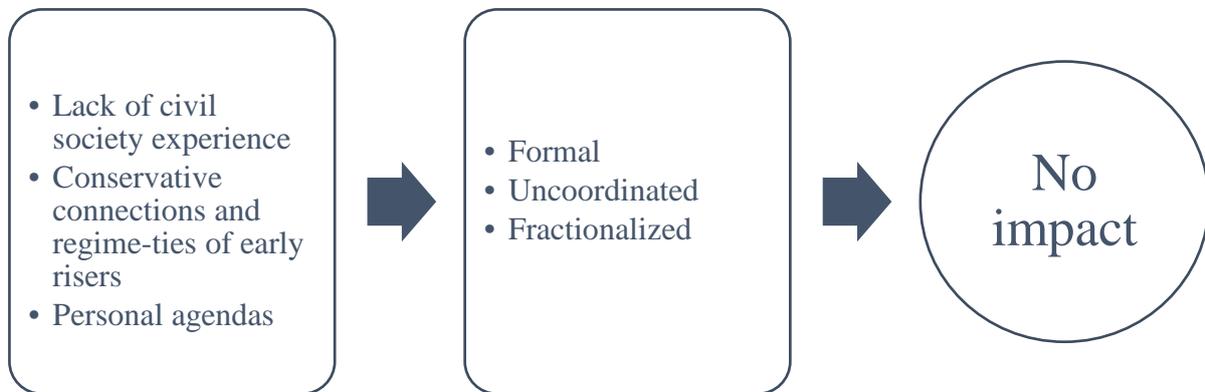
Summary - The impact of internal factors in the case of the Syrian-American diaspora

The three identified elements discussed above illustrates the focal argument of this section. Emergent cleavages in the Syrian diaspora's mobilization structures has reduced their credibility and reliability as legitimate claims makers in American politics. What seems to be similar political objectives were promoted through separate and uncoordinated political organizations. One informant argued that on the US scene, political mobilization was essentially an intra-group, organizational fight that had been damaging for perception. At the extreme, members of organizations would badmouth each other in order to elevate their own position with policy-makers:

[T]here are disagreements between the NGOs [...]. People compete, like, badmouth each other, accusing each other for everything, there is a trust issue, and in the US there is more, like, who has better access to the administration and who doesn't (Informant 2, 2015).

As such, these cleavages reflected a particular sense of sharpness. When one of my informants were asked about the diaspora's political influence, he expressed disappointment and referred to the most common answer they would receive in conversation with decision-makers, "we are trying to do the best we can." But because of apparent splits and incoherence, decision-makers were weary of constructing alliances with the Syrian diaspora. As two diaspora figures alluded to, the Syrians knew what they wanted, but failed to channel their message in a united fashion (Informant 4, 2015; Informant 12, 2016). As such, it has been difficult for US authorities to distinguish between different voices in the diaspora. Frankly, the sheer *amount* of voices has made it difficult for them to know whom to listen to (Informant 2, 2015; Informant 12, 2016). Arguably, cleavages in the Syrian-American diaspora has limited its ability to influence American politics. In Figure 1 below, I present a model showing how internal factors have played out in this case.

Figure 1: Internal factors in the Syrian-American diaspora and its effect on prospects for political influence.



5.3.3 Internal factors explaining the lack of influence of the Syrian-British diaspora

The Syrian-British diaspora reflect different mobilization structures and strategies compared to the Syrian-American community. However, as the dependent variable suggests, the Syrian diaspora has also been unable to exert substantial influence on British policymakers. To explain their lack of influence, I argue we must pay attention to intragroup dynamics that reflect both differences and similarities with the Syrian-American community. Ideally, isolating explanations through a comparison of these cases should be sufficient to make claims about the effects of mobilization structures on influence. However, realistically – and as this section aims at clarifying – mobilization structures in the two cases demonstrate two widely different mobilization trajectories. By looking at mobilization structures in the Syrian-British diaspora, it becomes clear that failure is the result of its inability to establish an effective lobby in London.

The political expression reflects a different organizational mode compared to the Syrian diaspora in the US. Instead of developing formalized lobbyist organization, the UK diaspora has largely been based on individual activist and underground networks. This is not to say that organizations in the form of SMOs have not been present, but rather that their significance as interest claimants has been limited. By delving into the weakness of the diaspora’s lobbyist position it becomes clear that lack of civil society experience in the homeland, consistent funding challenges, the diaspora’s relatively small size, and lastly, its emphasis on community reconstruction have produced what I call an “activist” diaspora. Despite being better coordinated than its US counterparts, its position as a stakeholder in British politics have

remained largely unrecognized. I will subsequently go through each of these elements in turn to show how this has limited its prospects for political impact.

Resources - Funding and size

Two important aspects of mobilization that cannot be underplayed in the Syrian-British community is the lack of funding and its rather limited size. Problems of funding have made it difficult to carry out humanitarian operations, subsidizing for example education in the homeland. Important for the purposes of this thesis, it has also limited its ability to establish an effective political force in the UK and, more specifically, London. When asked the question of what she deemed the imperative mobilization challenges, one informant emphasized this factor as strictly limiting their capabilities (Informant 13, 2016). Arguably, her position as a focal member of one of the largest and most visible diaspora organization provides her claim with increased credibility. Another informant who's organization was more of an international character and strictly apolitical, focusing on aid to the Syrian crisis, also identified this as a persistent problem. Not only funding in general, but also the competition for funds between different actors served as a huge obstacle for their work (Informant 10, 2016).

An interesting feature that was brought up in this interview was also a comparison to the US diaspora in terms of funding abilities. When prompted about the characteristics of the two diasporas and the main differences between them, one informant identified a discrepancy both related to occupations and the relative difference in salary levels of certain professions in the two countries. Most importantly, the numbers of doctors and their salary levels. Despite being unable to obtain accurate statistical data, informants on both side of the Atlantic indicated that education levels in both diasporas seem fairly high in comparison with other, similar communal groups (Informant 3, 2015; Informant 4, 2015; Informant 7, 2015; Informant 8, 2015; Informant 10, 2016; Informant 13, 2016). A substantial portion of Syrians living in both countries are well educated, are primarily doctors, physicians or dentists. Yet, the doctors in the US was still financially more robust and thus better suited to professionalize the diaspora's political activities: "It is a reflection of Britain, really. Whereas even if you are a doctor, you are not necessarily 'living the dream like in the US'. Like, in the US you have a mansion, you have a car, you have everything" (Informant 13, 2016). The Syrians in the UK do not lack education or respectable occupations, income levels of physicians or doctors are simply substantially lower. This has reduced their ability to raise funds for political activities. Isolated, this aspect is not in and of itself sufficient to limit the diaspora's political influence. However, the

combination of lack of funds and the diaspora's rather limited size are jointly obstructing prospects for impact.

To be rendered a credible and legitimate movement promoting some form of political goal, support in terms of a constituency can be an important resource. As covered in the contextualization chapter, the Syrian-British diaspora is quite small. Before the conflict, about 15,000 identified as Syrians. In itself, this number presents problems in terms of gathering the numbers for protests and for claiming to represent a sizeable group vis-à-vis decision-makers. One informant also brought to the fore a mention of the so-called "grey ones", a designation he used on those who had resigned from political activities based on the developments since 2011 or those who from the outset decidedly chose not to engage (Informant 1, 2015). Questioned about dilemmas and challenges of mobilization, several informants pointed to the fact that many Syrians in the diaspora had their own worries and were thus not particularly active (Informant 1, 2015; Informant 10, 2016; Informant 13, 2016). One of them argued: "It is too close to home, they just want to protect themselves by building a wall" (Informant 10, 2016).

A smaller community also provides less contribution overall, dwarfing the diasporas political initiatives in comparison to other interests. Adding to this the element of disagreement on whether to support or denounce the regime, the political mobilization of the anti-regime side is even further restricted. The fundamental argument is that the Syrian-British diaspora has been lacking the resources required to establish themselves as noticeable political actors. Another element that have been limiting is the focus on non-political mobilization.

Diaspora community development – less political?

An observation that has arguably reduced the political capabilities of the diaspora has been its focus on common identity building and diaspora construction. While little experience with civil society has also been a challenge for unity in the Syrian-British community (International Alert 2015), it seems to a greater extent to have been acknowledged, at least from certain segments of the diaspora. Rethink Rebuild Society is investing at the very least an equal amount of resources into its community-building program as it does on its political advocacy component. This program has a two-fold aim, one that is to smoothen the integration of recently resettled refugees by providing advice services and language training. Furthermore, the program seeks to bring the Syrian diaspora together – despite inherent differences – to "[...] think about issues, to learn about things" (Informant 13, 2016). Fundamentally, the goal is to construct a unified Syrian diaspora community, particularly in the Manchester region, but in the UK in a broader

sense. This is reflected in their idea of rethinking history, identity, culture, political perspectives, and aspirations. “As a Syrian community, we need to rethink our approach to everything [...] it is all a ‘work in progress’” (Informant 13, 2016).

Similar tendencies were observed under a diaspora-organized event called *Ahlan wa Sahlan*³¹ in a London suburb. The initiative was a coordinated effort between the Syrian diaspora and local community organizations focusing especially on welcoming refugees to the UK and providing a platform for identity reconstruction anchored in culture and history. When prompted about political questions, the initiator from the Syrian community immediately hesitated and sought to alter the conversation in fear of instigating a dividing discussion amongst the different attendees: “We keep politics outside this group because we’re not political and because we don’t want to invite more tension” (Informant 14, 2016). Community development trumped political advocacy.

