Ethnic and religious Conflict in Syria: Primordial or Constructed
Olli Session 5

Crowd-sourced solutions for next week
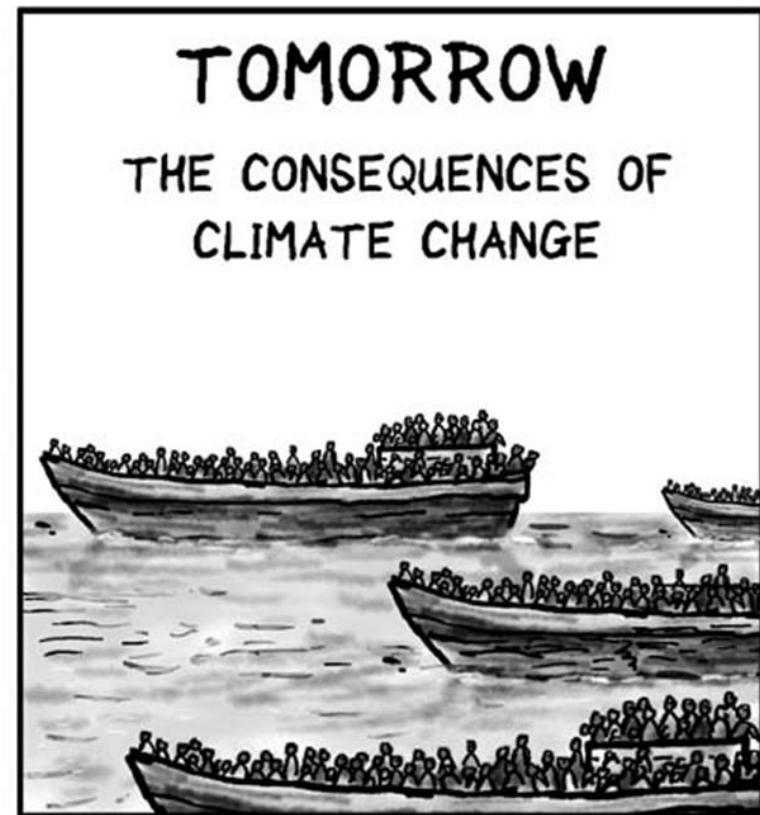
- Send ideas to bev@berkeley.edu for:
- Solutions to humanitarian problem
- Solutions to integration and assimilation
- Ideas for Conflict mitigation and resolution

Today's Menu

- Review from Last Week: What are the causes of the refugee crisis?

  - 1. **Environmental Refugees**: Climate and Disaster as causes of forced migration

  - 2. **Conflict Refugees**: What causes Ethnic and Sectarian violence?

    - Social-Psychological causes: group identity formation
    - Primordialism: Human nature and evolution of group competition
    - Constructivism: constructed group boundaries
      - Necessary and sufficient conditions for violent conflict

- 2. **Syria: What are the Causes of the conflict?**
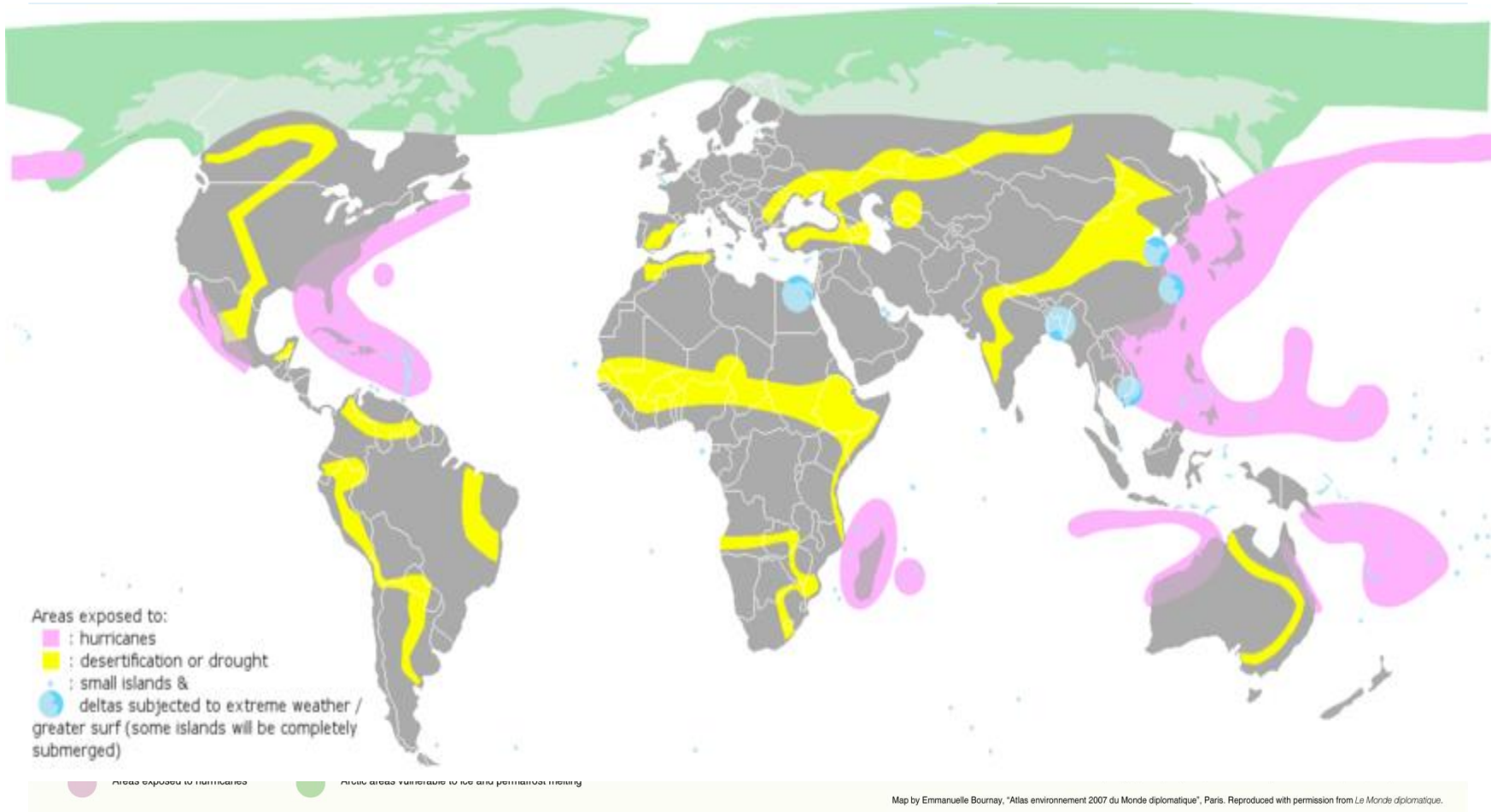
1. Environmental Refugees

