

War and Economy in Syria: A Socioeconomic Analysis up to Julani's Ascendancy

Sobia Jamil¹, Syed Zohaib Abbas Rizvi²

ABSTRACT

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This study examines the socioeconomic dimensions of the Syrian conflict from the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011 to the political transition that followed the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in 2024. The research investigates whether the Syrian conflict is more effectively explained through the Greed and Grievance framework or the Frustration-Aggression Theory of armed conflict. Specifically, it addresses the following questions: (1) What socioeconomic factors contributed to the outbreak and persistence of the Syrian civil war? (2) To what extent do the Greed and Grievance and Frustration-Aggression theories explain the Syrian case? and (3) How have economic inequality, youth unemployment, corruption, and democratic deficit shaped patterns of conflict and instability in Syria? Employing a qualitative and analytical research design, the study draws upon secondary sources, conflict literature, policy reports, and socioeconomic indicators to assess the drivers of unrest and violence. The findings suggest that while elements of grievance are evident, the Syrian conflict is more comprehensively explained through the Frustration-Aggression framework. Prolonged economic hardship, limited employment opportunities, entrenched corruption, political exclusion, and restrictions on political participation generated widespread frustration that eventually transformed into collective mobilization and violent conflict.

Keywords: Secularism, Radicalization, Economic indicators, Socio-economic fabric, Resistance.

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of General Education Jinnah School of Public Policy and Leadership (JSPPL), NUST.

Corresponding author: sobia.jamil@seecs.edu.pk

² PhD, Independent Researcher.



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Introduction

The concept of an armed conflict is a physical phenomenon wherein two or more quarrelsome factions or parties engage with weapons to fight each other. Larger armed conflicts are decided by the intensity and use of military strength by either group or party. Thousands of casualties and millions of internal displacements i.e., movement from the war-torn region into a safer place, are the results of larger armed conflicts. The fighting groups can be divided into two major categories. Countries fight with each other e.g. Russia and Ukraine are two United Nations-declared independent countries with different might and stature engaged in a never-ending armed conflict. The second category involves an internationally accepted sovereign government (often weak) and a resurging or powerful militant group.

The best example to illustrate the second condition is of Afghan Taliban fighting the foreign-backed Afghan government in Kabul. This condition may be reversed with a powerful country's military fighting a relatively weaker, dependent and justified armed group i.e., Israel and Hamas. The highest cost that an armed conflict pays is in the shape of human lives. People who get lifelong disabilities and injuries pay even a greater price. After human suffering and mass migration comes the suffering of cities, power plants, universities, homes and hospitals. Israel's brutal onslaught on the defenseless Palestinians is a perfect example of a strong US-backed military being involved in the killings of over sixty thousand Palestinians including thousands of women and children. Starvation and devastation of property went hand in hand throughout the campaign.

Numerous reasons may be attributed to the start and duration of a conflict; some conclude in months, others take years of life loss and infrastructure damage. The scars these conflicts leave on the human consciousness can be seen in the population of post-wars periods. In some cases, geopolitical tensions like territorial disputes lead to never-ending conflicts. For instance, the internationally renowned dispute of Kashmir between Pakistan and India (Cohen, 1995) has always remained a bone of contention in matters of diplomacy, normalization of trade ties and other people-to-people projects. When it comes to ethnic hostilities, we can take Rwanda as the best available test case of the contemporary conflicts: Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups (Uvin, 2001) have both been on the receiving end of the conflict and they know the pains inflicted by the other power during the hostilities. In these cases, tribes act as separate countries, nationalism gets restricted to the honor of a tribe. Though the use of proxies by the international powers has been in use for

decades, with the collapse of the Soviet Union by succumbing to a never-ending war in Afghanistan at the hands of US-funded and trained Taliban being the prime example, still the surge in creating and arming proxies came after the advent of the Arab Spring in 2011 (Tharoor, 2021).

Methodologically, the research has drawn on theories of armed conflict to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the Syrian war discourse. Ever since the outbreak of reported violence in Syria in 2011, the socio-economic fabric of the country has started to fragment along ethnic, religious and economic class structures. Under the first methodological framework of Frustration-Aggression in the Syrian context, the discontentment among the youth kept on increasing till it reached a boiling point.