The emphasis on community building opens up an interesting causal question. Is the inward-focus a suggestive explanation for the lack of influence, or has it developed as a consequence of limited political success? I would argue that the Syrian-British diaspora recognized at an early stage its challenges presented by sectarian, religious and political divides. Rethink Rebuild Society and other diaspora organizations began its reconciliation work immediately after the inception of the revolution, attempting to act as an inclusive and representative body for the anti-regime Syrian community. It has been able to meaningfully ally themselves with other organizations that happens to reflect a stronger sectarian character (e.g. Kurds House UK). Furthermore, the absence of mobilization prior to 2011, fostered rapprochement contrary to its American counterparts. The acknowledgement of differences at an early stage of social mobilization prevented conflict lines from emerging as they have in the Syrian-American community. Better coordination was identified as a crucial element for influence by the diaspora itself (International Alert 2015). It did not mean that the diaspora developed a monolithic movement structure, but rather that it was able to overcome the challenges of division. A possible contributive explanation to this is the ease of mobilizing smaller groups. However, it has come at the expense of political advocacy. A community with already scarce resources in terms of funds and size allocated most of its efforts towards stronger coherence, but made them less effective as a political interest. It lacked the professionalization developing in the Syrian-American community, thus developing more as a network of individual activists rather than a

³¹ English translation ‘hello and welcome’.

centralized, powerful political force. A question that arise from this assessment is whether the Syrian-British diaspora was inherently less political. The answer to this inquiry seems to be negative. The Syrian community had to compensate for lack of rigid organizational mobilization by employing an “activist”-approach to political mobilization, i.e. a completely different organizational mode comparatively to its Syrian-American counterparts.

Activist networks as basis for mobilization

Despite lacking professionalism, the Syrian-British diaspora has developed a strong network of activists. As such, the diaspora has, besides establishing SMOs, organized collective action predominantly through a different organizational mode compared to the Syrian-American diaspora. “Mobilization mainly happens through activist networks and contacts. We organize our activities on social media” (Informant 10, 2016). It is important to underscore that this alternative trajectory has presented the Syrian-British community with unique opportunities and challenges.

Strong, but loose networks have facilitated coordination of mobilization. This is reflected in the diaspora’s ability to synchronize outreach initiatives such as publication of statements and press releases. Small-scale, or individual initiatives combined with little intra-diaspora rivalry (as seen in the US) has contributed to ease this process. As an example, multiple diaspora organizations to the London Supporting Syria & the Region conference published in February 2016 a co-signed document criticizing the limited and late invitation of Syrians and the secondary manner in which they were consulted (Rethink Rebuild Society 2016b). Similarly, approaching decision-makers across the UK has become simpler valuable resource for the diaspora. One informant referred to how the network of cooperating diaspora initiatives simplified reach-out to particular Members of Parliament. Rethink Rebuild Society, being a Manchester-based diaspora SMO, would cooperate strongly with the Syrian Association of Yorkshire to direct a message to Labor-party MP, Jo Cox. She identified these opportunities as crucial for the diaspora’s political mobilization: “the networks help us understand what resources are spread around the country [...] and it saves us from reproducing the same efforts (Informant 13, 2016). Her overall impression was that the Syrian-American diaspora was substantially more divided in its political mobilization in comparison to the Syrian-British diaspora. Despite the fact that there is reason to believe that coordination in the latter is imperfect, this impression lends support to the analysis above. Cleavage structures in the Syrian-American diaspora are apparent and real.

That the Syrian-British diaspora has developed a more “activist” approach to its political mobilization has also had an effect on its political expression. While targeting policy-makers through direct lobbying has been an important part of certain SMOs (e.g. Rethink Rebuild Society) advocacy strategy, an equally important component has been awareness making. One informant who were a spearhead of activist work in London put it this way: “we’re activists, we’re not like personnel of... you know, not sets of profiles. We’ve got access to the information and we are doing our best to speak about it” (Informant 1, 2015). By contrasting my two cases, it becomes clear what he referred to with “sets of profiles”. When prompted about what he thought of the Syrian-American diaspora and its professionalized expression, he first argued that the Syrian-British diaspora did not suffer from polluted agendas and continued: “[...] we’re trying to get them out of their backers’ grip [...] They are not doing the best work that can be done for Syrians” (Informant 1, 2015). Distributing information both traditionally (e.g. op-eds, rallies etc.) and creatively (artistry), he deemed these as better ways to promote the anti-regime cause from within the diaspora. Additionally, it could serve the diaspora’s aspirations better. Speaking about Syria would be an important element in changing politicians’ approach to the conflict. As will be covered below, the importance of awareness-making cannot be overstated, considering the powerful challenges that both the US and the UK diasporas have faced when it comes to discourse framing.

However, the “activist” expression of the Syrian-British diaspora has produced challenges for the Syrian-British community. This mode of mobilization has perhaps been better suited to alter general perceptions of the Syrian revolution, but reduced its ability to represent the voice of Syrians in London as a proper and established interest claimant. Formal mobilization and thus a strong presence in London has been traded for a looser mobilization structure. It is important to accentuate that this cannot be interpreted unconditionally. While RRS, inter alia, has been an actor attempting at formal advocacy work, (i.e. direct lobbying and a frequent presence in London), the mobilization has been predominantly characterized by grassroots coalitions of Syrian activists. It has thus translated into a weak lobby, unable to exert influence on British policy-makers.

Summary - The impact of internal factors in the case of the Syrian-British diaspora

In sum, the elements identified above have all been contributing factors for the Syrian-British diaspora’s inability to affect policies. While being better coordinated in comparison to its American counterpart, the diaspora’s limited funding and stronger focus on internal cohesion have produced a relatively weak lobby. Indeed, its activist-features have been better suited at

producing coordination among politically active members of the diaspora but limited its ability to exert influence on policy-makers. So far, I have demonstrated how each case of diaspora mobilization has had a unique mobilization structure. This is modeled in Figure 2 below. Despite different trajectories, both cases of Syrian diaspora mobilization have lacked political influence. I now turn to the question of external explanations.

Figure 2: Internal factors in the Syrian-British diaspora and its effect on prospects for political influence.



5.4 External explanations – National political context

Having covered the internal developments of the Syrian diaspora in the US and the UK, I now turn to the external elements that affect prospects for political impact. As such, I try to identify how each individual case of diaspora mobilization has faced both similar and distinctive challenges in the political process. It is important to emphasize that despite covering several aspects of political context in this thesis, the concept of political context as employed here is by no means exhaustive. As noted in the theory chapter, I aim to illuminate in particular access, shifting policy alignments, influential allies, divided elites, and public opinion. This segment is rooted in the following proposition made in the theory chapter:

External factors, specifically national political context, explain why the Syrian diaspora in the US and the UK failed to impact host state policies.

The analysis seeks to utilize collected fieldwork data, supplemented with alternative sources where possible. This is crucial considering potential information bias if the analysis is based only on one party’s perspective in an interactive political process between policy-makers and diaspora movements.

The national political context reveals similar trends in both cases; the diaspora movements have corresponding elements of opportunity and constraints. *Access* to the political system has been present in both cases. On the other hand, *shifting policy alignments*, insufficiently influential

allies, divided elites, and an unfavorable *public opinion* have constrained prospects for movement impact. Altogether, I argue that the constraints produce an overwhelmingly challenging political context that, in correlation with internal factors, have substantially reduced movement influence. I will now go through each of the elements of political context as set out in the theory chapter.

5.4.1 Political context in the US

Opportunities

Access

When discussing movements' access to the political system, it is paramount to consider potential available avenues and the structure of the polity. In terms of issuing claims directly to policy-makers, Congress and the administration in the White House have been focal points of interest for the diaspora. Most activities, be they contentious, such as protests and marches, have been targeting these avenues. More important has been the direct contact and meetings scheduled with politicians, arguably because of the diaspora's predominantly professionalized approach to the policy process. The professionalized approach may, on the other hand, reflect the structure of the political system and as such, the diaspora's mobilization is a response to this. Organized interests are known to have strong influence on deciding American foreign and domestic policies. The diaspora has had extensive access to influential politicians within Congress and the administration. Representatives of SAC and SAMS, for example, met at several occasions with Congressmen, previous and current Secretaries of State Hilary Clinton and John Kerry, and President Obama to discuss policy proposals regarding Syria (Informant 3, 2015; Informant 4, 2015; Informant 5, 2015; Informant 12, 2016). If access to the political system was characterized by some degree of responsiveness by decision-makers, Kitschelt (1986) argued that movement impact was much more probable. With substantial access to important stakeholders in American politics, lack of access has not been a political constraint for the Syrian diaspora's mobilization efforts.

Constraints

Shifting policy alignment

As covered in the theory chapter, shifting alignments tend to refer to how democratic polities regularly experience changes in power, most centrally through electoral instability (Tarrow 2011). Such shifting alignments may in turn be a central element spurring political mobilization

and subsequently affect movements' ability to influence policy-making. In the case of Syrian diaspora mobilization, shifting alignments in this traditional sense has not been a visibly important factor. Despite alterations within Congress, the Presidency has remained largely unchanged. However, the *policy* alignment of the Obama-administration is arguably an interesting feature that can help explain simultaneously both the emergence of diaspora mobilization in the US and its limited political influence.