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28MH3jZ
-

19.5 million people in 100 countries

Where do environmental refugees come from?

Areas exposed to:
- : hurricanes
- : desertification or drought
- : small islands &
  deltas subjected to extreme weather / greater surf (some islands will be completely submerged)

Areas exposed to hurricanes   Arctic areas vulnerable to ice and permafrost melting

Map by Emmanuelle Bournay, "Atlas environnement 2007 du Monde diplomatique", Paris. Reproduced with permission from *Le Monde diplomatique*.
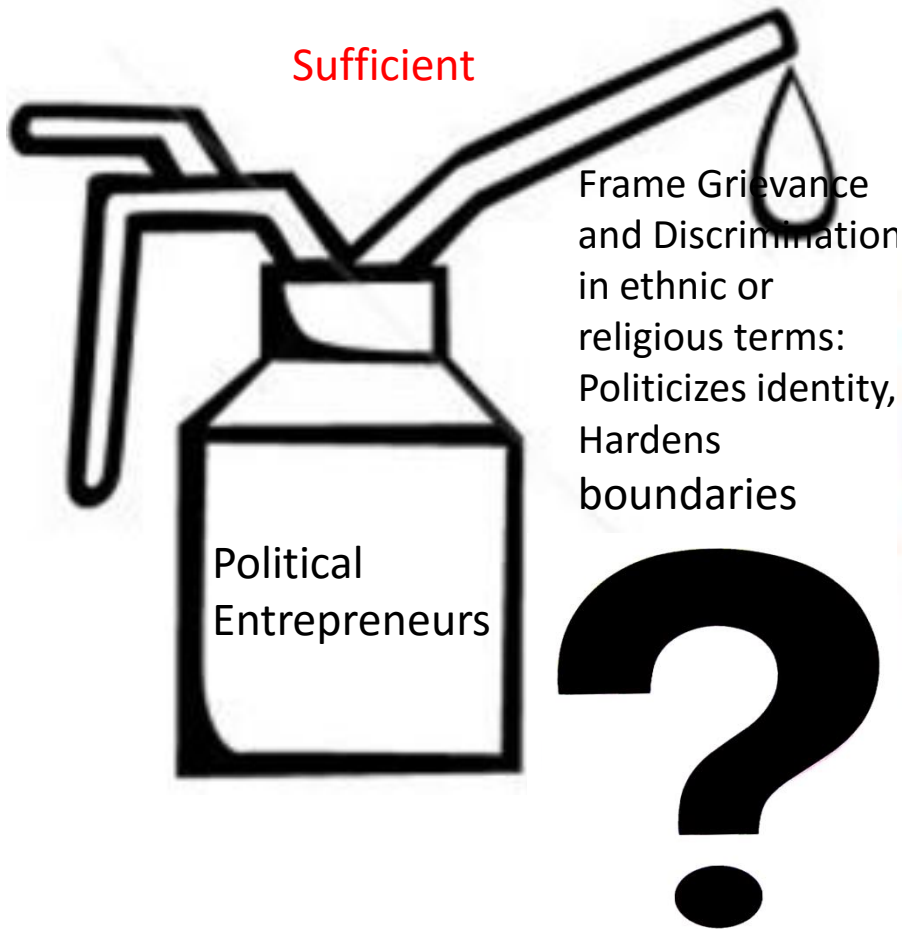
Case Study: the Maldives

Review Causes of the Refugee Crisis: 2. Conflict Refugees

- What causes ethnic and sectarian conflict?
  - Answers from Social Psychology: The process of competitive group formation
  - Primordialism: incompatibility of cultures causes cultural violence
    - the unchanging nature of ethnic groups (ascribed identities), the essential "rightness" of religious belief
    - Fixed and ascribed group identities cannot be negotiated…….
    - a Belief in the essential superiority of cultures, races, nations
    - Inherent group conflict
    - conflict is more likely than peaceful dispute settlement

Constructivism: What Causes a fire?

