

An Autocratic Middle Class? State Dependency and Protest in the Middle East and North Africa

Transcript

Dr Maryam Alemzadeh

Hello, everyone. Thank you for being here. I have the pleasure of being your guest host today at the Middle East Politics Workshop, because your host host is the guest today. So I have the pleasure of introducing the three co-authors and the one presenter on their behalf. Neil Kesri will be presenting the co-authored piece. He does not need much introduction, but I'm going to do it anyway. Neil is a professor of politics in the Department of Politics and International Relations here at Oxford and a fellow of St. Anthony's College and the Middle East Center. His research is focused on social movements and collective protests in the Arabic-speaking Middle East and North Africa region. and he is the author of a book and multiple, multiple fascinating articles that have won a lot of awards. Present also with us are the other two co-authors, Dr. Bruno Schmidt, Foyer Head, Fellow of Political and Development Studies at Maudlin College. And his specialty is comparative politics and international relations with a focus on states and societies in the Arab Middle East. And he's currently researching contemporary politics in Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf monarchies. And last but not least, we have Azam Wazir, who is a DFIL candidate at DPIR. specializes in political economy, culture, and state-society relations in non-democratic contexts. And the dissertation, very briefly said, is about how Saudi state's political economy reshapes citizens' imagination of the state. I am very excited about this presentation. I forgot to introduce myself. I'm Mariam Alanzadeh, also a fellow here. So without further ado, please.

Professor Neil Ketchley

Thanks everyone. So this is a totally new paper. We don't actually have a draft yet. We've only presented it a couple of times. So yeah, comments are really welcome. And the other places we've presented it, it's been Nuffield at Oxford and Bocconi, which are different in both composition and context from the Mac. So we're hoping we'll get different kinds of feedback. So let me just begin by telling you a causal story that political scientists and sociologists have been telling themselves for about 50 years at this point. And that is that there is a macro level relationship between increases in higher education and democratization as an outcome. So this is Coleman's boat, named Dr. James Collins. This is an analytical tool that sociologists use, where you have what are effectively theoretical relationships. We never actually see a relationship between more university graduates, for example, and democratization. Obviously, It is

flowing through individual level conditions that then lead to individual level outcomes that then feed back up into macro outcomes. This is called the macro-micro-macro linkage. And this is kind of one of the frontiers of social science. We're really, really bad at actually showing how individual level factors actually feed up into big N or aggregate things that we want to explain. So this is 1 version of the higher education democratization story. This is not my story, to be clear, but it's a very common story. And so one version of this suggests that when you start getting more university graduates, this creates a pool of people in society who have, on the one hand, a set of attitudes. So they will tend to have a greater sense of efficacy. They think that they can change the world. They think that they understand the world. They probably think that the world owes them something as well. And it's also that you get a cohort of, or a sector of society who tend to have greater experience of protest. We know that universities are incubators for oppositional politics. And so the argument goes that whether because of the ecology of campuses, because of things like peer effects, that if you go to university, you're much more likely to get exposed to protest and to become a protester. And so the argument goes that once you have societies with large numbers of graduates, you have these attitudes and experiences, this creates a coalition within society who will be both more protest prone and also more liberal, more prone to support democracy. And this is how you get bottom-up democratization processes. So this is a story that people like Simon Martin, Lepser, all the way to kind of Robinson and Acemoglu have argued for 50 or 60 years. So over the last couple of decades, there's been a revision to this argument. And that is that in late developing economies, so economies where you have autarkic industrialization, import substitution industrialization, you often see in the post-colonial moment a massive increase or expansion in public sectors with a corresponding increase in graduate employment in those public sectors. And so the argument goes, that actually in this, what Tamila Lankina calls state manufactured middle class, the middle class becomes lumpen in one way or another, because most of the labor market options available to these graduates are in the state and in that state individual relationship is 1 born of dependency, where in these late developing contexts, if you work in the public sector, you become quiescent, you become demobilized, you become lumpen, because you see the state as being your guarantor, where you're going to get better employment, higher wages, access to public goods, and so on and so forth. And so in this revised argument, which has been really pioneered and pushed most recently by somebody called Brian Rosenfeld, who wrote this brilliant Princeton University press book that won lots of awards from political scientists. She argues that what this actually adds up to is an autocratic state middle class, where actually having an expansion of higher education in where these graduates are mostly employed in the state is going to create a pool of people in society that will serve to stabilize autocracy. And this is why in these late developing economies, actually you can have large numbers of graduates, but without the corresponding macro level outcome of democratization. Does this all make