Already in 2011, the Obama-administration called for the resignation of President Assad (Myers 2011). Syrian assets in America were frozen and imports of Syrian oil banned as sanctions were introduced. To the Syrian diaspora, it was a signal of interest convergence, that the Assad-regime was a mutual adversary. The US involvement in Libya in the fall of 2011 reinforced a sense of optimism that the Americans would support regime-transition in Syria (Informant 6, 2015). Repeated condemnation of Assad's repression and the famous "red-line" speech³² after the chemical weapon attacks in Ghouta, seemed as unambiguous statements of support to the ideal goals of the Syrian diaspora. It made the diaspora perceive the US as an important ally and nearly a guarantor of a Syrian transition (Informant 8, 2015). The diaspora's optimism can explain its high level of political activity and mobilization during this period.

However, the political shift in 2013 was a surprising and devastating blow to the political mobilization in the diaspora. The revelation that political support to the opposition had been merely rhetoric was unexpected even amongst President Obama's closest advisors (Goldberg 2016). This shift in policy alignment was an effective limit to the pragmatic goals of persuading the administration to actively engage in Syria. While the policy strategy of the Obama-administration may have been the same all along, it was nonetheless a strong signal of reluctance to do anything in Syria. Thus, the initial policy alignment provided an element of opportunity for the diaspora, but its *shift* contributed to reduced interest convergence and consequently less room for policy influence – particularly on the matter of protecting civilians through active engagement.

Influential allies

Having support from influential allies has arguably been crucial for social movement impact. "Friends in high places" can help mobilizers issue claims to decision-makers. I treat those who have actively promoted the Syrian diaspora's agenda in political processes as influential allies.

³² On August 20, 2013, President Obama issued a warning to the Assad-regime that utilization of chemical weapons would be a red line, changing his calculus on the use of military force significantly (Ball 2012). In retrospect, this did not alter the administration's foreign policy strategy.

They are considered acceptable negotiators on behalf of the diaspora movement (Tarrow 2011, 166). As such, merely supporting the “ideal goal” of ousting Assad and establishing a new political order in Syria is insufficient to be rendered an influential ally. I here look at important individual elite allies and not the US generally.

In the US context of Syrian diaspora mobilization, it is reasonable to argue that influential allies were present. Several notables within the administration and Congress have supported the diaspora’s cause, particularly on establishing a no-fly zone (equivalent to measures implemented in Libya), arming moderate rebels and generally stronger pressure on the Assad-regime to resign. When she served as Secretary of State (2009-2013), Hillary Clinton was an important political ally of the diaspora. Most notably because of her assertive and ‘hawkish’³³ approach to American foreign policy. As conflict-levels increased in Syria, she argued for an early response to Assad’s violence (Goldberg 2016). As one informant argued, not only did she support a no-fly zone, but she also shared a fundamental sentiment towards the conflict, namely that the root-cause of it is the Assad-regime, and not *Daesh* (Informant 3, 2015). This causal attribution of the conflict’s development has been a critical challenge for the diaspora, as I will elaborate on in section 5.5. Furthermore, in an address to the Global Diaspora Forum, Clinton specifically addressed the importance of cooperation with the Syrian diaspora. “They are serving as a link between the international community and opposition activists on the ground. Our efforts are enhanced by having the members of the Syrian diaspora [...] advise us” (Clinton 2012). This serves as a robust argument for their mutual acceptance and strong cooperation.

Another central figure within the D.C. political establishment is former Ambassador Fred Hof. He served as Clinton’s special advisor on Syrian transition in 2012 and collaborated strongly with the Syrian-American community. Through his influential position, Hof promoted the diaspora’s agenda within the State Department and the White House employing harsh rhetoric against the Assad regime. At one occasion, he claimed Assad’s brutality was turning Syria into “Pyongyang of the Levant” (Rogin 2012). On the matter of refugees, he repeatedly advocated admitting at least 100,000 Syrian refugees and for stronger support to the anti-regime movement in ousting President Assad (Informant 3, 2015). So did former Ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, and current US ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power. The latter is perhaps one of the most outspokenly interventionist advisors in the Obama-administration and has published a book on “the responsibility to protect”, arguing against turning a back against genocides; an

³³ A term used to describe aggressive and interventionist foreign policy perspectives. The antonym, ‘dove’, means that negotiated settlements without the use of force is preferred.

argument she used frequently to increase American pressure and involvement in Syria (Goldberg 2016). All of the above were frequently in touch with my informants, exchanging policy views and information regarding Syria (Informant 5, 2015).

In Congress, the Syrian diaspora has had allies on both sides of the aisle. On the Republican side, the staunchest supporters of the Syrian diaspora has been Senator John McCain (AZ) and Lindsay Graham (SC), both known to be foreign policy hawks. Especially after the formation and expansion of *Daesh* in North-Eastern Syria and North-Western Iraq, they have sought to convince the Obama-administration of having a US-led coalition to destroy the self-proclaimed Caliphate. Despite their commitment to a stronger and more assertive American foreign policy towards the Syrian crisis, parts of the diaspora have perceived these approaches to be too radical. Especially the notion that the US should send troops to interfere directly in Syria (or so-called “boots on the ground”, similar to the Iraq intervention). Nonetheless, support for a no-fly zone has been a focal interest put forth by these allies and seeing this as a pragmatic goal for the Syrian diaspora, they have been crucial partners in Congress.

On the Democratic side of Congress, are perhaps most notably Dick Durbin (IL) and Tim Kaine (VA) influential allies to the Syrian diaspora. The states they represent have large Syrian and Arab constituencies, which may be an indication of their propensity to promote the Syrian diaspora’s political interests. Durbin and Kaine have actively lobbied for guaranteeing civilian protection in Syria. In a bipartisan letter to President Obama, all of the above Senators urged the establishment of humanitarian safe zones in Syria. This would ultimately mean to deter Syrian aircrafts from continuously dropping barrel bombs in certain areas of the country³⁴ (Wong 2015). The Syrian diaspora has promoted this as a crucial policy since the inception of the regime’s bombing campaigns. Furthermore, all of these Senators have called for the Obama-administration to admit greater numbers of Syrian refugees. Thus, they have all been important partners for the diaspora.

Despite having aided the Syrian-American community within the political establishment, these political notables have not been influential *enough*. To illustrate and validate this argument, there are several indications of why the diaspora’s allies have not been able to affect policy changes in any meaningful sense. As Secretary of State, Clinton had high influence on the foreign policy trajectory, but yet were unable to follow her own policy principles. In response to Obama’s organizing principle, “don’t do stupid s***” in which he referred to the problematic

³⁴ The letter was sent before the Russian intervention in September 2015.

foreign policy of the Bush-administration, she argued that this had produced the power vacuum in the region allowing jihadist groups such as *Daesh* and *Jabhat al-Nusra* to emerge and gain foothold. President Obama strongly resented this causal claim and rejected her policy approach. He maintained that Syria did not warrant military intervention, arguing that the Assad-regime did not threaten US interests to any significant degree. Samantha Power had also been in intense arguments with President Obama in National Security Council meetings, favoring a more assertive approach. In a frustrated response, he had once quipped “Samantha, enough, I’ve already read your book” (Goldberg 2016). In sum, neither were sufficiently influential to have President Obama and his closest advisors change their minds on the Syria-policy.

Fred Hof resigned from the State Department after having served as special advisor for only half a year. According to an informant, he left because he advocated helping Syrians remove the Assad-regime. “He repeatedly recommended things, but the Obama-administration kept saying no, they didn’t want to get involved at all” (Informant 3, 2015). After resigning, he has continuously criticized President Obama for his “mistaken Syria-policy”, particularly emphasizing the loss of credibility to American foreign policy in light of the red line bluff. During my fieldwork, SAC invited me to a diaspora community event where Hof was present. He appeared as an important, but resigned ally when it came to affecting the administration’s policy orientation and has continuously criticized the US approach to the Syrian conflict ever since leaving his post (e.g. Hof 2016).

Obama’s reluctance to make a move on Syria, despite strong lobbyist efforts by the diaspora and its allies, may reflect the inherent power vested in the executive branch. In the end, the President has substantial prerogatives in formulating foreign policy. In Congress, the limited impact of the influential allies is twofold. Firstly, the fraction of Congressmen actively allied with the diaspora and promoting their interests were rather limited. Secondly, internal splits and partisan alignments have been an impairment towards cooperation on a wide range of issues, not only the Syrian cause. The division of elites is what I turn to next.

Division of elites

As argued in the theory chapter, the division of elites can be an indicator suggesting higher propensity for movement impact (Piven and Cloward 1977). Here I argue that this has been a limiting factor for the Syrian diaspora. Part of the reason it has been unable to gain effective policy achievements has been because of the division between elites, more specifically the robust partisan divide between Republicans and Democrats. This is evident by looking

particularly at the lobbyist efforts of the diaspora in Congress. One informant argued that the polarization on the on Capitol Hill is a major disappointment to their advocacy work: “Part of the issue I think is, the people on the Hill, like the Republicans, like McCain and others who has been really supportive [of our cause], have also been against Obama from day one on *everything else*” (Informant 5, 2015). He stressed that this was a problem on both sides of the aisle; the Democrats would stick with President Obama and his Syria policy while Republicans would criticize every policy proposal on the matter, even if they were principally for it. As such, work on Capitol Hill with particular members of Congress have often stranded, simply because partisan lines have obstructed cooperation. On a discussion of responsivity of influential politicians, another informant reinforced this argument of the impact of the political divide on the diasporas work. He argued that the Democrats wanted to blame the Republicans for obstructing the acceptance of more Syrian refugees (Informant 2, 2015). While this may be found to be representative of attitudes amongst politicians towards immigration more generally, it still strengthens the effect of division and how it has limited the effect of the diaspora’s mobilization.