The factors that enabled this burst through the ranks of the elite circle and the people of influence included but were not limited to: bureaucratic corruption and systemic hurdles; ever high rate of youth unemployment with no governmental/ institutional plan/ framework for job opportunities; nepotism and lack of transparency even for the underpaid, mundane and non-productive jobs; economic inequality and lack of awareness about the concerns at the governmental level etcetera. When all these and the associated factors combined, the Syrian population especially the educated unemployed and aware youth, converted the frustration into aggression, an aggression that turned so violent that even IS (Islamic State) found permanent stakes in Syria. When the individual and psychological frustration takes the form of a group/ mobilization at the grassroots level, then it comes under the model of grievance theory.

By grievance in armed conflicts, we infer examples such as a prolonged conflict, a street mobilization, a non-violent campaign spanning decades, etc. In Syria, it got converted to the grievance mode with separate groups with opposite identities rooting for revolution under different banners. IS and other religious militants believed in strict interpretation of the Islamic law, violence and suicide campaigns; the moderates and secular Syrians under the banner of FSA (Free Syrian Army) were in favor of reforms and a democratic new government being elected by the people; Kurds were represented by the YPG (People's Protection Units) to take Assad out, but by 2015, the same group helped making SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) to fight off IS (ISIS at the time). The presence of so many groups under the discourse of grievance really made the Syrian crisis a case study to be studied from the theories of armed conflicts.

Aftermaths of the Arab Spring

After witnessing initial success in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, protests and conflicts in Syria were also seen at new levels; therefore, the removal of

dictatorships and family dynasties in the Arab world meant trouble for countries like Syria, Bahrain and even Saudi Arabia. But democracy hasn't been tasted by the Arab countries (Rachman, 2021) and most of them are being ruled by the dynastic dictatorships with zero level contribution of non-royal citizens.

Since this study shall discuss the socioeconomic dimensions of Syria, we first need to discuss the attitude of the Arab governments towards democracy and the latter's relevance and place in the Arab world countries. Democracy in the Western world is seen as intertwined with economy and social responsibility; what we do not assume or ignore at our biased behest is the nourishment of different types of governments in different types of states and people. It is commonly said that Egypt hasn't seen democracy before 2012 and the history dates back to the times of pharaohs, so when the protests led to a democratic setup, they refer to different socio-economic and political factors. Let's take a few examples first: the Egyptian people were fed up with the authoritarian regime of President Hosni Mubarak and his predecessors, his frequent de jure suspension of human rights and other liberties and most importantly his disapproval of a free and fair parliamentary election on the footsteps of the Western world. When Muslim Brotherhood's Muhammad Morsi was sworn in the President's office, hopes were high of a transition towards democracy (Rachman, 2021), but what happened in the one year of his short term in the office not only shocked the world but also opened up a list of questions on the role of the foreign backed Egyptian military in the country's politics. Egypt holds a sizable number of Christians (10 percent) and secular Muslims, but the initial draft of the Egyptian constitution had no room for the unorthodox Muslims and Christians and was mainly drafted by the conservative Muslim Brotherhood's officials.

This portrayal of a new Egypt in the making saw a huge decline in the popularity of the conservative President and paved the way for the military to step in again. From 2014 till date, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, the military general who had put off his uniform and had replaced Muhammad Morsi, has been serving as the 6th President of Egypt. Whereas Muhammad Morsi died in court in 2019 while attending to one of the various charges affixed on him by the authoritarian regime. El-Sisi's dealing of the protestors over the years in addition to his use of brute force have never allowed any steps towards a democratic nourishment of the Egyptian society (Mefreh, 2021). A politician had no future in Egypt whereas a military general was poised to serve for a decade at minimum. There is no conspicuous doubt about the interests of the United States and Western powers in the Middle East. These democratic powers have become accustomed to dealing and supporting the monarchies with no human rights of voting for a parliamentary democracy, and of course

direct contacts mean direct oil contracts. The term democracy and its associated jargons for instance press freedom, freedom of speech and the rights to vote have all been manipulated to the maximum ability of the beneficiaries which in these cases obviously refers to the Arab monarchies and the Western democracies. When Tunisia, Libya and Egypt had their respective governments changed, we did witness neither smooth transitions of power nor the formation of mutually agreed governments. Egypt came back to its merry ways with a hardcore military-backed autocratic government (Sayigh, 2023) with US back up within a couple of years of the revolution cum Arab Spring, but the revolution affected countries of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) i.e., Algeria, Libya and Yemen did not achieve anything substantial. Tunisia, the parent country of the Arab Spring, has been transformed into a new form of autocracy with ever-lower participation in the elections and an ever-higher unemployment rate.