What Causes Ethnic and Sectarian Violence?

Sufficient

Frame Grievance and Discrimination in ethnic or religious terms: Politicizes identity, Hardens boundaries

Political Entrepreneurs

?

Necessary
Imperialism, War, resource scarcity, Climate, Natural disaster—power disparities, discrimination, privilege, Failed states

The Spark: Further hardening of boundaries by violence against "out" groups (not the other way around)

- competition among Political entrepreneurs, organizations, parties for power, resources,
  - Competition over identity construction—the framing of issues In order to gain support
  - stereotypes and dehumanization of "the other," or the out-group

  The Match: Violence Perpetrated by gangs and criminals, elites, or Extremist groups (who have often been marginalized , who

  Want to be successful in the dominant group by showing

  loyalty
  - Violence leads to a Growing language of sectarianism
  - And provides incentives to fan sectarian fears

- **Combustion**: Civil unrest over economic and political issues can turn to an ethnic or sectarian war

- Why does fire spread? Why do publics follow? (incentives, cascades)

Constructed Conflicts can be mitigated
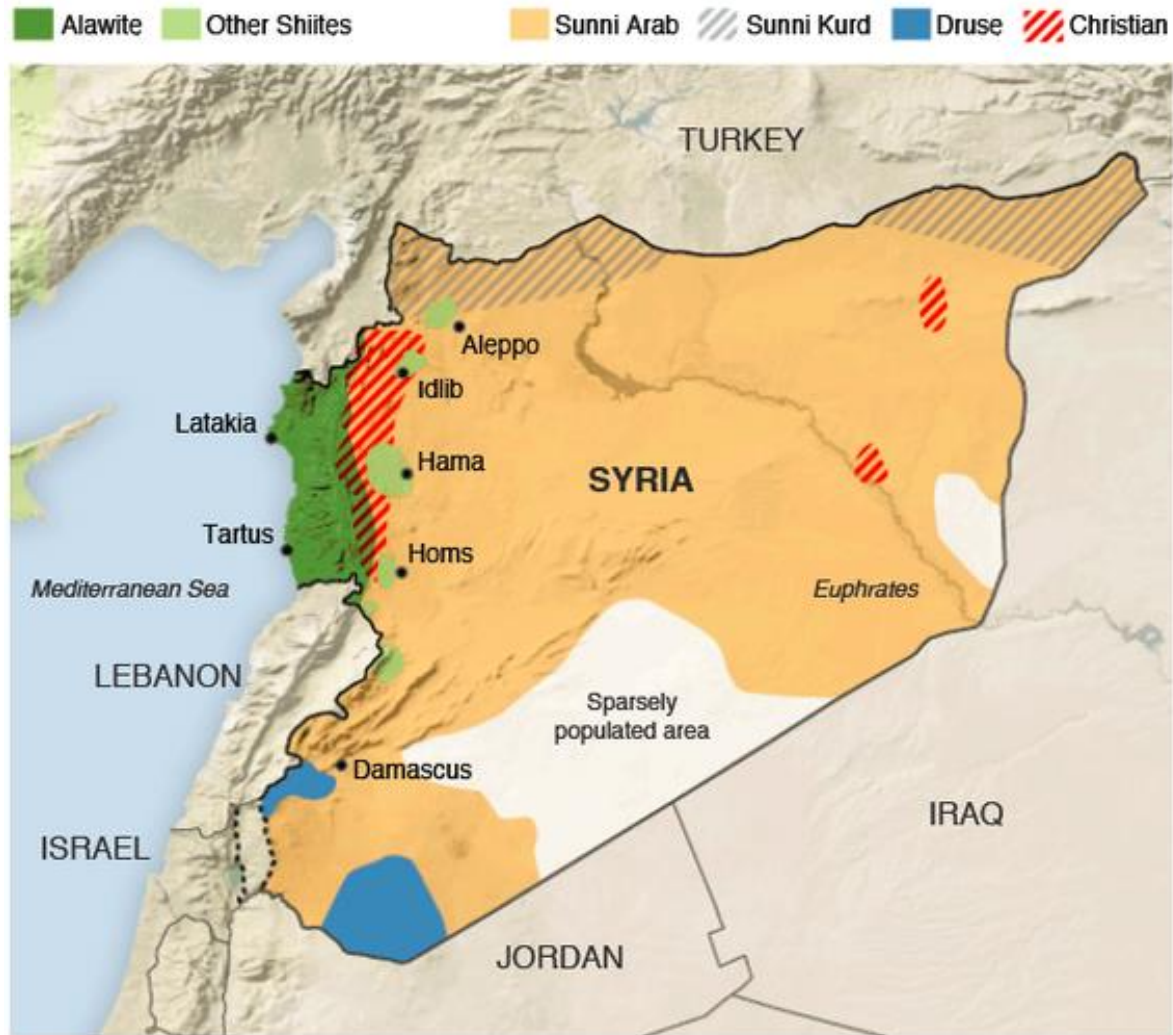
REMOVE HEAT