The Congressional divide is not something that exclusively applies to the Syrian diaspora’s political mobilization; it reflects a broader political phenomenon that limits its ability to pass laws. As such, it may have ramifications for social movements in general – especially those that seek some kind of policy change. Whereas division of elites along partisan lines have served to limit probability of movement impact, it is important to note that not all Congressional activity is unequivocally partisan. The introduced bill that would authorize the use of military force as a response to chemical weapons in the fall of 2013 reflected a split between hawks and doves of foreign policy rather than party lines. In the end, President Obama decided to postpone the vote indefinitely, allowing more than 185 members of Congress to remain undecided on the issue (Hudson 2013). This in itself is also an indicator of the diaspora’s lack of political influence on the matter. While allies in the political establishment is important in that they promote movements’ objectives, the vast range of allies for the Syrian-American community has not been able to make a difference, politically.

Public opinion

The question of how public opinion relate to social movements is complex as evidenced by the discussion in chapter 3. It is rather inconclusive whether social movements can affect policy change directly without a supportive public (Vráblíková 2013). Due to limits of available data, only opinion polls regarding direct US intervention will be discussed here. I am unable to draw

an accurate picture of support to the diaspora movement in general. By intervention, I mean the employment of military assets to impose a no-fly zone and utilization of targeted strikes to shield civilians from indiscriminate bombing. There also seems to be some form of consensus in the Syrian diaspora for this type of intervention (Ghanem and Hunt 2013, 3). I argue that public opinion has been a significant constraint on the diaspora’s ability to persuade decision-makers in this regard. I base my argumentation largely on statistical data provided by Pew Research Center.

In 2012, after a year of increasingly violent responses to peaceful protests in Syria but before the chemical weapon attacks in Ghouta, a sample of Americans were asked whether the US should assume responsibility and act. Nearly two-thirds of those asked (64%) expressed a negative sentiment towards any US intervention (Table 3). 25% of the participants favored a US military response and 11% responded that they did not know. Interpreting these numbers need to be done with utmost care, especially since the question does not inform what type of responsibility the US should assume in particular.³⁵ Nonetheless, the figures indicate a substantial opposition towards US intervention. In comparison with other conflicts where a similar political question has been raised, the trend seems to suggest that the public have become increasingly reluctant to support American interventions abroad since the first data entry in the comparison.

Table 3: US interventions

Does the US have a responsibility to do something about...	Yes	No	Don’t know
Fighting in Syria (3/12) ³⁶	25%	64%	11%
Fighting in Libya (3/11)	27%	63%	10%
Ethnic genocide in Darfur (12/06)	51%	36%	13%
Ethnic fighting in Kosovo (3/99)	47%	46%	7%
Fighting between Serbs and Bosnians (6/95)	30%	64%	6%

Source: PEW Research Center (2012)

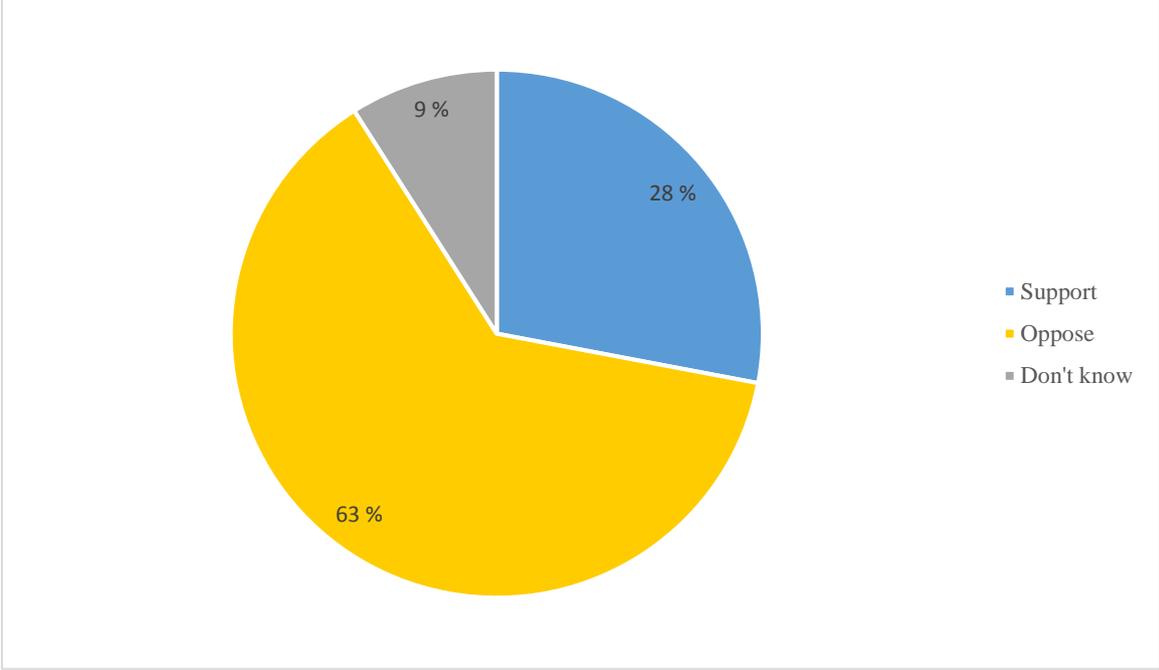
As such, it can indicate that the Administration’s unwillingness to intervene is supported by the public opinion. While it does not say anything about what constraints lack of public support

³⁵ For the sake of transparency, all survey questions (and answer options) used is recited in full in Appendix 1.
³⁶ Month and year of survey.

imposes on the diaspora’s prospects for movement impact, the fact that public opinion was used by Vice President Joe Biden as an argument to justify non-intervention suggests that it has impacted the policy process (Goldberg 2016). It is safe to assume that it did not enhance the diaspora’s agenda. An interesting counterfactual example is Libya in 2011 where the US together with NATO allies intervened *despite* limited popular support. This observation suggests that public opinion is perhaps only used as consultation rather than a direct influence on policy-making. At least, in the Libya-intervention, it was not a decisive factor.

After the revelation in August 2013 that the Assad-regime had utilized chemical weapons, the American public opinion displayed an even stronger opposition to US-engagement in Syria (Figure 3). 63% opposed, whereas 28% were in favor of an intervention. Part of the explanation for the overwhelming negative reply on this survey may be because of how the question is phrased. Compared to the 2012-survey, the 2013-survey asked whether the respondent favored or opposed military airstrikes against Syrian targets and as such pinpoints direct measures. However, it still reflects a largely negative opinion towards an assertive US-role in the Syria conflict, conforming to the sentiments of 2012.

Figure 3: American attitudes towards airstrikes against Syria



Source: PEW Research Center (2013)

Despite the limited comparability of presented data, it can be argued that the Syrian diaspora's effort to mobilize for stronger US involvement in Syria has been against the backdrop of an unsupportive American public. That Congress reflected indecisiveness towards the proposed authorization of the use of force in Syria and the fact that the Obama-administration postponed the bill indefinitely could suggest that public opinion was indeed a decisive, intervening variable mediating the influence of the diaspora movement (Burstein 1985; Burstein 1999). In this case, the Syrian diaspora was unable to impact politics without public support. In comparison to the findings of McAdam and Su (2002), the social movement has not been able to influence policy-making in conjunction with public opinion. The diaspora has convinced neither the public nor decision-makers. This reflects a broad challenge of the diaspora, to which I turn to in section 5.5 – discursive framing.

So far, this section on political context in the US indicates that shifting policy alignment, divided elites, insufficiently influential allies, and lack of support by the public together can explain in part why the Syrian-American community had no impact on US policies. In the next section, I analyze the political context in the UK by employing the same set of indicators.

5.4.2 Political context in the UK

Opportunities

Access

For the Syrian diaspora in the UK, access has not been a substantial political constraint for political influence. In terms of political protests, public areas in London, such as the Prime Minister's residence, have served as central avenues of interest mobilization. The focal point of reference for its political advocacy has been Parliament and thus individual Members of Parliament (MPs), including those represented in Government. Several of those interviewed expressed the availability of MPs in terms of scheduling meetings or inviting them to diaspora-initiated events. "We've managed to get ourselves into places like the parliament here [...] We spoke to all sorts of MPs, we delivered [our messages]" (Informant 1, 2015). In the fall of 2015, Syria Solidarity UK organized, in cooperation with Labour MP Gisela Stuart, an event within the House of Commons aiming to shed light on developments in Syria. The event emphasized in particular Syrian voices from the diaspora community. Furthermore, Syrian activists and organized advocacy organizations have had access to the Foreign Affairs Committee, a particularly important forum for discussions revolving UK foreign policy developments

(Informant 13, 2016). This is an additional indication of open characteristics of political structures in the UK context. In terms of theory, limit of access has not been a constraining factor considering the relative degree of openness of these channels of influence. It is however, important to refer back to the mode of mobilization; the lack of formalization may provide some evidence as to why the diaspora have been unable to voice their opinion openly in the Foreign Affairs Committee. Clearly, this is a source of great frustration in the diaspora (Rethink Rebuild Society 2015a)

Constraints

Shifting Policy Alignment

Similar to the US case, there has been no notable electoral realignments with ramification for the diaspora's prospect for movement influence. David Cameron's Conservative Cabinet has been in power since 2010,³⁷ before the Syrian uprising. As such, the polity has been relatively stable in terms of political alignments. However, shifting policy alignment also seems an important element that revealed a lack of interest convergence between UK policy-makers and the diaspora, thus lowering prospects for impact. As with the US example above, the political disputes regarding the pursuit of a more assertive foreign policy approach in response to the chemical weapon attacks in Ghouta in 2013 provides an apt example.