The country's socioeconomic fabric was highly dependent upon the foreign tourists, but things got worse before 2015 when terrorist attacks saw a huge decline in the revenues extracted by foreign tourists. It is important to note that Tunisia has been understood as the best fruit of the Arab Spring has produced, but even the best fruit of the revolution has extreme ripeness in it. More than 80 percent of Tunisians think that their country is headed in the wrong direction (Mbarek, 2021).

Syria's Socioeconomic Fabric

Concluding the debate on the socioeconomic fabric of the country that we are supposed to discuss in detail, let's take the Syrian Ba'athist Government's approach towards the post Arab Spring protests and civil wars. The father-son duo of Hafez Assad and Bashar Al-Assad have literally ruled Syria with iron fists since 1971 making the duration equal to the life span of Bangladesh and with the infamous Hama Massacre of 1982 also included in the list of brutalities.

Syria was the perfect candidate for a transition towards democratic norms and a pluralistic government. Emotional nationalism has paved the way for the coercive adherence of the Syrian people to the Ba'athist party and family (Aldoughli, 2020). It would be true to say that the Syrian conflict can be described as one of the deadliest conflicts of the 21st century. Though the genesis of this conflict can be traced back to March 2011, when people started protesting against the government of Bashar Al-Assad, the actual reason for the high intensity of the conflict was the domino effect of the Arab Spring, a clock of revolution that was first timed in Tunisia in 2010. What was started as a sequence of events entailing protests and agitation movements in 2011 in Damascus and other Syrian cities had turned into a full-scale country-wide

conflict just a year later in 2012. The Ba'athist government led by Assad junior by now had two choices: either to make room for the democratic opposition forces and step aside or to resist by brute force. For the first option, pro-Assad forces and opinions have always maintained that making room for someone else meant allowing the radical forces to take Syria and its people hostage.

The argument is that the secular opposition forces were to be defeated later by the radical outfits and with no overarching power to protect the Syrian people, their customs and their defense, the country would have disintegrated into different interest-ridden states led by power-hungry foreign-backed terror outfits. When such statements are made for the future of a country of 23 million (2012) people, we may infer ruptured constitutional values and social norms (Hinnebusch, 2012; Lesch, 2012; Phillips, 2016; Heydemann, 2013). No one can control a country except the ever-ruling class is an argument that is made by indifference and in haste. When one rules a country for a decade, he or she knows about all the 'ifs and buts' of the culture, religion and identity of that country. But when one quickly pronounces failure as in the case of President Muhammad Morsi of Egypt, it is imperative to understand that people are reluctant for a change when their daily lives are running smoothly. Freedom of expression and other similar beliefs are considered savories by them. If a decision is made to use force to suppress rebellion or revolution or coordinated aggression (Tisdall, 2021), then this use has to be brute especially when the suppression has to be of differently equipped groups of differently trained internationals. After making the second choice, Assad had to formally enter into the Russian-guided Iranian alliance of resistance (axis of resistance) and he was supposed to fight against the rebel groups backed by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Israel and other members of the US bloc. This choice of choosing the Iranian bloc was highly natural as mentioned before, but the people of Syria saw bloodbath everywhere; even Idlib was captured in 2015 (Alkhshali, 2015). For armed conflicts, the year 2014 bore witness to the rise of the militant group ISIS. The armed group captured sizable territories on the Western Iraqi front.

Here came another condition of the armed conflict. World superpower USA limited its involvement to aerial bombardments of the potential strongholds of ISIS, and the indigenous force of Syrian Democratic Forces (a loosely organized group of nationalists and secular-minded Syrian fighters) acted as an armed group to ouster the other armed group (ISIS) with boots on the ground. The effort took three years to bear fruit in 2017, famously known as the Battle of Raqqa, which is synonym to the defeat of ISIS. The world has seen a noticeable decrease in the intensity of the conflict in the war zone after the Idlib ceasefire, powered by Russia and Turkey (Kiselyova, 2020). But making alliances isn't easy in the Middle Eastern warfare: the Islamic State

operates against the Assad's regime in Syria, but it also attacks the secular rebel groups in the same country, whereas in Iraq, it attacks the Kurdish people. Therefore, the Syrian opposition forces haven't been able to formally make a big alliance and oust Assad from power; this ideological difference has been cashed in by the Assad regime. He has successfully cracked open the fault lines among the different opposition groups.