REMOVE OXYGEN

REMOVE FUEL

Syria: A Case Study in Conflict and Climate as causes of the Refugee Crisis

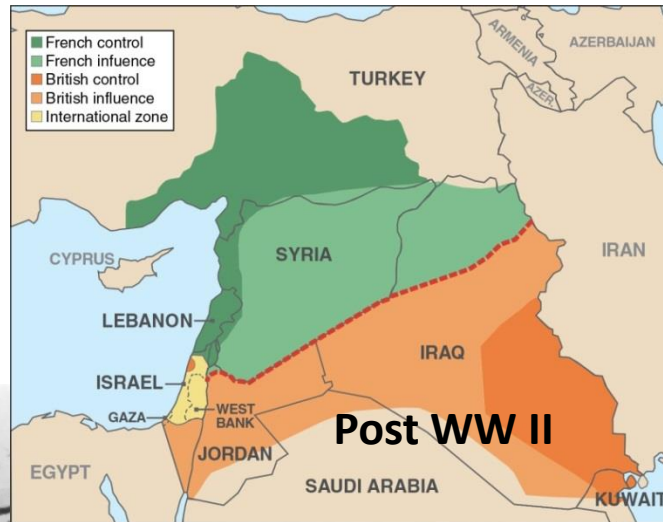# Historically Porous ethnic and sectarian boundaries

Part I **Necessary Conditions** for ethnic and sectarian war in Syria

Porous cultural boundaries hardened by: Imperialism, War, resource scarcity, Climate, Natural disaster—power disparities, discrimination, privilege, failed state

Necessary Conditions for conflict: Imperialism, Nationalism, U.S. intervention

WW I

French control
French infuence
British control
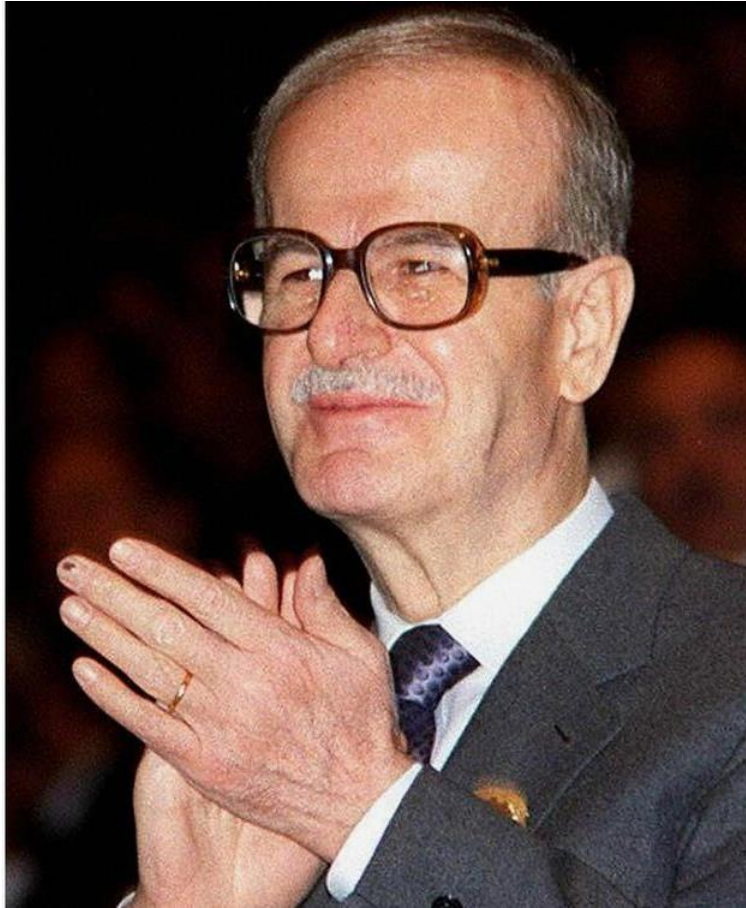British influence
International zone

