Transnational Repression, Diaspora Mobilization, and the Case of The Arab Spring

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ABSTRACT
Do authoritarian states deter dissent in the diaspora? Using data on Libyan and Syrian activism in the United States and Great Britain, this study demonstrates that they do through violence, exile, threats, surveillance, and by harming dissidents’ relatives at home. The analysis finds that the transnational repression of these diasporas deterred public anti-regime mobilization before the Arab Spring. I then identify the mechanisms by which Libyans and Syrians overcame these effects during the 2011 revolutions. Activists “came out” when (1) violence at home changed their relatives’ circumstances and upset repression’s relational effects; (2) the sacrifices of vanguard activists expanded their objects of obligation, leading them to embrace cost sharing; and (3) the regimes were perceived as incapable of making good on their threats. However, differences in the regimes’ perceived capacities to repress in 2011 produced significant variation in the pace of diaspora emergence over time and guarded advocacy. The study advances understanding of transnationalism by demonstrating how states exercise coercive power across borders and the conditions under which diasporas mobilize to publicly and collectively challenge home-country regimes.

KEYWORDS: transnationalism; repression; social movements; diasporas; Arab Spring.

Transnationalism has become a dominant paradigm used to describe the ways in which social, political, and economic processes and practices transcend national borders in an increasingly interconnected world (Vertovec 1999). By analyzing how immigrants and diasporas remain linked to their countries-of-origin after emigration (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Vertovec 2004), studies of transnationalism have demonstrated the importance of cross-border ties in shaping and sustaining remittance-based economies, cultural practices, and civic...
engagement in the home country (e.g., Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003; Levitt 2001; Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999; Smith and Guarnizo 1998). While debates persist about the salience of transnationalism across populations (Mouw et al. 2014), investigating its forms and effects has proven to be critical in understanding the character of social life among diasporas.

The literature has more recently attended to how populations abroad become transnational political actors and mobilize for social change in the home country. States facilitate political transnationalism through top-down processes, such as by incorporating their diasporas as constituents with voting rights (Brand 2010, 2014; Gamlen 2014; Itzigsohn 2000; Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008; Ragazzi 2014; Pearlman 2014). Diasporas also mobilize after emigration to launch social movement organizations aimed at influencing politics and development at home (Bermudez 2011; Fitzgerald 2009; Guarnizo et al. 2003; Haney and Vanderbush 1999; Landolt 2008; Smith 2006; Smith and Bakker 2007; Smith and Stares 2007; Wayland 2004). Though the literature is primarily focused on populations from democratic or semidemocratic states, scholars suggest that migration out of authoritarianism grants diasporas political opportunities for advocacy (Hockenos 2003; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Sheffer 2003; Tarrow 2005; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004) that enable them to mobilize as “long-distance nationalists” (Anderson 1998) against home-country regimes.1

But because relatively little attention has been paid to diasporas’ relations with authoritarian home countries, researchers have neglected to understand how these groups remain subject to repression’s deterrent effects after emigration. The operation of what I dub transnational repression by sending-state regimes means that these populations cannot fully “exit” from authoritarianism, and that those with domestic opportunities for protest remain constrained in the exercise of their rights, liberties, and “voice” (Hirschman 1978). This is not to say that anti-regime activists in the diaspora pay the same costs as those in the home country. At the same time, however, regimes can sanction their opponents and inhibit dissent abroad in direct and indirect ways. For example, after Syrian musician Malik Jandali performed at a July 2011 rally in Washington, DC, in support of his home country’s anti-regime uprising, regime agents beat his elderly parents in their home in the Syrian city of Homs, telling his mother, “we’re going to teach you how to raise your son” (Amnesty International 2011). Reports detail additional instances of Syrians’ relatives being harmed after they spoke out against the regime of Bashar al-Assad from abroad (Devi 2012; Hastings 2012; Hollersen 2012; Parvaz 2011; Public Broadcasting Service 2012). Yet, we know little about the various forms that transnational repression takes or its effects on diaspora mobilization.

In order to investigate these phenomena, this study asks: (1) How do authoritarian regimes deter dissent abroad? (2) Under what conditions are these effects overcome? To this end, I analyze Libyan and Syrian activism in the United States and Great Britain before and during the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. The findings demonstrate that transnational repression significantly constrained anti-regime advocacy before the revolutions. I then identify the mechanisms prompting revolution sympathizers to “come out” and mobilize publicly against the regimes, and show why the pace of diasporas’ coming out varied between the Libyan and Syrian cases. The article concludes by explaining the implications of these findings for the study of transnationalism, repression, and mobilization more broadly.

**THEORIZING THE FORMS AND EFFECTS OF TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION**

In the era of the nation-state, borders delimit political power in important ways. Official boundaries circumscribe authorities’ monopoly over the legitimate means of violence and distinguish relatively liberal jurisdictions from despotic ones (Weber 1978; see also Mann 1984). But despite the indisputable importance of geography in shaping political opportunities for dissent (Bob 2002; Tarrow...
authorities routinely permeate borders in order to pursue threats and exercise some degree of “governmentality” over their citizens abroad (Gamlen 2014; see also Bauböck 2003; Délanoy and Gamlen 2014). These tactics of social control and repression are not new or unique to authoritarian regimes; however, only some states manage their diasporas in “blatantly progovernmental and police-like” ways (Miller 1981:40). State encroachment is likely to be most severe for diasporas with ties to home countries that have not undergone, or have foreclosed, liberalizing reforms because protest abroad is perceived as traitorous by regimes that are intolerant of dissent at home (Östergaard-Nielsen 2001). Because autocrats cannot typically rely on democratic authorities to repress law-abiding dissidents for them, diaspora mobilization in democracies is likely to be viewed as especially threatening (Brand 2006). The question remaining is how do regimes deter dissent abroad?