The Russian Proximity

The Middle Eastern autocrats were only allowed to rule by the United States when they remained in the superpower's proximity and compliant to its charter of demands. But the Arab Spring witnessed signs of positive change. The need for this much-awaited change doubled in intensity since the regime in Syria had long been dependent and in proximity of Russia (Understanding Russia's Intervention in Syria, 2019). This reliance on the Kremlin meant US support for the opposition groups operating under different names and ideologies in Syria e.g. the secularist Syrian National Front (SNF) or the militant groups like Al-Nusra Front.

In the wave of toppling down of monarchies, Syria was faced with real indigenous and foreign-funded revolts. After succumbing to the United States' plea of R2P i.e. the responsibility to protect doctrine which in itself is a successor of preventive and preemptive modes of wars (strikes) in the Libyan case in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Moscow was cautious when the same demand was applied on Syria. As expected, Putin's representative vetoed the resolution of R2P in Syria (The Impact of the Libya Intervention Debates on Norms of Protection, 2016). The political rhetoric of R2P had led to the international intervention in Libya; the doctrine lost its significance to the veto powers of the five permanent members of the Security Council in the latter conflicts. Syria in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, became a test case for the resurgence of the Russian might at one end and the US-led capitalistic unipolar world at the other. The people of Syria suffered heavy casualties, refugees' crisis (Tisdall, 2021) and property damage at the hands of the government forces and their allied proxies, the secular nationalist opposition forces and the radical militant groups. The region of Syria has historically been called Levant and the birthplace of the world's most dangerous militant group ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Levant) later renamed as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). The role of the religious terrorist proxies in annihilating the social fabric of Syria has much to do with the sect of the Assad family. Though Middle Eastern rulers rule by iron fists and don't care about the norms of Islam, but they invest on portraying themselves as humble and rightful Islamic rulers by ostentatious acts of charity, establishing magnanimous mosques named after them in different countries; same sect clerics are also used for marketing and praise, gimmicks that often attract a

layman. These rulers publicly abide by staunch religious beliefs and spend hefty sums on personal security, including hosting of US military bases. Strictly speaking, most of these rulers rule because they abide by the US will and interests in the region. But the Syrian monarchy didn't belong to the mainstream Islamic sects; they are known as Alawites. We will not go into the details of the Alawites' beliefs and practices, but we will not say that they have normally been excommunicated by both Shias and Sunnis. The support base from Iran had a few genuine religious and political reasons.

The orthodox Shias have declared them heretics, but still, they remain a Shia offshoot with a reasonable level of acceptance among the Shia community. They could be brought back to the uncorrupted Shia'ism, many believe. Iranian proximity to Russia is a commonality between the two countries i.e. Iran and Syria. The Moscow- Tehran interdependence has taken unimaginable leaps: Russia Ukraine war has witnessed Moscow using Iranian kamikaze suicide drones inflicting heavy casualties on Kiev; the use of the Russian airbase in the Syrian province of Latakia's coastal city of Jableh by Hezbollah and the Iranian authorities and the subsequent attack on the weapons depot by the Israeli air force, are all examples of Syria joining the anti-west pro-Russian alliance. Due to the publicity of the beliefs of the Alawites including the heresy, the radical minded Islamic groups publicly called for the murders of the infidel army of Bashar Al-Assad (Rosen, 2011). Though it is a reality that Bashar.

Al-Assad had filled key diplomatic and military positions with Ba'ath party loyalists and some Alawites as well. The calls for the Holy Jihad against the infidels were answered within the Syrian army with many officers and soldiers with common radical instincts with the militant groups' members quitting the army and joining the rebel groups to avenge killings from the Assad's army. We can witness the Egyptian pattern of social disorder in Syria as well i.e. minorities and secular-minded Muslims favoring a despotic and dynastic ruler instead of a democracy that has issues with how people dress and what they eat. In the last couple of years, Bashar Al-Assad has started becoming acceptable in the eyes of the wealthy Arab states, the same states that had funded the radical groups to oust him from office.