Post WW II

1950's

Protest Against French Domination 1936

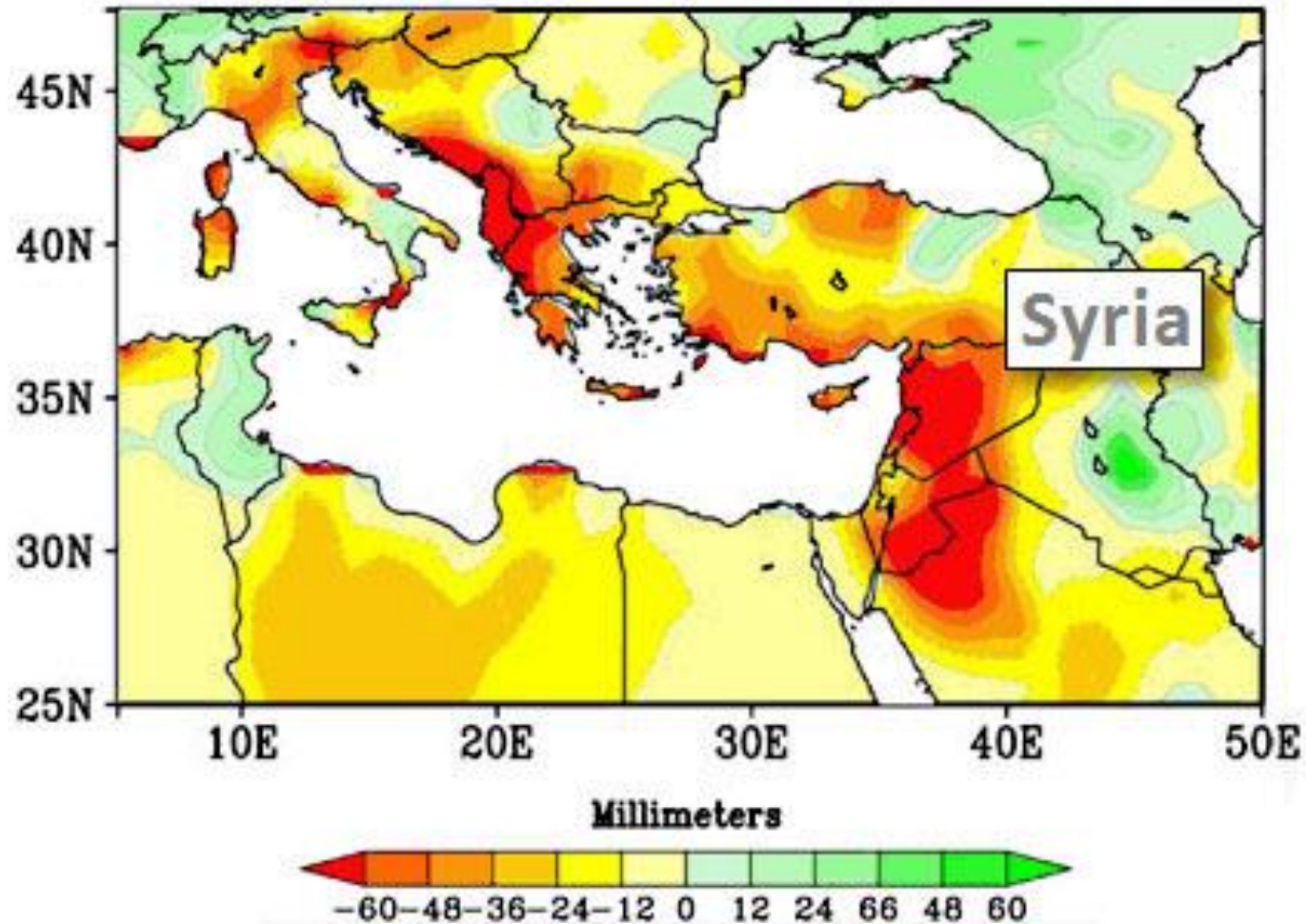"We should do everything possible to stress the 'holy war' aspect,"

Defining Syrian National Identity: Secularism, Authoritarianism: Repression of competing political entrepreneurs (Muslim Brotherhood)
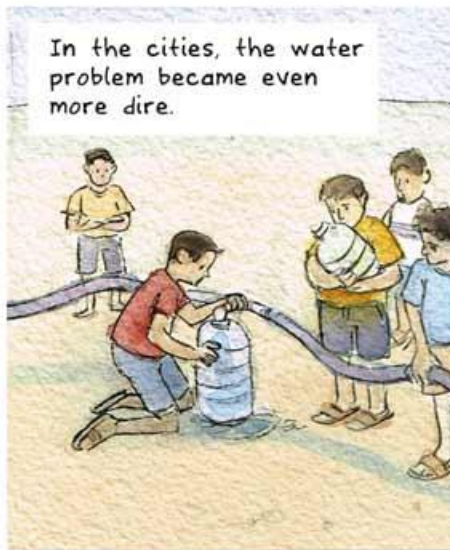