Some observers note that the UK had been one of the most enthusiastic supporters of direct confrontation against the Syrian regime in 2012 and 2013 (Gaskarth 2016). Following a similar line as its US counterpart, Prime Minister Cameron called for a "strong humanitarian response" to the chemical attacks that would pave the path for an eventual military incursion. Effectively, it could be interpreted as a move that aimed to maintain the UK's role as an important global actor. First Secretary of State, William Hague, had argued in the UN Security Council that all nations should make necessary contributions to save innocent Syrian lives (Hague 2013). The diaspora clearly interpreted the policy alignment as favorable, deeming it an opportunity to obtain the desired policy outcome, namely a UK intervention.³⁸ It thus served as an impetus for increased mobilization, both formally and informally.

However, the policy shift of the UK substantially lowered the chances for diaspora influence. While the Government called back Parliament from its break in late August 2013 to secure

³⁷ David Cameron was succeeded by Theresa May in July 2016.

³⁸ Note that I employ the same definition on intervention as earlier. Intervention thus means imposition of a no-fly zone and the utilization of targeted airstrikes to protect civilians.

approval of military action in Syria, its failure to obtain consent revealed a political atmosphere clearly in conflict with the diaspora's desired political goals (referred to as "the Syria vote"). Numerous politicians and political observers have considered the vote a huge political fiasco for Prime Minister Cameron and the UK more generally (Gaskarth 2016). Also the diaspora expressed its frustration by its result and still reflect on its dismal consequences for Syrians who three years later continue to suffer (Morris 2016). Similar to the US, the initial policy stance seemed to provide an opening for movement influence, considering the relative level of interest convergence. The following policy shift in 2013 and Cameron's decisive acknowledgement and adherence to the vote produced an unfavorable and constraining effect on further diaspora impact. It is difficult to assess whether the diaspora had any direct influence on individual MPs and other members of the Cabinet, but as will be covered below, they seemed to have some allies promoting their cause within Parliament. On the matter of engagement, the shifting policy alignment became a constraint on movement influence – a constraint the diaspora was unable to alter.

Influential allies

In comparison to the Syrian-American community, the Syrian diaspora in the UK has had less apparent strong allies. As such, this indicator may reflect a stronger constraint and imposed limit in this case. That is not to say that allies have not been present at all. Using the same delineation as in the US example, allies are those who actively promote the diaspora's pragmatic goals in political processes.

While several MPs in Parliament have done so, particularly two stand out as significant. Significant in that they have actively met with and discussed political processes with the diaspora and seem consistent in their policy views on the Syrian crisis. Through the All-Party Parliamentary Group, Friends of Syria (APPG), Conservative MP Andrew Mitchell and Labour MP Jo Cox have supported no-fly zones and enabling and increasing humanitarian aid to the crisis. On the matter of resettling refugees in the UK, only Jo Cox was a solid advocate. It is important to note that the APPG has included a number of MPs,³⁹ but as co-chairs of the group, these two in particular have been the most visible and outspoken supporters of the political goals of the diaspora.

³⁹ It is difficult to pin the exact number of members of the APPG, especially since it was relaunched by MPs Mitchell and Cox after the general election in 2015.

Andrew Mitchell, serving as Secretary of State for International Development from 2010-2012, was a key facilitator of distributing aid to Syrians in refugee camps in countries neighboring Syria. Additionally, he maintained after the Syria vote in 2013 that Government should not completely wipe intervention off the table. In an interview, he argued that intervention was required to alleviate human suffering in Syria. If the motion were to be reintroduced to Parliament, he would support it (Hockenberry 2013). In meetings with members of the diaspora, he has reinforced and reiterated his call for Britain to pressure for the protection of civilians and to strengthen the voice of Syrian-led civil society organizations.

Jo Cox was arguably the most openly supportive ally of the Syrian diaspora in the UK. Much of her respect within the Syrian diaspora stems from her strong commitment to humanitarian aid, advocacy for no-fly zones and the acknowledgement of the diaspora's independent voice. As argued by a representative of the RRS, Cox was an "amazing advocate" for Syrians, both in the diaspora and at home: "Anything that we needed or wanted, she was willing to raise in Parliament, and she took a lot of heat because for her views on Syria [...] Sometimes you need that voice in Parliament that can push things through" (That's Manchester 2016). Other groups, such as the Syria Solidarity Movement and Syrian Association of Yorkshire, also argued that her commitment to humanitarian principles benefited their objectives in Parliament (Safdar 2016).

One could argue that Government, by initiating the motion that would open for a humanitarian intervention in Syria was an act that supported the political objective of the diaspora. However, the fact that they had no particular contact with the diaspora, signifies the absence of an allegiance in any direct sense. The reluctance to invite the diaspora to Foreign Affairs Committee hearings reflect this (Rethink Rebuild Society 2015a). Furthermore, Prime Minister Cameron's poor agency for the Syria vote in 2013 and decisive call to wipe intervention off the table completely in its aftermath (Gaskarth 2016), are supplementary evidence that he and his cabinet were not overtly supporting the diaspora.

Similar to the experience of the Syrian diaspora in the US, the Syrian-British community had allies that were important, but not strong enough to alter policies on Syria. They were also few in number, making it even more difficult to provide substantial support in political processes. Andrew Mitchell was also involved in a political scandal in 2012, forcing him to resign as Secretary of State. The loss of an important ministerial position along with an arguably reduced credibility further decreased his political influence. Jo Cox was only elected in 2015 and was in position four years after the Syrian conflict emerged. Thus, she was a newcomer to

Parliament which can be a factor for reduced political clout. Her assassination on June 16th 2016 ended her principled support to the Syrian diaspora and became a major setback to their political mobilization. As argued by one representative of the diaspora, “it is difficult to move forward without Jo Cox” (That’s Manchester 2016). While the consequences of her death have further limited the diaspora’s influence, I argue that despite Cox’s vocal support for the Syrian community, she was unable to make any real difference on Britain’s Syria policies.

Division of elites

Division of elites have arguably been another constraining factor for the Syrian diaspora in the UK, particularly on the matter of intervention. The presumptive idea that division between political elites provide a greater chance for movement influence seems refuted, but in comparison to the partisan split in the US, my empirical evidence is less conclusive here.

Division between and among party lines in Parliament has, instead of providing new avenues for mobilization and a new set of powerful allies, contributed to further exclusion of the diaspora in the political process. It is difficult to assess whether the Syrian crisis is cause of this political divide, but the Syria vote in 2013 indicates what some observers have termed “political maneuvering” amongst the opposition; using the vote as a tool to gain a political advantage (Gaskarth 2016). Labour Party leader, Ed Miliband, seized the opportunity to undermine Prime Minister Cameron’s government and, with the support of Conservative backbenchers, managed to vote down the motion to intervene in Syria (Strong 2015).

While it is difficult to pinpoint the role the Syrian diaspora had during these negotiations, the division was a contextual element that was effectively closing the door of external diaspora influence. Even some Labour MPs expressed discontent with the political procedure and its partisan character. It reflected a split, perhaps not as strong as the division in the US Congress as elaborated on above, but still a significant one. Despite not being in Parliament at the time, MP from 2015, Jo Cox reflected on the Syria vote and contended that “the Labour Party put politics above content [...] [it] led to the worst possible result, which was taking any action off the table forever” (Barnett 2016). It is interesting to note that Ed Miliband and his shadow foreign secretary,⁴⁰ Douglas Alexander, had their own political initiative on Syria, one that explicitly sought to consult the UN prior to any further action. While this had been the intention

⁴⁰ A term used on the opposition’s proposed alternative cabinet minister.

of the Conservatives all along, the political dispute that ensued seemed indeed to reflect partisan divides based on a pursuit of political gains rather than content.

Another element that supports this notion is the history of UK foreign policy-making. As argued by Gaskarth (2006; 2016), British foreign policy has historically been characterized by bipartisanship. Despite differences on domestic policies, both parties have traditionally agreed on UK's response to international developments. As such, Government is expected to consult the opposition and then negotiate a compromise. Conservative proponents of intervention such as then Defense Secretary, Philip Hammond, argued that by developing an alternative motion on Syria, Miliband had "provided succor to the Syrian regime" (Chorley and Duell 2013). It displayed disunity in Parliament.

It can be argued that Labour's political maneuver was based on other reasons, for example UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's plea not to intervene until experts had completed inspections of the chemical attacks or based on the lack of public support (as covered below), but it nonetheless reinforces the evidence of a partisan split. "A major party opposing the government's policy on a matter of national security was extremely rare [...] (Gaskarth 2016). If the perspective of Labour as opportunistic on the Syria vote is highlighted, then it can be argued that political influence from external interests (such as the diaspora) receives less attention and thus does not factor substantially in on policy-decision. Effectively then, it can be a partial answer to the diaspora's recognized dilemma; namely that they are not being listened to (Informant 13, 2016). Particularly not on this issue. While I cannot demonstrate any causal link between the diaspora and this political process, the indicated constraint has definitely produced a more unfavorable context subsequently. It has been harder for the diaspora to promote the no-fly zone as a result of the Conservative-Labour divide and its vote in 2013.