Because political authority is constituted through networked infrastructures that enable regimes to exercise “extensive power” (Mann 1986), transnational repression is likely to operate through institutional outposts such as embassies, missions, and consulates. Such institutions act as gatekeepers that regulate access to the home country, as satellite stations that monitor various affairs of interest taking place abroad, and as sponsors of associational life for their nationals. Through all of these functions, regime infrastructures may operate as “an extension and in the service of the authoritarian state at home” (Brand 2006:111). As gatekeepers, officials can punish dissenters with exile (He 2014; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004) or facilitate the return of their opponents for the purposes of repression. As satellite stations, regimes have been known to conduct surveillance of diaspora communities (Brand 2006), and as civil society sponsors, regimes establish organizations to promote home-country policies, ideologies, and loyalty (Miller 1981). In these ways, extra-national regime institutions can cast a powerful shadow over the diaspora.

Regimes may further repress dissidents abroad by threatening the well-being of their significant others in the home country. Such tactics reflect authoritarian styles of control that wield sanctions against an individual’s primary social group as a means of deterrence and punishment (Alexopoulos 2008; Heckathorn 1988; Khawaja 1993; Moore 1978). Because such regimes commonly rely on extensive surveillance and informant networks to identify and repress disloyalty (Johnston 2005; Pfaff 2001), even the deeply aggrieved may be silenced for fear of being reported on and incurring costs to themselves or their kin. As a result, the diasporas most likely to be aggrieved by human rights abuses taking place in the home country are also those subjected to relational disincentives to speak out.

Regimes may also target dissidents abroad directly. Targeted violence serves the dual purpose of eliminating threats and signaling to the greater diaspora that there is no safe harbor. However, the use of lethal force is likely to be a relatively rare occurrence. In order to carry out executions across borders, regimes must deploy covert agents capable of subverting domestic security forces, which risks incurring sanctions by domestic authorities and jeopardizing diplomatic relations. Because lethal retribution violates the domestic regime’s monopoly over violence and can produce a backlash, transnational repression will likely operate through covert means. At the same time, a regime need only eliminate a tiny number of dissidents abroad (and perhaps just one will suffice) to signal what is possible for those who dare to speak out and to succeed in stoking widespread fear among the diaspora.

The transnational repression of dissidents abroad is significant because its operation and effects simultaneously embed diasporas in multiple social “fields” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004), political climates, and systems of control. As Wendy Pearlman (2016:25) argues in her study of political fear among Syrian refugees, totalitarian-like state repression produces a “disposition of silence” that is often “carried beyond the homeland.” For this reason, I propose that any member of a diaspora who wishes to maintain access to an authoritarian home country and has significant others residing there is likely to consider dissent a high-risk activity irrespective of the freedoms granted by domestic authorities. As a result, the migration of populations from authoritarian to democratic states will not automatically produce free expression or transnational mobilization. And yet, a diaspora’s willingness to engage in anti-regime advocacy is important because they have the potential to channel critical forms of attention and resources to the victims of state abuse (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Tarrow 2005).
Under what conditions, then, do diasporas come out to protest against authoritarian-sending states? Because the mechanisms producing deterrence and mobilization have not been theorized to date, the empirical investigation of these dynamics is warranted.

**DATA AND ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES**

In order to investigate transnational repression and diaspora mobilization, this study analyzes two sets of original data: 140 semistructured interviews with activists who participated in anti-regime diaspora movements, and ethnographic participant observations of pro-Syrian-revolution events in the greater Los Angeles region occurring between October 2011 and November 2014. Sampling procedures targeted opposition activists involved in a range of efforts before and after the 2011 revolutions, including formal advocacy organizations and protest movements, and across concentrated diaspora communities in each country. Respondents were obtained through (1) web and media searches identifying publicly known activists and organizational leaders, (2) contacts made over the course of participant observations, and (3) respondents’ referrals to others in their activist networks. Selective sampling sought to maximize variation (see Lofland et al. 2006:93) by targeting individuals of different immigrant generations and varying ethnic and religious identities, exiles and non-exiles, and women (see Table 1). The interviews produced rich accounts of activists’ experiences with repression, their community relations, and how their activism changed over time before and during the 2011 uprisings.

I interviewed 64 Libyans in 2013 and 2014 in and around Los Angeles, Washington, DC, London, Manchester, Leeds, and in Tripoli, because many activists had repatriated to Libya after the fall of the Gaddafi regime in late 2011. I also conducted in-person interviews with 76 Syrians in late 2014 in and around Los Angeles, Washington, DC, London, Manchester, and Bristol, as well as Skype and phone interviews with those in Houston, Boston, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Chicago, and across Michigan. I began ethnographic observations after obtaining an invitation to a pro-revolution Syrian event in Orange County in 2011. Because southern California is a major diaspora hub and center of pro-revolution activism, these data provide insights into Syrians’ community relations and mobilization dynamics over time.

The data were coded according to the tenets of process tracing (George and Bennett 2004) and grounded methods (Charmaz 2006; Strauss and Corbin 1990); as such, activists’ accounts were used to formulate the theoretical framework guiding the study. A sample of interviews was used to derive open codes, which were then grouped and refined into focused categories using NVivo software and used to code all of the transcribed data. Codes were continuously compared to the data to ensure their validity and reliability (Glaser 1965). This approach revealed how activists’ actions and inactions were shaped by factors occurring at different levels of analysis over time, including social-psychological factors, their networked relations, and shifts in violence at home.

**FINDINGS: THE OPERATION AND EFFECTS OF TRANSNATIONAL REPRESION**

The analysis demonstrates that the Gaddafi and Assad regimes deterred dissent in the United States and Great Britain in direct and indirect ways through their institutions, agents, loyalists, and informant networks before the 2011 revolutions (see Table 2). The threats posed by transnational repression (1) propagated fear, mistrust, and division between co-nationals; (2) significantly constrained or foreclosed individuals’ abilities to speak openly about home-country politics; and (3) limited...
anti-regime mobilization to “fringe” exile groups. Individuals seeking to protect their loved ones in, or their access to, the home country were thereby obligated to abstain from criticizing the regime in word and deed.