When we discuss proxy formations and the wreckage they have caused in the Middle East, we usually refer to two countries i.e. Saudi Arabia and Iran. Proxy funding usually leads to atrocities in cities and countries where the funding country remains safe, but the funded region feels the heat of the hate and weaponry indoctrinated and supplied, respectively. Though Syria has weakened as a country after a decade of fighting and civil unrest, it still has relative stability when compared to countries like Yemen and Libya. Brute force has been used by Assad and his army, but the secularist faction of the

country has very much accepted him as the dynastic leader. This doctrine of the lesser evil has mainly been derived from the fates of the countries of Libya, with two rival factions trying to govern separately by de facto governments, Yemen, with Houthis (Robinson, 2023) holding the capital (Sanaa) of the country, Iraq having powerful militias apart from the elected government, etc. Socially, people of a country have a psyche to be ruled by a stable government rather than by a pack of power-hungry proxies. Syria with all its needs for humanitarian assistance for people in camps and other issues like malnutrition and sanitation still have some potential for reformation left, especially after the acceptability of Assad's regime in the eyes of the wealthy Gulf States.

Research has identified and attributed factors that impact conflicts, often adding the element of violence into the equation. The most common factors of violence are usually socio-economic in nature. They are responsible for the collective approach of a group of people towards the society they collectively inhabit or are linked to. Let's discuss the economics of a society with respect to the factors of deprivation and inequality. There is a class struggle between the privileged and the poor/ socially sidelined class of humans. This feeling of isolation and economic deprivation leads to a continuous thought process of revenge and justice. When one cannot take his or her due share (legible in his or her eyes) from the society's elite, the best form of justice under the definition of armed conflicts is reserved for siding with the uprising. "Some supporters of insurgent movements argue that armed resistance is a more effective means of challenging the status quo than peaceful protest, particularly in contexts where they perceive persistent political and economic exclusion (Akhtar, 2007; Grare, 2013)." The worrying part that armed groups bring for a state is the acceptability of their narrative in the minds of the youth, being furthered by a sizable number of educated youngsters joining the groups. The game of resources and distribution on the basis of preferences and political prejudices has paved the way for irreparable damage. It takes years of dedicated efforts and will to bring back alienated youth into the fold of nationhood and sovereignty.

The Socioeconomic Indicators of Syrian Crisis

Various factors add up to comprehensively define the factors of a civil war or public unrest. Society and economics add up to identify patterns of unrest, frustration and aggression, hence the name socioeconomic. This research examines four major reasons/ factors of the Syrian socioeconomic downfall, especially after the Arab Spring in 2011.

Economic Inequality

With an annual inflation rate of 8% in the last decade of the 20th century (Magomedova, 2017), fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs) started getting

expensive for the economically deprived Syrians. This scenario furthered the gap between the elite (a small group of powerful and rich people being well-connected with the Ba'ath Party) and the struggling majority. The rules of economic inequality were properly applied in the Syrian armed conflict. The uprising in the Spring of 2011, famously known as the Arab Spring, paved the way for proxy fighting, civil war and never-ending bloodbath in Syria. Even after the overthrow of Assad's government, the situation hasn't improved, with an already dilapidated Air Force being continuously attacked by Israel in the presence of the newly appointed ruler, Julani. United Nations Development Project's (UNDP) report in 2005 (UNDP, 2005), mentioned 30 percent of Syrians living below the poverty line in 2005, but the situation became alarming when the equation got multiplied by three, reaching 90 percent in 2023 (Press, 2023). In just 18 years, an economically struggling country's ship has almost sunk in the ocean of economic inequality.

Youth Unemployment

When getting hard-earned and highly expensive university degrees doesn't guarantee a chance for a decent job in your own country, resentment shall grow in your personality. The Syrian population was growing, ensuring a continuous flow of well-educated and new-to-market graduates seeking fresh jobs. More than half of the adult population of Syria was without a job before the start of the Arab Spring in 2011. This continuous resentment turned into hatred for the ultra-rich circle of elites that ultimately opened the gates for civil war. Even the employed people were paid peanuts and the motivation to settle in a Western country for a livelihood increased manyfold. The majority of people couldn't afford a foreign adventure, so arming the conflict was the best possible move, a move that led to the birth of foreign proxies and bloodshed. Societal and moral pressure to feed your children is so intense that people have affiliated with banned organizations for food and medicine. Even children as child laborers became prey to these organizations with over 800 joining ISIS (Watch S. H., 2014). Fighting the government killed many children, while some of their families were fed a few times during the process.