Public opinion

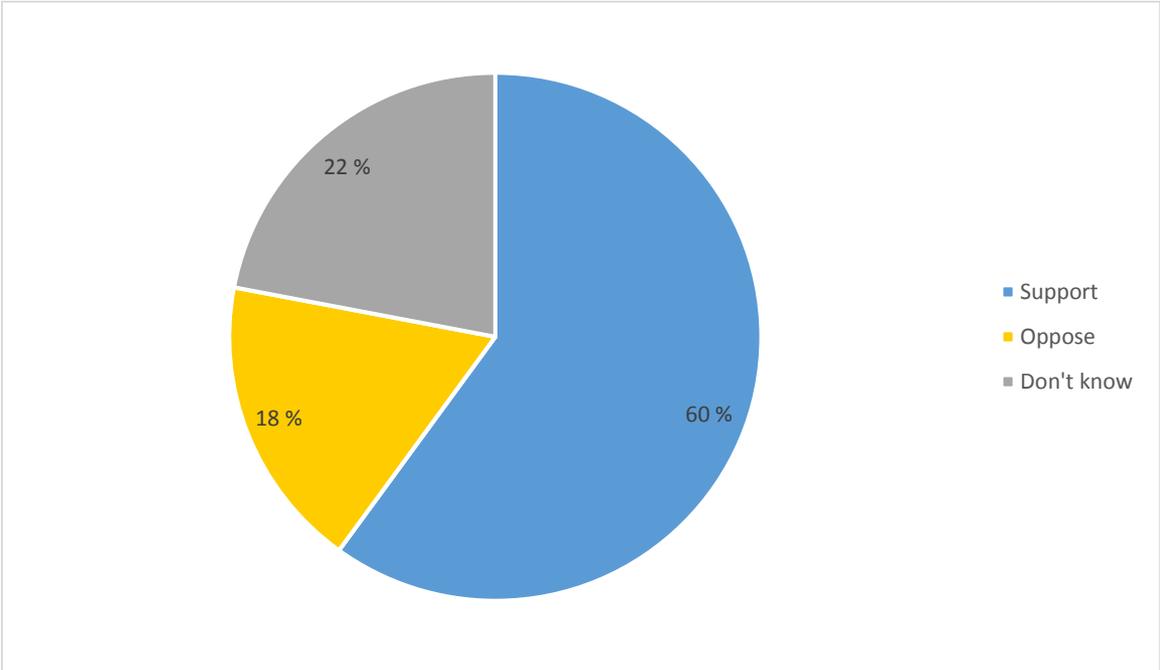
While I have argue that public opinion has been a constraint for the Syrian diaspora in the UK, similar to its US counterpart, empirical evidence suggests a more nuanced picture. By utilizing polling data provided by YouGov, it appears that public opinion has, to an extent, fluctuated on the matter of intervention. It is particularly interesting to note that the polls, albeit not being directly comparable to the American equivalent, have been conducted at roughly the same time (2012 and 2013).⁴¹ This allows for some form of longitudinal assessment of public opinion in relation to the question of humanitarian intervention. Again, it is impossible to gauge direct

⁴¹ Polling were in both cases conducted before and after the chemical weapons attack.

support to the diaspora movement. I merely seek to highlight the development of public opinion on the question of intervention to illustrate its constraining effects on the diaspora’s influence.

In 2012, a selection of UK residents were asked whether they would support or oppose enforcing a no-fly zone over Syria so the Syrian air force could not attack rebels or civilians. This poll (Figure 4) reflected attitudes towards British intervention prior to the chemical weapons attack in Ghouta in 2013. The somewhat surprising result shows that 60% of those asked were in favor of imposing a no-fly zone and 18% against it at this point. It can indicate that the public and the diaspora agreed to a certain extent at this point. One may thus argue that the convergence of perspectives between these political forces should have been enough to persuade policy-makers to opt for a more assertive approach in Syria. On the other hand, there were no sustained public debate on intervention in 2012 and in the absence of a UN mandate, it was not actually a tabled political option. Intervention without UN consent would be rendered a violation of international law. In context of an inert Security Council and a lukewarm attitude towards intervention amongst allied Governments (Adams 2015), supportive public opinion and extensive diaspora mobilization was not enough to sway decision-makers and the question did not reemerge until later in the conflict and, in particular, after the August 2013 chemical weapons attack.

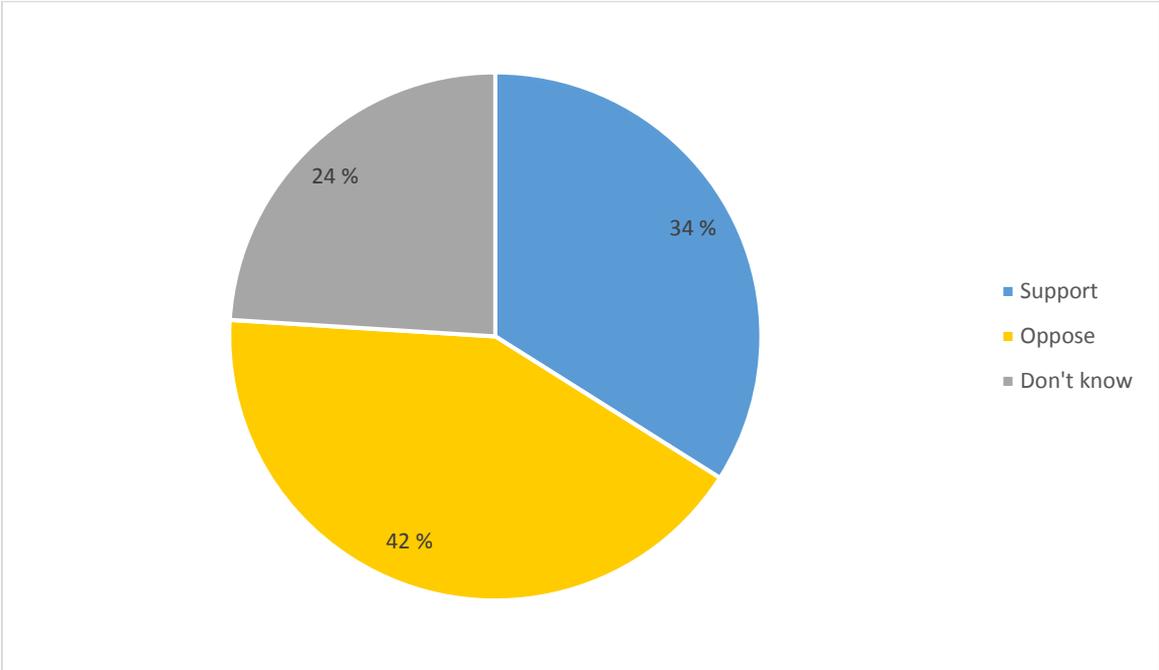
Figure 4: British attitudes towards enforcing no-fly zones in Syria in 2012



Source: YouGov (2012)

As the question of intervention entered the political agenda in late August, YouGov conducted another poll (Figure 5). At the time, the media had reported a number of chlorine gas attacks in Eastern Ghouta (a suburb of Damascus) which demanded some form of response from western governments. Those surveyed were asked whether they would support using British aircraft and missiles to enforce a no-fly zone over Syria, and if necessary, use them against aircraft and airports operated by the Assad regime. Conducted four days before the question of intervention were to be debated in Parliament, the public reflected a different attitude compared to what it did in early 2012. 42% opposed intervention whereas 34% supported it. While I do not aim to explain the reason for the shift in public opinion, one can argue that it imposed a constraint on the diaspora’s prospects for impact. Some observers viewed Cameron’s decision to wipe the possibility of intervention completely off the table as evidence of acknowledgement of public opinion on the matter (Hannan 2013). It was a reaffirmation of democratic values in British policy-making (Gaskarth 2016). The timing of the shift in public opinion was at least particularly bad for the diaspora as what they had long called for was about to be seriously debated on a political level. That they did not have public opinion as support at this critical moment, constrained their ability to influence policy-makers.

Figure 5: British attitudes towards enforcing no-fly zones in Syria in 2013



Source: YouGov (2013)

It is important to emphasize that comparing the public opinion polls both within and between the cases are somewhat problematic. Especially considering that for each poll, the question of

intervention has been posed differently. Moreover, both the political motion in the US and the UK have not detailed intervention explicitly, making it rather vague whether it entailed military forces on Syrian soil (similar to Iraq in 2003) or establishing a hegemony in Syrian airspaces (similar to Libya in 2011). Despite this, I argue that the surveys do have some empirical value in that they can be interpreted as proxies for the attitudes towards a humanitarian intervention. By assuming that intervention conforms to the diaspora's call for no-fly zones it can be argued that public opinion was a political constraint on the diaspora's political mobilization, lowering its potential influence.

In sum, this section on political context in the UK indicates how external factors provided the Syrian diaspora with both opportunities and constraints. In comparison to the political context in the US, my discussion above shows how these indicators reflect similar tendencies. Contextual factors that limit the diaspora's ability to influence host state policies in the US and the UK includes shifting policy alignment, insufficiently influential allies, divided elites and unfavorable public opinion. At the end of this chapter, I summarize these findings in a model (Figure 6). I now turn to the last element of this analysis, framing the political discourse.

5.5 External explanations – Framing the political discourse

The purpose of this section is twofold. Firstly, I intend to explain why the diaspora's framing processes have failed to capture the political discourse and consequently been unable to garner widespread attention and support. Secondly, the goal is to demonstrate how discursive opportunity, understood as ideas that are rendered sensible, realistic and legitimate within a certain polity at a specific time, can be an analytical construct that help explain the movements' inability to influence policies. This section draws together both cases as I see the prevailing political discourse and the challenges and shortcomings of both diaspora communities to be similar. It uses the following theoretical proposition as guidance:

External factors, specifically discursive opportunities, explain why the Syrian diaspora in the US and the UK failed to impact host state policies.