Importantly, regime institutions played an active role in the repression of the diaspora, including lethal retribution against Libyan dissidents. Libyan embassies coordinated an assassination program in Europe and the United States in the 1980s and 90s in order to eliminate the National Front for the Salvation of Libya’s (NFSL) revolutionary network (Bassiouni 2013; Pargeter 2012). Intelligence chief and ambassador to the United Kingdom, Moussa Koussa, was expelled from London in 1980 after telling The Times that two dissidents had been murdered and more killings were planned. Furthermore, on April 17, 1984, officials from within the London embassy shot at peaceful masked demonstrators on the street, killing a policewoman and injuring several protesters.5 Other

5 The Thatcher government responded by severing diplomatic relations with Libya, and the death of Yvonne Fletcher remained a point of contention between the two governments for over a decade.

Table 1. Interviewees’ Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptors</th>
<th>Libya</th>
<th>Syria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43 (67.2%)</td>
<td>59 (77.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21 (32.8%)</td>
<td>17 (22.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immigrant generation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firsta</td>
<td>46 (71.9%)</td>
<td>58 (76.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>18 (28.1%)</td>
<td>17 (22.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age at revolution’s onset</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24b</td>
<td>12 (18.8%)</td>
<td>20 (26.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>24 (37.5%)</td>
<td>20 (26.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>14 (21.9%)</td>
<td>21 (27.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>13 (20.3%)</td>
<td>14 (18.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>1 (1.5%)</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minority status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic minority</td>
<td>4 (6.3%)</td>
<td>7 (9.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious minority</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (3.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4 (6.3%)</td>
<td>10 (13.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Host-country</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>37 (57.8%)</td>
<td>49 (64.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>27 (42.2%)</td>
<td>25 (32.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>2 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active in collective efforts against</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regime before 2011</td>
<td>16 (25.0%)</td>
<td>16 (21.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self/family forced to emigrate due to</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>repression before 2011</td>
<td>32 (50.0%)</td>
<td>24 (31.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64 (100.0%)</td>
<td>76 (100.0%)</td>
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</tbody>
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Note: Numbers in parentheses are percentages.
aNot all first-generation participants emigrated from Syria or Libya directly.
bAll participants were legal adults when interviewed in accordance with IRB protocols HS# 2012-8918, University of California, Irvine.
assassinations occurred in Britain in the 1990s (Hilsum 2012) and at least one was attempted in the United States. Though the regime’s warming relations with the West in the 2000s corresponded with a decline in known murders and eased slightly the sense of threat abroad, these incidents left an indelible impression. As Monem, a Libyan American who opposed the regime clandestinely in the 1990s, attested, “everything is possible. You can’t trust a regime like that.” And though Syrian respondents did not report being threatened by violence in the United States or Britain, several attested that embassy officials had summoned them and verbally threatened them and their families. As such, respondents avoided regime institutions whenever possible.

Respondents also attested that informants were embedded in their communities for the purposes of surveillance; some were known regime loyalists, while others were perceived as coerced to inform in exchange for scholarships to study abroad. As Tamim, a Libyan American not active before the revolution, explained, “we knew that we were being watched and reports were sent on us.” When Gaddafi’s security apparatus was raided during the fall of Tripoli in 2011, this was confirmed; Tamim’s intelligence file “was a report about . . . all the details about my wedding [in California]!” Many respondents stressed that fear of surveillance was “not paranoia,” as Hussam, a Syrian American activist, emphasized. When officials in Syria told his parents that Hussam should stop attending his local mosque in Texas because anti-regime persons were in attendance there, he knew that “one of their informants was either at the mosque or at the college.” In addition, Syrians who had been summoned to the London embassy reported that they were questioned over matters that could have only become known to officials through informants.

The regimes also repressed their diasporas through their gatekeeping functions, as when respondents were forced into exile. Some interviewees found themselves “blacklisted” after protesting or participating in covert anti-regime meetings abroad, meaning that returning home would likely result in being seized at the airport and imprisoned. As Hend attested, after her father and his friend attended an NFSL meeting in the United States, her father’s friend “returned to Libya and was jailed immediately” as a result of having been informed upon; her father was forced into exile thereafter. The regimes also held sway over students on state-sponsored scholarships, as when Libyan officials

Table 2. Typology of Transnational Repression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lethal retribution</td>
<td>The actual or attempted assassinations of dissidents abroad by regime agents or proxies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats</td>
<td>Verbal or written warnings directed to members of the diaspora, including the summoning of individuals by regime officials to their embassies for this purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveillance</td>
<td>The gathering and sending of information about co-nationals to the state security apparatus by informant networks comprised of regime agents, loyalists, and coerced individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exile</td>
<td>The direct and indirect banishment of dissidents from the home country, including when the threat of physical confinement and harm prevents activists from returning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawing scholarships</td>
<td>The rescinding of students’ state benefits for refusing to participate in regime-mandated actions or organizations abroad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proxy punishment</td>
<td>The harassment, physical confinement, and/or bodily harm of relatives in the home-country as a means of information-gathering and retribution against dissidents abroad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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As Paul (1990:5) writes, “the Syrian government has almost certainly been responsible for killing, injuring, restricting free speech, and otherwise violating the rights of persons outside of territory it directly controls” in the Middle East and Europe.
coerced students to demonstrate in support of Gaddafi during his speech at the United Nations in 2009 by threatening to withdraw their scholarships (Hill 2011).

Interviewees further attested that the regimes deterred dissent by punishing or threatening family members at home, which I term *proxy punishment*. Several Libyans and Syrians active before the Arab Spring explained that their relatives were imprisoned and tortured specifically because of their opposition. Others were punished through imposed separations, as when the Assad regime “issued a travel ban on all my family members,” according to Radwan, a dissident who fled to the United States in 2005. Many also reported that intelligence agents visited or summoned their relatives for questioning. As Libyan American Monem attested, “my father was harassed consistently while I was abroad.”