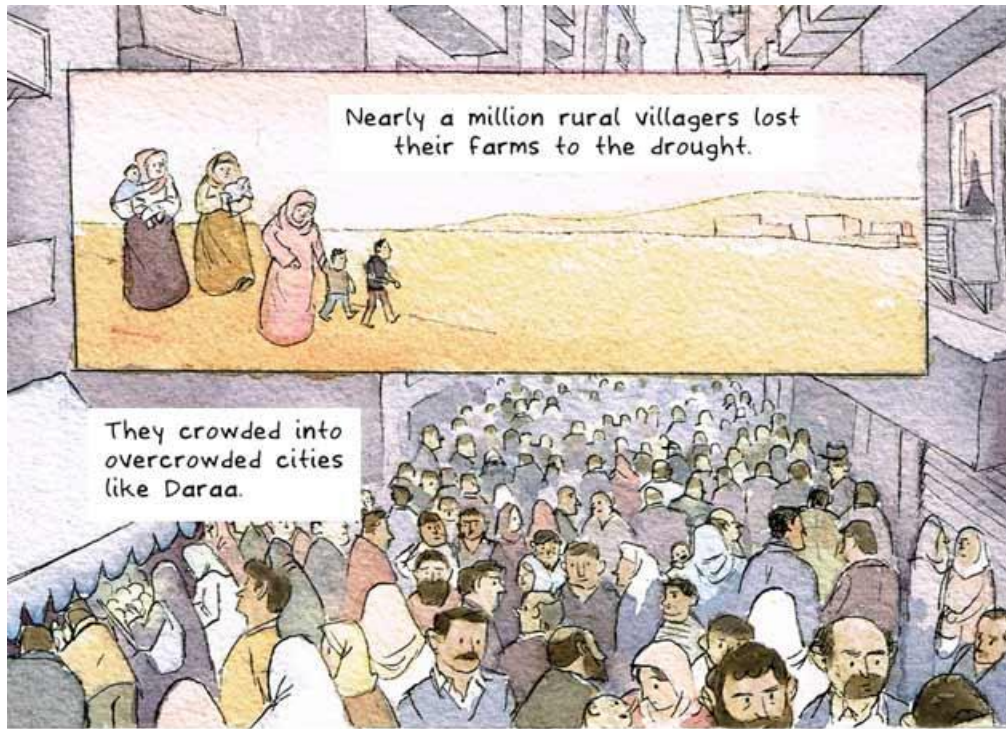- Nation should Arab Suni, Orthodox Muslim place for Minorities
- Eth national state

Muslim Brotherhood

Continuing his father's definition: The second (Bashar) al-Assad regime: a prospering country but another Dictatorship

And then the Drought

Nearly a million rural villagers lost their farms to the drought.

They crowded into overcrowded cities like Daraa.

In the cities, the water problem became even more dire.

There weren't enough jobs. Once prosperous farmers were lucky to find work as street sweepers.

Thousands of Syrian Muslims pray for rain in Grand Umayyad Mosque Damascus 2006

Protest

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21uILDiCgMg   peaceful protests
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GX6vKZnVV64 shots fired

February, 2011.

Political Entrepreneurs stereotype the other and politicize cultural (religious) identity,
framing Alawites as infidels worse than Christians or Jews
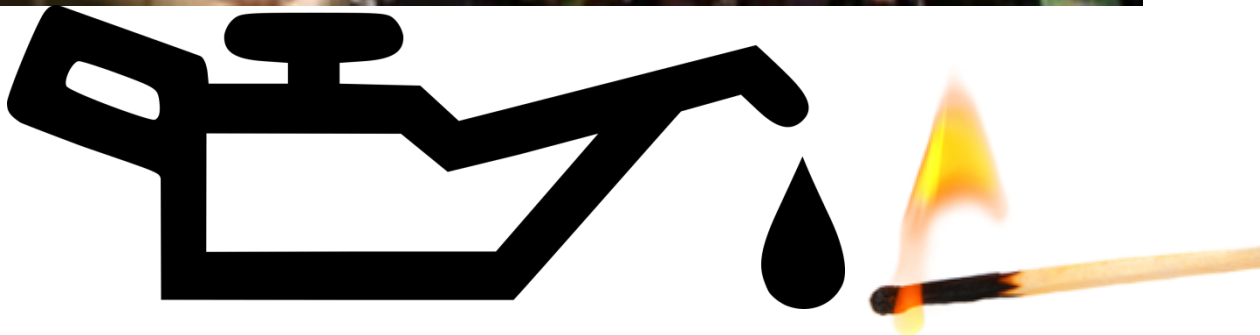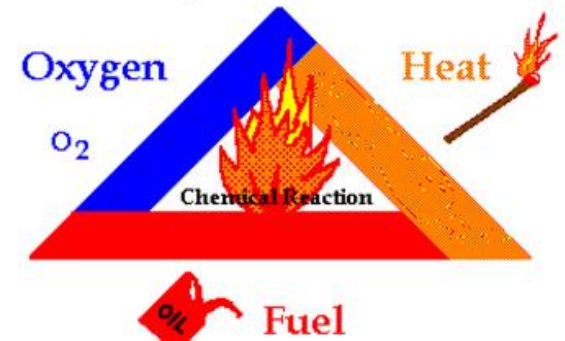## Moving moderate Sunnis toward extremeism

Political Entrepreneurs

*"What is happening in Syria is that the country has been ruled by a **Nusayri** idea, a Shi'a group that came to power and started discriminating against the Sunni people"*