5.5.1 The dominant foreign policy discourse of non-intervention

It should be noted that the political mobilization of the Syrian diaspora in the US and the UK have faced a similar challenging element – namely the pursuit of civilian protection in context of a discourse dominated by a reluctance to overextend foreign policy measures in the Middle East. While civilian protection has been called for since day one (Informant 9, 2015), the diaspora has not been able to alter the political discourse despite framing it through a notion of humanitarian responsibility. Host state concerns of past strains have trumped the diaspora's call to alleviate human suffering.

President Obama's foreign policy conviction reflected an approach that sought to reduce the US' military engagements abroad, particularly emphasizing aspirations of demobilizing war efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. An effective summary of Obama's perspective of foreign affairs thus had a reference to past interventions: "no system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by any other" (Gerges 2012, 93). Indeed, the dominant foreign policy discourse was one of non-intervention in the US. In a similar fashion, Prime Minister Cameron looked to recent British foreign policy failures for inspiration and sought to mold his own approach around a discourse of non-intervention (Daddow and Schnapper 2013). The appointment of William Hague as First Secretary of State served as a step towards a more cautious foreign policy for the UK.

Although they intended to frame it in terms of protecting civilians, any engagement in Syria was, by the political establishment in the US and the UK (majority of parliament), rendered an overextension of foreign policy, one that would reflect the assertive doctrine pursued less than a decade earlier prior to the Iraq intervention. While the calls for civilian protection did not directly imply that the diasporas sought a large scale invasion of Syria, it was indeed too similar and thus unconvincing. An informant from the Syrian diaspora in the US reflected on the question of intervention and argued that the diaspora was unable to accurately frame intervention in humanitarian terms because the Obama-administration had, early on, labeled intervention in solid military terms. "We didn't ask for your tanks in our streets. We wanted more pressure from day one, that civilians could not be bombed [...] What people ask for is more protection from the Air Forces of the regime. We need civilian protection" (Informant 2, 2015). One can thus argue that while some may claim the diaspora's objective as legitimate based on its humanitarian notions, it was insufficient to convince policy-makers in either country to accept them against the backdrop of a non-interventionist foreign policy discourse. Following Koopmans and Statham (1999), the diaspora's claims were thus not rendered

sensible, realistic and legitimate at the *time* arguably because of the strong parallels to previous engagements.

One may argue that the Libya-intervention was a diversion that challenges my argument of a dominating non-interventionist foreign policy discourse. However, it is important to emphasize that Syria and Libya were two completely different cases. The Libyan diaspora, for example, operated in a different political environment. In fact, it has been argued that the intervention in Libya was a verification of Western overextension in Middle Eastern conflicts and thus was the final straw confirming both Obama's and Cameron's philosophy (Naím 2011; Goldberg 2016).

5.5.2 Symptom vs. root cause

Another challenge for the Syrian diaspora has been to convince, not only policy-makers, but also the general public, of the root cause of the conflict. The diaspora has maintained since the inception of the Syrian uprising that solving the crisis requires focus on what they argue is “a brutal dictatorship that crushed a non-violent uprising” (Informant 13, 2016). The diaspora has argued extensively that the refugee crisis is at its root caused by Syrian Air Force bombing of neighborhoods held by rebel groups. Thus, increasing provisions to refugee camps in countries neighboring Syria is treating the symptom rather than the root cause (Rethink Rebuild Society 2015c). Furthermore, diaspora organizations have promoted the claim that the Assad-regime was instrumental in producing *Daesh* and other extremist groups, arguing that at the beginning of the conflict, known militant Islamists were strategically released in order to militarize the conflict (Rethink Rebuild Society 2015b). Targeting *Daesh* through airstrikes is, similar to extending and increasing help to refugee camps, first and foremost a treatment of a symptom.

As such, part of the diaspora's inability to influence policy-making in both cases stems from the difficulty of correcting the dominant narrative that, in their view, does not separate cause and effect. This is particularly accurate after the growth of the refugee-crisis and the emergence of more radical expressions in the conflict, most notably illustrated by the development of *Jabhat al-Nusra* in 2012 and *Daesh* in 2014. It can be argued that these elements have overshadowed the diaspora's attempts of framing the narrative because they have produced other concerns for the host states. The prominence of national security and *Daesh* in political discourse is indicative of this. Additionally, I would argue that the growing importance of awareness-making by the diaspora, as argued by some informants, are additional, supportive evidence (Informant 1, 2015; Informant 13, 2016). However, in the early phases of the uprising,

framing of the conflict's main cause seemed less of a source of dispute. Both President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron condemned the Assad regime's retaliation against the street protests in 2011. Arguably, the political discourse regarding cause and effect has become a growing issue for the diaspora as the conflict has progressed.

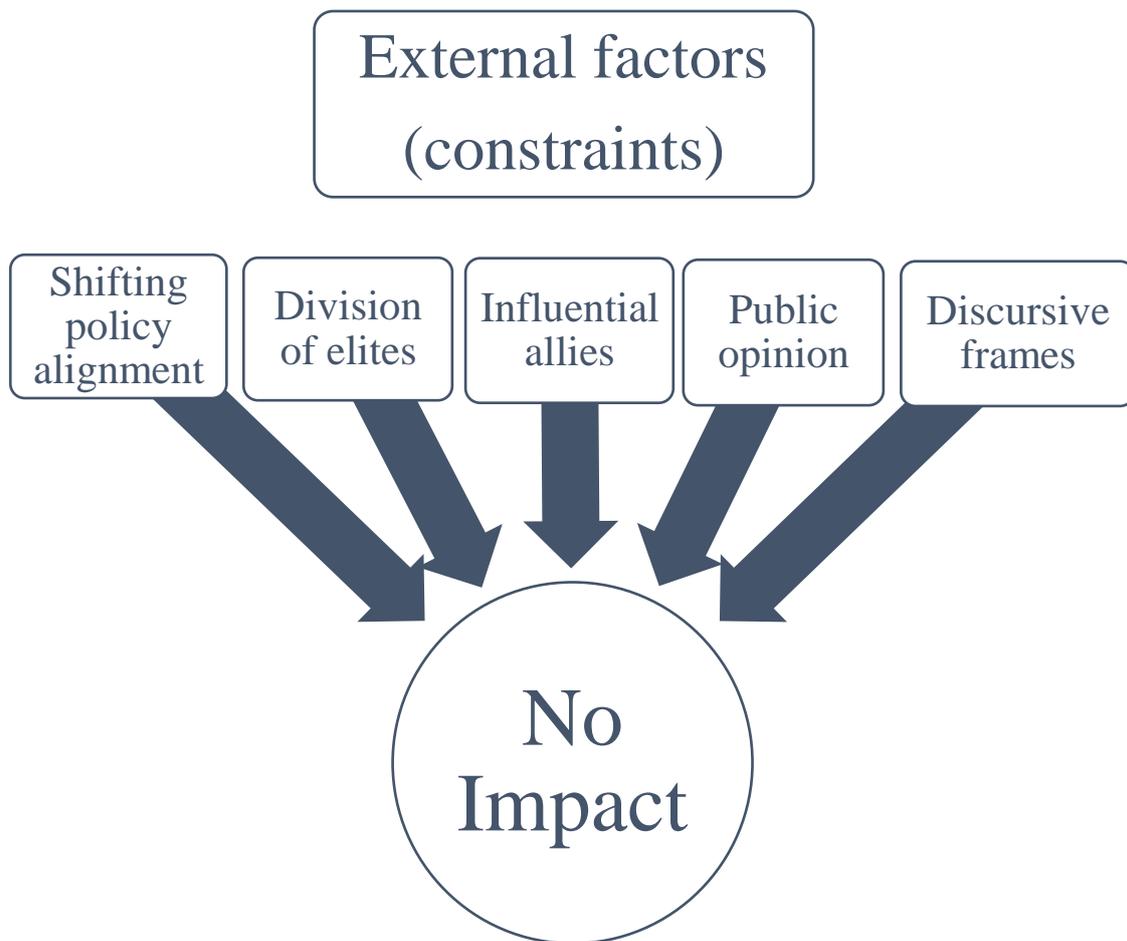
Despite providing convincing evidence of their claims, the diaspora has been unable to alter the dominant discursive narrative. While the reflections above are not necessarily rendered insensible, unrealistic and illegitimate, it can be argued that the Syrian diaspora has been unable to outbid concerns that translate directly into host countries' immediate interests. National security in the wake of the Paris and San Bernardino attacks, for example, have emerged as a strong competitive discourse challenging diaspora's narrative and political objectives. It has produced greater resentment of Syrian refugees and Muslims writ-large in both the US and UK and intensified the focus on combating terror by targeting *Daesh* in Syria.

In conclusion, the discursive frames of the conflict have constrained the Syrian diaspora's ability to affect host state policies. A dominant non-intervention foreign policy discourse has reduced the resonance of the Syrian diasporas call to protect civilians. It was perceived as an overextension of foreign policy to intervene in Syria. Furthermore, the fear of terrorism emerging as a result of the conflict and questions of national security have overshadowed what the diaspora argues is the root cause of the conflict. They have been unable to correct this narrative, reducing their chance of influencing policy in either host country.

External factors explaining the lack of influence of the Syrian diaspora

Below is a model (Figure 6) showing the constraining effect of external factors as I have discussed above. It includes both national political context and discursive frames. *Shifting policy alignment, division of elites, insufficiently influential allies, unfavorable public opinion* and the inability to capture the *discursive frames* all limited the Syrian diaspora's ability to influence host state policies in both the US and the UK.