The effects of transnational repression were significant. First, respondents reported experiencing widespread fear, mistrust, and division because consorting with the wrong co-national could be dangerous. As Malik, member of a London-based exiled Syrian family, remarked, “Those who used to visit Syria regularly didn’t want to associate themselves too closely with those who didn’t in case the authorities found out and . . . they get arrested in the airport or they get hassled.” Nebal, a Syrian studying in London, further explained: “the regime made us fear each other because you don’t know who works for the regime. Just saying hi to the old opposition is a crime.” Firas, a Syrian student in California, echoed this claim: “you stay away from the classic opposition because you know somebody is observing them!” The presence of temporary migrants likewise heightened the sense of threat for permanent residents. Libyan American Ahmed recalled, “if a Libyan just showed up out of the blue without an introduction from some trusted person, it was always viewed with suspicion.” Sarah, a British Libyan not active before the revolution, also attested:

If you saw a Libyan on the street, you would cross over. You would never just talk to somebody you didn’t know [or] make independent Libyan friends . . . It was always keep your head down, because you want to protect your family in Libya and you want to go back to Libya. You don’t want to be on a watchlist, you don’t want to be . . . on their radar.

The sense of threat was particularly pervasive for Libyan dissidents before 2011 because they had been targeted directly in the past. NFSL activists and their descendants attested that the possibility of lethal retribution affected where they settled, with whom they consorted, and forced their (or their parents’) activism underground. As Khaled, son of an NFSL member, explained, the threats posed by the regime were “really at the forefront of our lives . . . there was no way around it for us. A lot of people used fake names and [we] always worried about who is a spy and who is not.” Hend, daughter of another NFSL activist, recalled that her family moved immediately out of an apartment in Michigan because Libyans believed to be Gaddafi “antennas,” or spies, had moved in next door. Because NFSL members remained vulnerable abroad, several dozen families formed an insulated community in Lexington, Kentucky, because it was “in the middle of nowhere, just white people,” as Khaled recalled, and could be more effectively monitored for incursions by unknown Libyans.

Transnational repression also constrained activists’ abilities to talk about home-country politics with fellow nationals in person or online.8 As O., a Syrian American, explained, “you would think that America’s this free society, with freedom of speech, and we’re comfortable speaking on things, but it has real ramifications back home.” For this reason, Hamid, member of an exiled family in the United States, reported that broaching the subject of Gaddafi with second-generation non-opposition Libyans would be quickly shut down:

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7 Several Libyans also reported that they or their colleagues were tipped off by domestic intelligence services about regime-related threats in the United States and Britain.

8 An interviewee in Pearlman’s (2016) study on political fear in Syria also reported that emigrants were often scared to voice their opinions above a “whisper” because “even outside, you feel that someone is listening” (p. 25).
When we met Libyans, a lot of them were scared. If I say hey, “Gaddafi-this,” everybody was like, “shut the hell up . . . I can’t even hang around with you!” They’re here [in the United States] and they didn’t even have free speech.

Respondents further recalled that diaspora social events, such as picnics and holiday celebrations, were strictly apolitical because attendees assumed that they were under surveillance. Rajfif, a Syrian living in the Washington, DC area, affirmed that the presence of informant networks in the community rendered gatherings into “shallow social events.” Ayman, a doctor who had settled in Manchester prior to the revolution, also affirmed that:

[Pro-regime Syrians] would take part in our community affairs and gala dinners . . . but we would never have the confidence or relaxation to speak in front of them openly about anything to do with the regime. For fear for ourselves, because we were going regularly back home, or for our family back home.

Furthermore, unlike the Gaddafi regime, the Assad government sponsored Syrian organizations and social clubs that were perceived as part of the regime’s infrastructure of control. Sarab, an activist based in New York, attested that “most of the Syrian-associated organizations or entities had some sort of close connection with the embassy.” Even purportedly apolitical humanitarian associations, such as the Syrian American and British Medical Societies, were not perceived as neutral or independent. As Hasan, a second-generation exile in London, attested, these organizations “were based around what the regime wanted . . . You couldn’t have an independent community of the regime.” Kenan, a Syrian American activist, also reported that no organization “could operate independently of the Syrian government,” and as a result, “we had no civil society.” This undermined efforts to establish viable advocacy organizations before the revolution, as in the case of the Syrian American Council (SAC). Though SAC was founded in 2005, Hussam recounted that “everyone was afraid” to be a part of this organization because the consequences could prove to be “very severe if you were visiting Syria, and the intelligence might visit your family members in Syria.” As a result, SAC remained largely memberless and dormant until the revolution.

For these reasons, transnational activism was perceived as a high-risk activity, and being “publicly anti-regime was fringe,” as Sarab recalled. Referring to exiled Libyan activists, Mohamed S. of London lamented that because “everyone was [so] scared, they got no support.” Abdullah, a Syrian who became active after moving to Boston in 2008, explained that only a “few people, using aliases [online], were comfortable talking about things that no one dared to otherwise.” Additionally, the few who were publicly active expected retribution. Mohamed A., founder of a one-man organization called Libya Watch in Manchester, reported that every morning he would check the underside of his car for explosives. He said, “I think that was being overcautious, but it is something that any Libyan would expect from Gaddafi.” Hamid in California also reported that his relatives in the U.S.-based Libyan Human Rights Commission, a small advocacy group founded in 1985, often used aliases in the media “because they were scared for their family back home” who remained vulnerable.

Though small networks of second-generation exiled youths worked to reinvigorate anti-regime opposition in the mid- to late-2000s, their efforts remained isolated. For example, several descendants of NFSL members formed the group Enough Gaddafi, which published a website to draw attention to the regime’s repressive history. When this group held its first protest against Gaddafi’s 2009 visit to the United Nations, turnout was reported as relatively low and many participants covered their faces. Relatedly, a small group called the Movement for Justice and Development Party was established in 2006 by exiled Syrian youth in Britain. They founded a television program called Barada TV to bring attention to repression in Syria, including the violent quashing of a Kurdish uprising in 2004. Some Syrian Kurds and Syrian Arab exiles periodically held commemorative protests of regime massacres in London, but officials filmed the demonstrators and blacklisted those who were not already
exiled, as happened to one Syrian Kurdish interviewee named Tha’er. So while exiles in both diasporas instigated anti-regime initiatives, their networks were small, and no member-driven organizations or anti-regime lobbies existed in the United States or Britain before the revolutions.