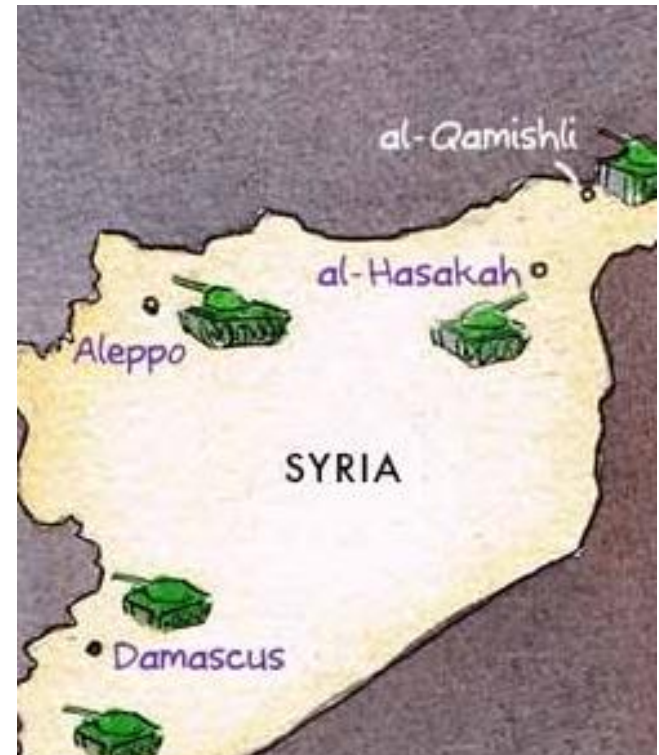# Extremists and gangs served as government's shadow militia—shoot protesters
The "Shabiha"

Oxygen
O₂
Heat
Chemical Reaction
OIL Fuel

Combustion: Thousands of People take to the streets

Assad tries to be conciliatory but it is too late

Free Syrian Army declared summer 2011

Armed opposition grows....Still are "gangs," not easily divided by ethnicity or religion

But boundaries are still blurred: Alawis join the opposition

- Sunni loyalists. Syria's large Sunni majority dominates the insurgency, and also the army conscript pool. Many quiescent civilians and state employees are also Sunni; if all Sunnis had rebelled, it is less likely that President Bashir Assad would still be ruling.

- And Alawites have joined the opposition

Then More Sectarian Fuel

Regime opposition
Groups compete
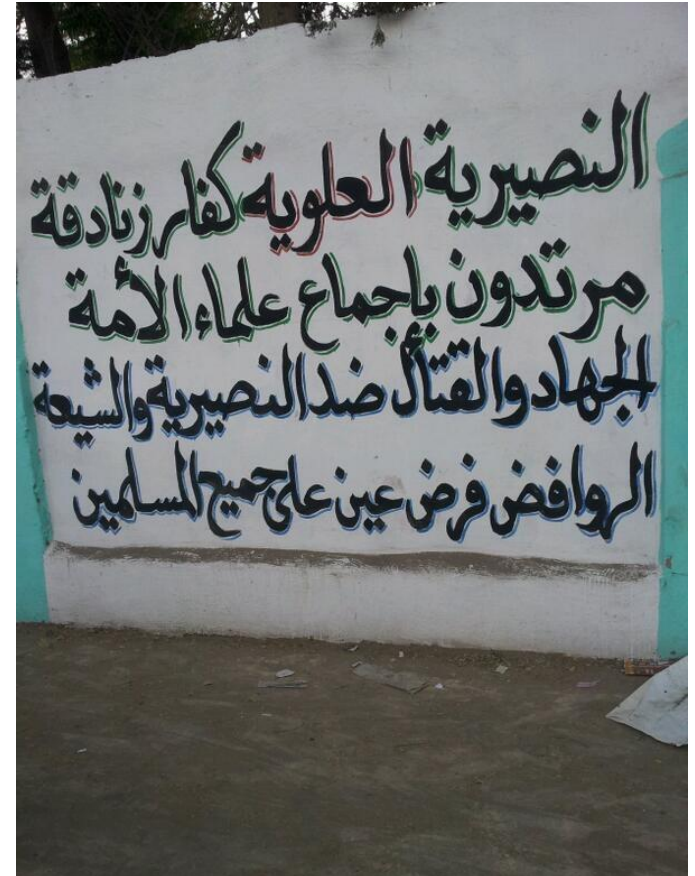
"We will eat your hearts and your livers you soldiers of Bashar the dog.".

Stoking tension by
Branding the enemy

النصيرية العلوية كفار زنادقة مرتدون باجماع علماء الأمة الجهاد والقتال ضد النصيرية والشيعة الروافض فرض عين على جميع المسلمين

Hard ethnic and sectarian boundaries are set by the extremist opposition

- Moderates follow
- Extremists emerge in other ethnic and religious groups
  - Shibaba kill Sunnis, prompting Sunni kidnappings and killing of Alawites (security dilemma)
  - Hezbollah accused of "ethnic cleansing" campaigns
  - Al-Nusra Front: Sunni militia fighting Syrian Government forces (Syrian branch of al-Qaeda)
  - Abu Sakkar of the FSA "We will eat your hearts and your livers you soldiers of Bashar the dog.".

Gradually, the War becomes sectarian

Syriac Military Council

Why do publics follow elites who construct conflict as ethnic and sectarian?

- gangs, criminals and thugs who want to commit acts of violence anyway can be mobilized by ethnic, sectarian, and nationalist ideologies.

- then moderates have to follow the thugs because they have little other choice as others begin to follow them as well.