Figure 6: Constraining external factors



One could argue that this model alone represents an extensive narrative of the Syrian diaspora's lack of influence. Following most-different-systems design as a comparative strategy, one could argue that these factors, because they are similar in both cases, explain why the diaspora were unable to impact host state policies. Since internal factors reflect different trajectories, this set of explanations would be disregarded. However, as I have shown through the empirical analysis, that would be to ignore the vast complexity of internal struggles and how this have had its influence on the diaspora's mobilization. It is the intersection of internal and external factors that ultimately explains why the Syrian diaspora fails to influence host state policies, not external factors alone. It is thus imperative that we continue performing in-depth case studies of mobilization and impact. As I have demonstrated, using a paired comparison approach is a fruitful way to go about it.

6 Conclusion

By utilizing the strategy of paired comparison and gathering extensive primary and secondary data material, this thesis has analyzed the Syrian diaspora in two particular host countries with respect to political mobilization and policy impact. More specifically, I have been interested in uncovering the factors and conditions that have limited Syrians' ability to influence host state policies in the United States and the United Kingdom. This in light of a substantial – and still growing – body of research that has focused predominantly on the influence diasporas have on host state policy making. By using social movement impact theory as an analytical framework for scrutinizing the diaspora's political failures, I posed the following research question at the outset:

Why has the Syrian diaspora failed to influence host state policies in the United States and the United Kingdom?

As the analysis indicates, the Syrian diaspora's lack of political influence does not allow for a simple and parsimonious answer. Indeed, the two cases reflect a complex and composite picture of political mobilization where both internal and external factors combined explain the outcome. The propositions suggested in the theory chapter are thus not mutually exclusive. While the literature has long been in disagreement on whether internal or external explanations best account for movement impact (Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999; Amenta et al. 2010), my findings suggest that there is no "magic bullet" determining movement outcomes. It is the intersection of internal and external (contextual and discursive) factors that explain why the Syrian diaspora has failed to influence host state policies. That said, the empirical analysis does not allow me to decisively conclude on which set of explanations matter most.

As demonstrated, the movements share one central historical element, the lack of civil society experience. The combination of repression at home and abroad, with the neglect of ethnic, religious and regional diversion in education have fostered a sense of distrust in the Syrian expatriate communities. As such, there has been a reluctance to mobilize politically, especially based on a Syrian identity before the uprising. While the uprising has arguably spurred mobilization in the diaspora, low trust levels have endured, particularly in the Syrian-American community. In the Syrian-British diaspora, this difference has, to some extent, been acknowledged, hence why some diaspora organizations have allocated more resource to

accommodate this element. In Britain, this seems to have come at the expense of political mobilization.

Despite this shared element, the movements have, in terms of mobilization structures, had two different trajectories, but with a similar negative outcome. The Syrian-American diaspora had difficulties garnering widespread support within the Syrian community, much due to conservative connections and regime ties of the diaspora's "early risers", but also because of the personal agendas and rivalry that emerged. It subsequently led to a manifestation of deep-rooted cleavages in the diaspora, producing highly uncoordinated and fractionalized professional advocacy organizations. These organizations have struggled to obtain legitimacy in the eye of American policy-makers, as they do not know which voice to listen to. As such, these internal factors have reduced the diaspora's chances of affecting policies.

In the Syrian-British diaspora, limited funding for political mobilization and the diaspora's limited size have been an important constraining element. Combined with its focus on community reconstruction, the political expression has largely been less professionalized and more based on individual activism. It has been unable to establish an effective political lobby in London. Despite being able to coordinate better than its Syrian-American counterpart, its weak lobby has constrained the diaspora's ability to influence host state policies.

When it comes to external explanations, both cases reflect similar opportunities and similar constraints. Access to the political systems have been present in the US and the UK allowing them to protest at public venues as well as interact with a variety of stakeholders in respective polities. Furthermore, a shifting policy alignment, allies without sufficient influence, divided elites, and a public opinion that was largely unfavorable, reflect contextual constraints both diasporas have faced.

Lastly, the dominant discourse of non-intervention combined with the rise of terrorist organizations have made the Syrian diaspora's call for increased US and UK involvement largely unresonant. They have been unable to frame what they argue is the root cause of the problem, much due to the dominance of the alternative discourse. It has thus constrained their ability to affect policies.

6.1 Implications, limits and further research

There are several implications of this study. Firstly, I have illustrated the utility of employing social movement impact theory in the assessment of diaspora politics – particularly the aspect that concerns the diaspora’s ability to affect host state policies. Whether they succeed or fail, this analytical framework can be employed on other cases of diaspora mobilization. As diaspora politics grows in importance (Vertovec 2005; Adamson 2016), this thesis presents an innovative and original way to go about it.

Secondly, I have demonstrated that it is crucial that we also pay attention to the *lack of impact* when we study social movements. The social movement literature has focused extensively on positive cases, but little on negative cases. Effectively, this thesis shows that the study of negative cases are indeed useful for theory development (Goertz 2005, 159). Despite its challenges, by studying failure, we may better understand the linkages between movements and their consequences (Giugni 1999). This aspect thus deserves more attention from social movement scholars who have largely neglected it. Furthermore, we should combine internal factors with external factors to produce a more holistic understanding of mobilization and its consequences. Not doing so may lead to the attribution of wrongful causal relationships and spurious conclusions. In this thesis, ignoring either of these groups of explanations would have missed crucial aspects of the Syrian diaspora’s failure to influence host state policies. The share of explanations that altogether tells the story of the Syrian diaspora are indeed vast. There is no reason to expect this to be different for other cases of mobilization, be they successful or failed. Arguably, this indicates that we should pay attention to both internal and external aspects when studying social movement outcomes in general.

The thesis is not without its limits. One important limitation is the question of causality. Movement impact research is particularly vulnerable when assessing causal relationships. As I argued in the methods chapter, the narrative provided in this thesis propose theoretical explanations for the lack of movement impact. It is therefore important to take it for what it is. The use of different sources of data and the temporal manner of how mobilization was analysed helps alleviate some of these difficulties. However, certainty of causality remains a caveat of the thesis.

While the study has been extensive in its own right by covering both internal and external elements affecting the diaspora’s prospects for influence, it is by no means exhaustive. By that I mean that several choices have been made in the research process that have ultimately led to

the exclusion of certain interesting research avenues. I will here synthesize those avenues I deem to have largest potential in terms of both theoretical and empirical usefulness.

First, I have focused on diaspora mobilization exclusively within *national* political contexts. This has come at the expense of a wider international context. For example, I have not paid extensive attention to the proxy elements of the Syrian conflict, looking at how such elements may have limited the diaspora's ability to influence respective host states. As argued by one scholar "the modern nation-state is not a discrete ecological unit insulated from exogenous pressures" (Meyer 2003). There is thus reason to believe that by extending the range of variables to cover these aspects, we could learn more about how other state actors inhibit movement influence. One way this can be done is by incorporating international relations in assessments of political opportunity.

Second, this thesis has focused primarily on *political* impact. Further studies could extend the perspective of impact by looking at how the diaspora has strived to influence perceptions of the Syrian conflict. As alluded to above, there are also consequences of no impact. An avenue could be to focus more attention on what happens to movements, and perhaps in particular, with diaspora communities when they are unsuccessful in changing policies.

Third, employing social network theory or interest group theory on a similar set of cases could be promising. While social movement theory has its usefulness as demonstrated, the findings can and should be corroborated by further studies using other analytical frameworks.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the Syrian conflict still rages on. What can we expect to see in the near future? The question many Syrians ask these days is if their homeland is a lost cause. Reduced funding for political activities and a stronger focus on the humanitarian burden seems to be the trend in both the United States and the United Kingdom. While there still is extensive political mobilization, it seems to be dwindling. Syrians in the diaspora are still committed, but the increasing financial burden to alleviate human suffering and a tiredness of the conflict may reduce the motivation and ability to mobilize politically in the near future. Furthermore, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah's involvement in the conflict presents a strong challenge for host states to implement some of the policies mobilized for in the diaspora (most notably humanitarian intervention and no-fly zones). Maybe the "window of opportunity" in terms of influence on this matter is now closed. With Donald Trump's ascension to the presidency in January 2017, it is expected that he will reconfigure Washington, D.C.'s policies, both domestic and foreign. As such, a new policy towards the Syrian conflict and new ways to handle its consequences may substantially alter the political context, providing new constraints

and new opportunities. While there is little difference to spot in UK policies after Theresa May succeeded David Cameron, it will be interesting to see how foreign relations will develop between the two host states and if it will have an impact on the Syrian conflict. What it means for the diaspora is difficult to predict, but there is little optimism to observe amongst Syrians themselves.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Public opinion polls with question and alternatives

Public opinion poll	Poll question	Alternatives
Pew Research (2012)	Do you think the United States has a responsibility to do something about the fighting in Syria between government forces and anti-government groups, or doesn't the United States have this responsibility?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US has responsibility • US doesn't have responsibility • Don't know
Pew Research (2013)	Would you favor or oppose the U.S. conducting military airstrikes against Syria in response to reports that the Syrian government used chemical weapons?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favor • Oppose • Don't know
YouGov (2012)	Enforcing a no-fly zone over Syria so the Syrian air force cannot attack rebels or civilians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Oppose • Don't know
YouGov (2013)	Using British aircraft and missiles to enforce a no-fly zone over Syria and, if necessary, use them against aircraft and airports operated by the Assad regime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Oppose • Don't know