Corruption, the New Normal

Syria and its government officials, courtesy of the association with the ruling family and the elite circles, remained untouched from accountability and checks of any sorts resulting in a hub of corruption and bribery. The country's passport and rating of the ease of doing business got a nose-dive, which in turn affected the prospects of job creation. Economic and policy reforms were also vetoed by the powerful circle. When the majority of the opposition realized that the Assad family is running a major chunk of the Syrian businesses and

making huge profits, resentment boiled over since they had now realized that reforms were only a dream never to be materialized.

Democratic Deficit

Syria was governed by the Assad family from 1971 until the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in 2024 following advances by opposition forces led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) under Abu Mohammed al-Julani. Throughout this period, Syria was characterized by an authoritarian political system in which political dissent, opposition movements, and independent civil society activities faced significant restrictions. Political participation remained limited, while state resources were heavily directed toward maintaining the security and military apparatus. Following the outbreak of the Syrian uprising in 2011, the regime's efforts to suppress opposition forces intensified, often justified as part of a broader campaign against extremist organizations such as ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. As the conflict escalated, political grievances, social fragmentation, and state repression contributed to a prolonged civil war that resulted in extensive human suffering and institutional deterioration. Despite these challenges, the Assad regime maintained its hold on power for more than five decades before its eventual downfall (Hinnebusch, 2012; Heydemann, 2013; Lesch, 2012; Phillips, 2016). while committing atrocities on the likes of the Hama Clan (Hama Massacre) in 1982.

Common Theories of Armed Conflicts

Greed and Grievance Theory

Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler published a remarkable work on the comparison between greed and grievance concepts (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004) and their prioritized versions being adopted by different state and non-state actors during a war. Though the two political scientists have argued in favor of greed rather than grievance, this makes the entire concept of alienation from resources and other socioeconomic indicators take a back stage. The things that matter to human psychology is pure greed; non-state actors and powerful countries tend to occupy a region or country just because of the urge to occupy natural resources, whether they be oil and gas fields or mineral reserves.

The proponents of greed argue that conflicts usually break out due to personal or group motives (Berdal, 2005). The combatants may join a rebellion or a radical group to advance personal motives and this joining of the righteous is carefully done after a thorough cost-benefit analysis. Though oil in the late 20th and early 21st century has been the major reason for conflicts, but at times, minerals like diamonds have been used just to prolong the conflict. This is a filthy rich business wherein the resources of a land are sucked away by foreign or foreign-backed intruders. There are decent arguments in favor of

the theory that civil wars are caused by the grievances of the common and resistant people. They are further categorized under societal, political and economic models. Rebellions for the rights under the abovementioned three categories is a reality in contemporary political science. Baluch organizations in Pakistan also associate themselves under the grievance models since they are not impacted by greed, but rather they tend to fight for their rights, rights that can still be provided. Poor provinces need special governmental efforts to uplift them from the prospects of poverty.

Taking the example of Syria and its never ending civil war, we may have a strong debate on the advocacy of greed and grievance. The data and catastrophe in Syria suggest more of a grievance doctrine rather than a greed one since they must have reachable and available resources for the proxies to be interested in looting. When comparing the two doctrines, we may have to look at the injustices being done by the Assad family to the followers and the Muslim Brotherhood and other conservative voices of Syria (Tisdall, 2021). Standing against the grievances of well over four decades was meant to happen and the Arab Spring had provided it the push and passion for the change that was exactly what was needed at the time. Still, we look for a more balanced justification of the Syrian civil war in terms of conflict theories since there was no confirmed greed for resources, whereas the grievance was felt by radicals belonging to countries that themselves have nourished alienation. The Syrian case may not exactly be explained by the grievance and greed theory; therefore, we shall proceed to the next theory of armed conflicts.