- "bandwagoning effect" sets in; no protection outside the sectarian or ethnic group

International Intervention heightens sectarian violence

- Saudi Arabia starts funding rebel groups to counter Iran's influence
- Hezbollah comes to the aid of Assad
- Saudis send even more aid to rebels (try to get al-Nustra to leave al-Quaida)
- August 2012 Assad uses chemical weapons against civilians
- Feb. 2014 Al Queda affiliate mostly based in Iraq breaks away and becomes ISIS
- Isis fights other rebels and Kurds
- Summer 2014 US aids rebels who fight ISIS, not Assad
- Sept. 2015 Russia aids Assad.

And finally…..The Construction of ISIS completes the construction of an ethnic and sectarian war

- Above all, a sense of "right order"
  - Hypercommitment—al-Wahhab
  - Construction of extreme otherhood and urgent threat: death to infidels
  - Devaluation of existing social and political order
  - Mobilization of rewards and sanctions
  - Experience of profanation
  - Outside forces—attraction of hypercommitted foreign fighters
  - Willingness to fight

Zimbardo

- https://www.ted.com/talks/philip_zimbardo_on_the_psychology_of_evil?language=en

- http://www.designmadeingermany.de/2015/91231/
- Video on refugees
- http://motherboard.vice.com/read/commodities-traders-helped-spark-the-war-in-syria-complex-systems-theorists-say
- http://blog.thehungersite.com/the-syrian-conflict-explained-in-five-minutes-2/?utm_source=social&utm_medium=thsfan&utm_campaign=the-syrian-conflict-explained-in-five-minutes-2&utm_term=20150416

- http://www.wearethemighty.com/intel/syria-guide?utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=facebook-referral-traffic&utm_source=watm-facebook-fan-page&utm_content&utm_term
- Good on the start of the war:
- http://www.vox.com/2015/9/5/9265437/syria-war-timeline

Larger social and economic forces

- Longer History: http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/12/understanding-syria-from-pre-civil-war-to-post-assad/281989/

- Colonialism and imperialism
- Alawite Shia Muslims see French as protectors European colonialists often promoted minority groups that would rely on them to maintain power, so the relationship was symbiotic.
- 1976 Assad helps Christian groups in Lebanon, courted elite Sunnis and Christians
- http://www.vox.com/2015/9/14/9319293/syrian-refugees-civil-war
- Iraq war with Sunni-Shia, Saudis https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=war%20in%20Syria%20explained
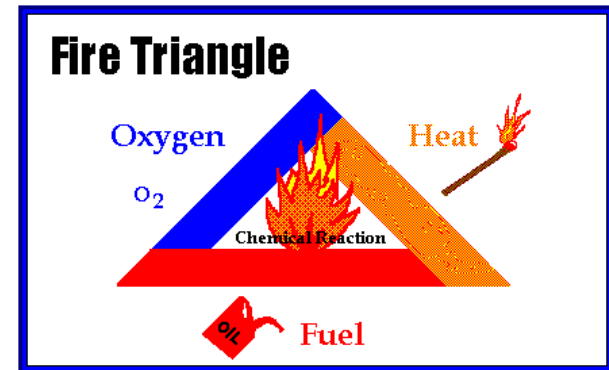
Assad comes to power in 2000

Drought and speculation

- several factors contributed to the food price spikes that precipitated the violence—grain shortages due to weather anomalies, booming demand from China, financial speculation, and the conversion during that time of crops to ethanol→ rise in food prices
- Between 2006 and 2011 over half of the country had suffered under the worst drought on record
  - Nearly 85% of the livestock died
  - Fields of Halaby (Aleppo) peppers withered away
  - 75% of farmers in northeast suffered total crop failure and lost livestock….affected 1.3 million people
- Government ordered well rights along political lines
- 1.3 million people lost farms to drought and crowded into cities like Daraa
- Water problem became dire in the cities and not enough jobs

Review from Last Week
Constructivist View: necessary and sufficient conditions for ethnic and sectarian violence
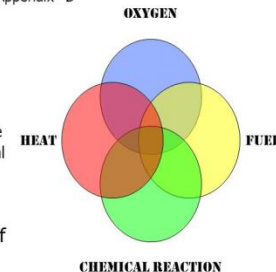
- Politicized Group identities (ethnic, religious, national) are not ascribed, they are constructed: How?
  - Politicized ethnic identities, religious identities, national identities (political by definition)
    - **Necessary conditions**: Broad political, social, economic (ie.scarcity of resources) events/processes (i.e. past imperialism and its consequences), and even natural disasters leading to grievance and discrimination (oxygen)
    - **Sufficient conditions**: political entrepreneurs looking for political support and competition among them—often backed by potent religious, ideological, ethnic symbols who frame grievances as ethnic and religious, remind public of past violence, (fuel)

- So the upshot is……. boundaries between ethnic and sectarian groups are not immutable, they are porous and can be constructed –But for violence to occur, a "last straw" is needed

Fire Triangle

Oxygen O_2 — Heat — Chemical Reaction — Fuel

REMOVE HEAT   REMOVE OXYGEN   REMOVE FUEL

Fire Basics

See Appendix "B"

- Components of combustion
  - Oxygen – sustains combustion
  - Heat – raises the material to the ignition temperature
  - Fuel – combustible material
  - Chemical Reaction – exothermic release
- Suppression of any one of these components stops the fire

OXYGEN   HEAT   FUEL   CHEMICAL REACTION