**DIASPORAS’ COMING OUT: TWO CASE STUDIES**

Despite the deterrent effects of transnational repression, this study also finds that members of the Libyan and Syrian diasporas mobilized publicly against the regimes during the Arab Spring to an unprecedented degree. However, because the Syrian regime blatantly sanctioned and threatened dissenters abroad during the revolutions’ first year, the pace at which the two diasporas came out varied significantly. The mechanisms producing diaspora emergence are explained below.

**The Libyan Case: Rapid Mobilization and Liberation of the Diaspora**

Protests in Libya’s eastern city of Benghazi erupted on February 15, 2011. After regime forces responded with lethal force, civilians and army defectors took over the military’s barracks and claimed the city as liberated territory. Protests spread across the country to the capital of Tripoli within days. On February 21, Gaddafi’s son Saif Al-Islam threatened to crush the uprisings, and on February 22, Gaddafi promised to purge the country “house by house” of dissident “rats” and “dogs.” Regime violence produced a backlash and widespread defections of soldiers and officials to the revolution, which escalated the protester-regime standoff into a nationwide war within one week.

The primary reason cited by Libyans for coming out against the regime was because the conflict rapidly engulfed their relatives. When their family members joined the revolution or fled the country, this released members of the diaspora from the obligation to hide their anti-regime sentiments. For example, Sarah decided to attend protests at the London embassy because her family in Benghazi joined the revolution. When she called her aunt, her aunt declared:

“...‘The whole family’s outside’—where people were being shot! And I said, “go back inside!” and she was like “no!” You could hear shooting on the line, and she’s like, “it’s either Gaddafi or us. For us, Sarah, the fear is gone.”

In another example, Esam, cofounder of the Washington, DC-based Libyan Emergency Task Force, felt empowered to speak out in the media once his parents escaped from Tripoli. Violent repression at home therefore upset the relational mechanisms that had previously forced those abroad to keep their anti-regime sentiments private.

The second factor prompting activists to come out occurred when they observed vanguard revolutionaries taking brazen risks and sacrificing themselves for the cause. This led respondents to embrace the potential costs of coming out. Ahmed S., a Libyan British doctor, decided to reveal his identity during the second day of demonstrations because “there was a fire in me. People are dying! I’m talking to my friends who are . . . protesting in central Tripoli and I’m wearing a mask? That’s ridiculous! It just didn’t seem right.” Even after agents in the embassy were observed photographing the participants, Sarah (mentioned above), who was also in attendance, recalled, “it was too late. We were out already.” Likewise, Ahmed H., a Libyan American who had been active anonymously before 2011, stated that despite the fact that his sibling was trapped in Tripoli, identifying publicly with the revolution was important for the collective effort:

I made it a point to do everything—[in] all of my online communications, all my appearances, my name was being spoken. To make sure that people understood that if people are going to be out there on the front lines, sacrificing or risking their lives, then the very least I could do from the United States was to make my name known and to say I’m with you, no matter what.
This sea change in respondents’ orientations toward risk was both a strategy and the expression of newfound empowerment. As Mahmoud, a lifelong activist who had been shot by regime agents in London during the 1984 protest, stated, “the mask came off. It became [about] facing them eye-to-eye.”

The third factor prompting participants to come out was the regime’s relatively weak response to dissent in the diaspora and the rapid collapse of its outposts and informant base. Initially, activists expected a significant countermobilization effort because of the heavy-handed tactics used in the past; Osama, an organizer of the first Washington, DC protest, recalled that they made plans for “security because [we] had an expectation that Gaddafi would send his people” to confront them. And while the presence of pro-Gaddafi demonstrators “shook up” those who travelled periodically to Libya, a participant named Manal recalled, these efforts came to be perceived as an empty “scare tactic” because students who were initially coerced into attending pro-regime protests rapidly defected to the revolution side (Hill 2011). This empowered activists to directly confront the institutions and agents that had long terrorized them. Tamim, cofounder of the Libyan Emergency Task Force, attested that the Washington, DC-area community spoke out to harass and shame the ambassador, Ali Aujali. After Aujali resigned on February 22, protesters entered the mission and ripped down pictures of Gaddafi, shouting, “is this a free country or is this Libya?” (Fisher 2011). As one of the participants named Rihab recalled, it was about “finally being able to do something . . . and [make] a statement on behalf of the martyrs.” A similar incursion occurred in London when demonstrators stormed the embassy and raised the revolutionary flag on March 16. Because the regime proved incapable of sustaining its countermobilization at the onset of the revolution, members of the diaspora experienced a rapid liberation of their own.

Libyans’ coming out also reinvigorated existing anti-regime groups like Enough Qaddafi and led activists to establish new organizations that united former dissidents, non-politicized expatriates, and students. As Khaled recalled, the first Washington, DC protest “was the most Libyans I have seen in one place in America ever. It was [hundreds of] people who had never been politically active, who had never met before.” Despite being an imperfect unity, the barrier caused by fear of consorting with the wrong Libyan had overwhelmingly dissipated. Though ten respondents reported guarding their identities beyond the first days of the revolution because their family members were trapped in Tripoli or because they were corresponding directly with rebels on the ground,9 activists attested that anonymity was relatively rare and did not hinder their efforts to garner resources and mobilize their co-nationals.

The Syrian Case: Pervasive Threats and the Gradual Mobilization of the Diaspora

In contrast to the swift eruption of war in Libya, Syria’s uprising resembled a “slow motion revolution” (ICG 2011a). After protests broke out in Dara’a and Damascus in mid-March, “demonstrators at first tentatively pushed the limits . . . and only gradually expanded the protest movement to most towns and cities across the country” (ICG 2011b:1). The regime initially retained control over much of the country and did not experience mass defections, leading to a more gradual escalation than in the Libyan case.10 Demonstrations spread to other cities in the summer after the government besieged Dara’a in April and Homs in May, but had yet to attain a critical mass (ICG 2011a). Many parts of Syria remained insulated from the fighting in 2011 and casualties remained relatively low as of December. However, increasing army defections and militarized bombardments produced a significant escalation in the conflict in 2012 and a ten-fold increase in casualties by the end of that year.