Frustration-Aggression Model

Initially proposed in 1939 by Dollard et al, the basic argument around which this theorem revolves is the correlation between group frustration and armed conflicts. Denial of rights leads to frustration ending in aggression by the weak populace against the strong group (Breuer & Elson, 2017). In the Syrian socioeconomic case, various factors played a vital role in adding up the frustration level of the common people. Monarchy, brutal government policies, massive corruption in bureaucracy and judiciary, high-end inflation, limited job market, collapsing institutions, oppressive means to silence the freedom to speech and ever-lower public trust in state institutions (Alam, 2023) added up all the fire and fury under the banner of frustration that later became a powerful punch of civil war. Resistance against reform insulted the people of Syria as if they were mere subjects of the monarchy. The experts of international relations witnessed a translation of frustration in the Arab Spring with people demanding economic reforms on the roads of Damascus. The aggressive armed exchange of fire and fury between the government and the protestors lead to the creation of more armed groups demanding results by

aggression. Civil war gave rise to the creation of various non-state and radically motivated militant groups in Syria.

Frustration-Aggression Theory and the Syrian Conflict

After carefully studying the two models/ theories of armed conflicts i.e. the greed and grievance theory and the frustration-aggression theory, with respect to the Syrian conflict, we have made a direct correlative linkage between the Syrian civil war and the frustration-aggression theory (Alam, 2023). Frustration at the hands of the Assad family has led the majority of the Syrians to look for opportunities from the outside to take their 'frustration into an ' aggression' mode out. This theory categorically explains the Syrian situation, wherein disturbing factors accumulated over time and turned into a time bomb awaiting opportunity, awaiting a remedy for frustration opportunity.

As we have discussed earlier, the main drivers of the Syrian civil war were economic inequality, youth unemployment, corruption and democratic deficit, respectively. People were frustrated due to the societal inequalities and economic hardships. The frustration was further aggravated by the rampant corruption in the government institutions transforming the frustrations into massive protests against the government. The government also tried to limit the freedom of speech of common people by usual use of brute force. Moreover, people were frustrated as they had no venue to express their feelings. The repressive techniques of the government to suppress these people added fuel to the fire. Massive protests by now had turned into violent clashes with casualties reported in most of the processions.

Another reason of this frustration-aggression theory, which perfectly explains the Syrian crisis, was the condition of the educated youth. The middle-aged people who had attained decent college degrees and were unable to secure respectable jobs to feed and shelter their families found this lack of economic opportunity in Syria to be a byproduct of the Assad dynasty. The only thing left for these educated people was to initiate or join a protest. Initiating a protest in a despotic country invites trouble, but joining a procession of thousands is easy on eyes and minds. This example also shows the implementation of the frustration-aggression theory, wherein frustration usually translates into aggression. When a part of the educated but unemployed youth (Fordham, 2016) joined different militant groups like the Islamic State (ISIS) and attacked the security personnel and common civilians, frustration led to aggression had taken a toll on the human bodies with blasts and indiscriminate firings killing hundreds in a single day of violence. Surely, once an educated class with dreams in their hearts had turned into serial killers with guns and bombs in their hands.

Conclusion

This study examined the socioeconomic dimensions of the Syrian conflict through the analytical lenses of the Greed and Grievance framework and the Frustration-Aggression Theory. The findings suggest that the Syrian civil war cannot be fully understood solely through resource-based explanations of conflict. Rather, the interaction of economic inequality, youth unemployment, corruption, political exclusion, and limited avenues for civic participation created conditions of widespread frustration that contributed to social unrest and, ultimately, violent confrontation.

The analysis demonstrates that prolonged socioeconomic deprivation and institutional shortcomings weakened public trust in state institutions and intensified perceptions of marginalization among significant segments of the population. While elements of grievance were present in the Syrian case, the Frustration-Aggression Theory offers a more comprehensive explanation for the transformation of socioeconomic discontent into collective mobilization and armed conflict. The inability of existing political structures to address public demands for reform further aggravated tensions and reduced opportunities for peaceful conflict resolution.

The Syrian experience highlights the importance of responsive governance, economic inclusion, and political participation in maintaining social stability. The study concludes that sustainable peace and post-conflict reconstruction require not only security measures but also meaningful socioeconomic reforms that address structural inequalities, strengthen public institutions, and restore citizens' confidence in the state. More broadly, the Syrian case demonstrates how persistent socioeconomic grievances, when left unaddressed, can contribute to the escalation of political instability and protracted conflict.

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