The factors enabling Libyans to go public were also operative in the Syrian case; as I explain below, the engulfment of their significant others into the conflict, the embracement of risk taking and

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9 Six Libyan respondents joined the insurgency in Libya during the first week of the revolution. I treat anonymous mobilization in war as distinct from guarded advocacy abroad because of the obvious differences in risk.

10 See Heydemann (2013) and ICG (2011b) for analyses of the Syrian regime’s resilience to date.
cost sharing, and the perceived decline in the regime’s capacity to target individuals abroad enabled Syrians to come out. However, the pace at which activists went public was staggered because regime agents and loyalists threatened and sanctioned activists abroad during the revolution’s first year. For example, after protesters met with the Washington, DC-based ambassador in mid-April to discuss their grievances, some participants’ relatives in Syria were detained, disappeared, or received death threats (PBS 2012). Activists from both countries also cited the brutalization of Malik Jandal’s parents in July 2011, referenced above, as a deterrent. Batul, a student who later became active in SAC, explained that these reprisals made her family too fearful to come out in 2011:

My mother told me, “I understand we all want to voice our opinions. I understand we live in America, it’s a free country. But you’ve got to think of the others. Don’t be selfish. You’re not the one who’s going to face the harm—they are.” That’s why [we were] quiet for a year.

These fears were heightened by the presence of counterdemonstrators at protest events throughout 2011 and beyond. Pro-Assad loyalists took photographs and video recordings of pro-revolution gatherings and verbally threatened individuals in Arabic, as I observed in the Los Angeles area. These were not empty gestures; one such individual in Virginia was convicted of documenting the Washington, DC-area opposition as an illegal agent of the Assad regime with the intent to “undermine, silence, intimidate, and potentially harm persons in the United States and Syria who protested” (United States v. Mohamad Anas Haitham Soueid 2011:3). For this reason, my presence at protests was also viewed with suspicion by some during the revolution’s first year. At an event in January 2012, a woman observed me jotting the names of participants I recognized and asked in a flat tone, “why are you writing names?” Another added, “we’re not afraid for ourselves, but for our families.”

British Syrians reported the same problem. Ayman, mentioned above, recalled that public events did not start in Manchester until “late 2011” and that he was “very afraid” to participate because “I have elderly parents and I don’t want them to be harassed, and we know that people have been.” The countermobilization of pro-regime groups meant that just because revolution sympathizers demonstrated in public did not mean that they felt free to be identified as pro-revolution. The fear of being informed upon by fellow nationals also increased polarization within the diaspora, as respondents reported cutting off communications with those who came out on behalf of the regime, as well as avoiding and boycotting businesses known or perceived to be pro-regime.

The threats posed by transnational repression led some activists to engage in what I call guarded advocacy by covering their faces during protests, posting anonymously online or not at all, and refusing invitations to speak to the media. Sarab, for example, first helped activists in New York organize demonstrations from behind the scenes “because I hadn’t gotten approval from my family to be public.” The guarded character of activism also led public events to take on a semiprivate character. As I experienced firsthand, despite declarations by a speaker that “the wall of fear has come down!” at a SAC-LA community meeting in December 2011, I was explicitly instructed not to photograph the audience. And because of persistent concerns about infiltration, some activists who came out in the initial weeks and months of the revolution were suspected of being agents provocateurs. Susan of southern California recalled that “people were like, why is she doing this if her family is home? Why is she not scared for them? Reality was, I was scared to death!” In all, respondents report that their mobilization efforts suffered from enduring suspicion between co-nationals. As Rafif recalled:

People took their [own] pace . . . in terms of coming out publicly in support of the revolution. That also created mistrust . . . because why is one [person] completely out there and not afraid, and then somebody else is still protecting his identity?

However, as in the Libyan case, Syrians reported coming out once the revolution escalated and regime violence converted their families to the cause or forced their loved ones to flee. Sharif observed
this shift among his co-nationals in Bradford, who began to say, “look, if my family in Syria are going on the street . . . why do I need to be frightened here in England?” Similarly, Batul was able to “open up” in 2012 after her relatives in Syria decided to make their anti-regime position known and gave “their okay” for their U.S.-based relatives to come out. The victimization of loved ones also compelled respondents to transition from guarded to public advocacy. Nebal, a student in London, emphasized that though an embassy official contacted him to demand that he attend pro-Assad demonstrations, he felt that he had “no choice” but to go public after his brother was imprisoned. Others did so after experiencing a personal loss. As Abdulaziz, founder of the Global Solidarity Movement for Syria, attested:

When I start joining the anti-Assad demonstrations in late April, we used to hide our faces with scarves because we’re not sure about the consequences, we’re worried about loved ones in Syria. In late May, my friend was killed in Hama and I saw the video on Al Jazeera. One week after that, the Syrian embassy again contacted me to ask me to join their protests, and I made my decision. I said, “look, I’m not joining you, you are killing our people . . .” The person said to me, if you don’t join us, that means you are against us. I said, “I am against you, go to hell! . . .” It was the spark of my activism in the open way.

Second, respondents came out after the scope and brutality of regime violence transformed their objects of obligation, rendering non-familial Syrians as significant others. As Omar, an activist from Houston, recalled, “my brother and family are in Syria . . . but people were losing their lives. And I don’t think our lives are more precious than those people who lost their lives.” Fadel, a doctor in London, refuted peer pressure not to go public by referencing a well-known child martyr: “You can’t only be concerned about yourself and your family. If you think Hamza al-Kateeb11 is not part of your family, I think you are very selfish.” Similarly, Firas came out after the regime sent tanks to put down protests in Dara’a in April 2011. Before this incident:

[I tried] to avoid mentioning my name in any petition. But after using the tanks, it was like no, screw it! . . . Why should I worry about my family when all of the people are getting killed? . . . I know that this regime uses . . . collective punishment. But I was like, I’m not going to care . . . I’m going to go public.

The perception that costs should be collectively shared sometimes forced activists to choose between their families and the cause, however. Muhammad, exiled in London, described the agonizing decision of whether or not to give a televised interview because his family in Aleppo might be subjected to reprisals. Because his brother advised him, “this is a duty on every one of us . . . If all of us are cowards because we have family in Syria, then it’s treason,” Muhammad decided to speak to the media. However, the decision pitted his family’s safety against his principles. For other Syrians, the decision to embrace the potential costs of coming out led to familial disputes, as when Fadel reported:

I was in a big dispute with my mother. She said, “Aren’t you risking yourself?” I said, “I’m not, I am safe here.” Then she said, “You have a brother and sister back home.” I said, “Mom, I have to get out of my silence . . . and talk and protest. Those people on the ground, they are brave enough to sacrifice their lives. And I’m sitting here, knowing that nobody is going to shoot at me . . . and I’m still hesitating? No way. This is the least I can do.”

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11 Hamza al-Khateeb, a young boy from Dara’a, was tortured to death by regime agents and remains one of the most widely recognized martyrs of the revolution.
Some experienced significant social costs for choosing the cause over their familial obligations. When Nour, an independent activist from a Christian family, opened a Facebook page in February 2011 calling for liberty for Syrians, some of his family members in the United States called him “angry. Like, if you don’t care about yourself, fine, but we want to go to Syria.” Friends and family began to sever their connections with Nour for fear of “getting in trouble,” and he “started to unfriend a lot of people just to spare them the headache.” Because two of his uncles in Syria were interrogated by security forces about him, Nour published an announcement on Facebook that his family had rejected him. That way, he reasoned that if the regime questioned any of his relatives about him again, they could see that he did not represent their views. “But it wasn’t an easy call,” Nour explained, because “I experienced . . . extreme isolation and social stigma . . . I lost everything, all my social connections.” Many participants also reported that they had to cut all forms of communication with their families at home so as not to incriminate them by association, which was emotionally devastating.

Lastly, activists came out because they perceived that the Assad regime’s increased use of collective and arbitrary violence in Syria meant that going public no longer posed additional risks to their significant others. As L.A. explained, such escalations signaled that her family’s fate was no longer in her hands:

Even if I didn’t do anything, if they want my family, they will take them for no reason. When my mom tells me you are [putting a] target on us, I say mama, when they want you, they won’t wait for me to protest or not to protest.

Sabreen, an independent activist from southern California, also recalled that though her mother initially asked her to stay anonymous, she later told Sabreen that “it doesn’t matter if you speak or not, because they are targeting everybody.” As such, members of the diaspora went public because they came to perceive that the regime was no longer willing or able to sanction them in a targeted fashion via proxy punishments. As Y. explained:

In the beginning, because everything was so slow in Syria, the regime was able to crack down on everyone who talked. Then it got to a point where they’re not going to keep up. When the conflict escalated militarily, we’re like, okay, their focus is not on Facebook anymore.

This rendered high-risk activism as low risk, enabling activists to transition from guarded to overt forms of protest.

In all, Syrian anti-regime mobilization emerged to an unprecedented degree over the revolution’s first year, reviving dormant organizations like SAC and motivating activists to form new social movement groups. And yet, transnational repression also obstructed diaspora solidarity and mobilization by perpetuating mistrust and fear, and by imposing costs. As Sarab explained, the decision to “cross that line of fear” was belabored, recalling:

After I put my first post on Facebook condemning the regime . . . My finger was trembling and my heart was racing . . . So it gives you a sense of how repressed . . . and how conditioned we were to be quiet and never express ourselves as long as I’ve been alive.

And though respondents affirmed that they would continue to be public regardless of the eventual outcome of the revolution, many knew of others who remain silent or guarded. Hassan, a political refugee who came to the United States as a teenager in the wake of the 1982 Hama Massacre, cited

12 Several participants in Los Angeles-area protests declined to be interviewed in 2014. A mutual friend explained that because the territories in which their families reside are constantly changing hands, they no longer wanted to be publicly identified as supporting any one side in the conflict.
this as a pervasive dilemma for Syrians abroad because “we enjoy freedom and democracy. We came to this country for those things. That fear should not be there . . . And still . . . people are afraid.”

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Prior studies have not theorized how authoritarian states deter dissent abroad, or the conditions under which members of the diaspora come out to protest against home-country autocrats. By investigating the emergence of anti-regime movements in the United States and Great Britain during the Arab Spring, this study demonstrates that the Libyan and Syrian regimes deterred mobilization through transnational repression. The regimes conducted surveillance through informant networks, threatened dissidents, forced them into exile, held their relatives hostage at home, and in some cases harmed dissidents directly. These tactics instilled fear and mistrust between co-nationals, de-politicized their speech and social life, and rendered anti-regime activism a high-risk activity. As a result, only a minority engaged in opposition activities abroad, and no public membership-based transnational advocacy organizations existed before 2011.

This study finds that three non-exclusive mechanisms enabled members of the diaspora to come out against the regimes during the 2011 uprisings. First, activists went public when repression at home engulfed their loved ones, such as when their relatives became pro-revolution in orientation or action, were forced to flee from violence, or were detained or killed by the regime. Because these changes released members of the diaspora from the obligation to keep quiet, this study suggests that home-country repression will stimulate public opposition abroad when it undermines the relational mechanisms that make transnational repression “work” as a deterrent.

Second, the risks and sacrifices undertaken by vanguard activists led respondents to embrace cost sharing as essential to the collective cause. Heightened regime repression broadened respondents’ objects of obligation and their sense of shared fate (Mueller 1992) with non-familial revolutionaries. For this reason, participants came to “believe the costs of protest should be collectively shared” (Hirsch 1990:245) and felt called to come out for reasons considered irrational by rational-choice perspectives (White 1989). However, activists incurred social costs when significant others did not share their views.

Third, respondents went public when they perceived that the regimes were unable to deliver on the promise of transnational repression. Libyans abroad felt empowered to come out when the defections of students and officials signified the collapse of the regime’s infrastructures of control. Syrians did so when escalations in violence posed imminent or arbitrary threats to their loved ones, leading respondents to perceive that coming out would not incur additional costs on their significant others. After the Syrian revolution’s escalation, others also came to believe that the regime was too consumed by war at home to sanction them individually through proxy punishment. Both cases suggest that regimes facing insurrections and mounting threats to their survival will be unable to repress-as-usual abroad. Perceived changes in the regimes’ capacities for repression, therefore, rendered high-risk activism as low-risk (McAdam 1986) and signaled openings in activists’ opportunities for dissent (McAdam 1982; Tarrow 2005).

Lastly, the diasporas experienced significant differences in the pace of their emergence. The rapid eruption of a nationwide war in Libya and the corresponding failure of the regime to sustain its countermobilization efforts abroad enabled respondents to overcome repression’s deterrent effects within days. The Assad regime, on the other hand, proved to be far more effective at imposing costs on and inducing fear among Syrians abroad over the course of the revolution’s first year. This hindered activists’ efforts to overcome pervasive mistrust between co-nationals, and as a result, Syrians consistently reported that the diaspora’s emergence as a pro-revolution constituency was belabored and gradual.

These findings inform theories of transnationalism, repression, and mobilization in several ways. First, by answering calls to better understand how immigrants and diasporas are embedded in multiple social fields (Guarnizo and Diaz 1999; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Portes, Escobar, and Arana 2008), this study demonstrates how populations simultaneously experience democracy and
authoritarianism after emigration. This suggests that scholars account for the layering of conditions that constrain or facilitate the emergence of protest and associational life. Because home-country illiberalism can stifle the development of an independent civil society abroad, the absence of public opposition movements within a diaspora warrants scholarly attention as much as their emergence.

In line with the literature on repression’s inflammatory effects on mobilization (de la Luz Inclán 2008; Loveman 1998; Moss 2014; White 1989), this study also demonstrates that significant escalations in violence can fuel transnational contention. As Barrington Moore (1978) argues, because all societies are governed by a social contract stipulating the legitimate behaviors of subjects and rulers, even highly repressive regimes can provoke a backlash (see also Hess and Martin 2006) when they exceed normative applications of violence and disrupt the “quotidian” (Snow et al. 1998). However, diasporas are likely to come out only when the relational mechanisms producing deterrence are significantly disrupted.

The findings also echo Doug McAdam’s (1986) assertion that social movement participation is a dynamic phenomenon. While the analysis demonstrates that those who were public in their opposition before the uprisings viewed the revolutions as opportunities for protest, repressive threats led others to engage in guarded advocacy. This suggests that analyses of high-risk activism should account for how anti-regime sympathizers are subjected to conflicting social pressures (Kitts 2000) that produce intermediate forms of activism ranging on a continuum between inaction and overt movement membership. The emergence of diaspora protest is also influenced by the pace of state-challenger conflicts (McAdam 1983; Rasler 1996; Viterna 2006) in the home country. Differences in the escalation of conflicts impact when, why, and how individuals come to participate in movements, as well the degree of trust and solidarity experienced between them.

Furthermore, this study suggests that researchers investigate transnational repression as a state practice and deterrent across other places, times, and populations. States such as, but not limited to, Belarus, China (see He 2014), Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, The Gambia, Iran, Mexico (see Gutierrez 1986), North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the former Soviet Republics have worked to eliminate and deter extra-national dissent in the past and present. Sixty-six years after the infamous assassination of Leon Trotsky in Mexico, for example, Russian dissident Alexander Litvinenko was murdered by radioactive poisoning in London in 2006 by regime agents. The Aliyev regime in Azerbaijan imposes proxy punishments on activists in Europe (Williamson 2015), and the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan is conducting a campaign of assassinations across Eurasia that are hindering the efforts of pro-democracy organizers (Farooq 2015). While the precise methods of transnational repression will vary by factors that include the regime’s degree of authoritarianism, its ideological orientation toward the diaspora, and its capacities for repression, even opaque threats can produce an “internment of the psyche” (Naber 2012) that deters collective action in democratic contexts. This further illustrates the importance of analyzing activists’ accounts, since interview and observation-derived data reveal forms and effects of state repression unknown to outsiders (Moss 2014; Pearlman 2016). As Libyan American Khaled emphasized during our interview, “people do not realize the grasp that Gaddafi had outside of Libya, the reach.”

Furthermore, though this article establishes the term transnational repression to refer to the repression of diasporas by home-country regimes, future studies may extend this conceptualization to theorize the ways in which repression by foreign regimes is also facilitated by domestic authorities—including democratic ones—for the purposes of neutralizing common threats (Miller 1981). Such collaborations include military interventions against pro-democracy movements, such as the repression of Bahraini protesters by Saudi military forces in 2011, extradition agreements, rendition programs, and resource transfers of weapons and spyware (Blanton 1999; Gordon 1987). Because the fuller repertoire of repression to which diasporas are subjected is the product of their intersecting “positionalities” (Koinova 2012) vis-à-vis both the home and host countries, studies of diaspora, immigrant, and minority activism should account for the multifaceted constraints imposed upon them. This is especially pertinent for Arab, Middle Eastern, and Muslim populations who face domestic
repression in Western democracies because of their identities and transnational ties in the post-9/11 and 7/7 context (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Cainkar 2009; Chaudhary 2015; Jamal and Naber 2008; Santoro and Azab 2015; Tarrow 2015).

Lastly, further theorization is also needed to understand the link between transnational repression and assimilation. As Luis Guarnizo and his colleagues argue (2003), transnational activism “endows immigrants with a renewed sense of efficacy and self-worth that facilitates their integration into the political institutions of their new country” (p. 1239). However, though states may grant diasporas civil liberties and political rights, these populations may only come to practice citizenship under certain conditions. Many respondents attested that transnational repression had deterred them or other community members from participating in domestically oriented civic life because doing so was viewed as futile or dangerous. Activists who went on to establish the Libyan American Organization in 2012, a national membership association dedicated to representing Libyan American interests domestically and promoting transnational engagement with the home country, reported that this initiative would not have been possible before the revolution. Because diasporas’ coming out signifies a transition from subjecthood to citizenship, the process by which groups transcend the shackles of authoritarianism and embrace civic participation as a means of social change remains a promising topic of inquiry.

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