sense thus far? Cool. So there's good reason. So maybe I should just go back one step. The empirical evidence for this is really twofold. So we have pretty high quality individual level data from contexts like Russia, showing that if you look at mass protest that's maybe not revolutionary, anti-systemic, maybe a bit more routine, that the state middle class is systematically absent or underrepresented given their prevalence in the population. And we also have pretty good attitudinal data from broader post-Soviet contexts and also contexts like China that show that these state middle class individuals are often quite hostile to democracy, they're often quite pro kind of regime stability and so forth. And this is the real empirical foundations of this revisionist literature. Now, this on its face has at least the width of plausibility. I would suggest there's something there to work with, not least because the MENA looks like it has some of the characteristics that have been found in these other contexts. So obviously, we know that in the post-colonial moment, we see these autopic industrialization processes, we see the state become the main engine for capital generation in a number of certainly Arab Republic contexts. We also know that in this post-colonial movement, we see junior revolutionary officers seizing power in the name of kind of third worldist developmentalist projects who launch massive expansions of the higher education sector and also tend to be extremely autocratic. Now, in this context, Stefan Hertog is in the room, what we often see are labor markets that are deeply segmented. in which there is a selective provision of public goods in which labor market insiders, so these are the people who work in the state, get a series of benefits as opposed to labor market outsiders. And this bifurcation becomes fundamental to regimes creating support coalitions in society, absent forms of democratic representation. So the argument basically goes that in the post-colonial movement, often these, you know, there's 300, Free officers, for example, in Egypt, they seize power, they need to create a support base in society, and they do so by expanding formalized employment, often including university graduates. And these material inducements, along the lines anticipated by the state dependency thesis, are non-trivial. So in Egypt, up until the mid-1990s, graduates have guaranteed employment in the state. So this policy ends in the mid-1990s because they can't afford it, but there's such a backlog that actually continues into the 2000s. We know from labor market survey data, from labor force data, for example, that people in the public sector still, even in the 2020s, tend to earn more than graduates in the private sector on average. These labor market insiders, this state middle class, often have access to housing, other public goods, and so forth. And so this is a plausible testing ground for this thesis. If we just look at cross-national data, so each one of these dots is an autocracy. This is using data from the ILO and the World Bank. It does seem to be the case that the MENA tends to have societies with high proportions of tertiary education and greater employment in the public sector. Some of these really high values up here, these are the GCC. Although we would suggest that it's probably these are quite different contexts given the small size of the populations. This grey dot, this is Cuba, this is Russia, this is China. And then some cases that we're going

to talk about in this paper, so Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, Iraq, all above the median. And we also know in these contexts that the main modal labour market outcome for these graduates will be to go into the public sector, which is on the right. So this is really, a kind of a plausible testing ground for this state dependency thesis. And indeed, in a number of studies, the MENA has been invoked as being a plausible candidate for this. So there have been a few applied studies, which are kind of within the same universe of what we're talking about. So Eva Bellin, for example, has an influential book that came out in the early 2000s. where she's not quite so concerned with just graduates, she's more interested just in labor market insiders, where she argues that these forms of dependency effectively create a critical mass in society that is quiescent, lumpen, not prone to mobilization. If you note though in parentheses, this comes out as an article and a book, but then in 2012, like a lot of political scientists, wasn't very responsive to the events of 2011 and so had to revise the thesis. Equally, there is actually quite interesting empirical evidence from Syria, for example, Kevin Meza Kings, formerly of this manner, has argued that if we look at participation in the 2011 Syrian revolution, that Sunni public sector officials are actually much less prone to mobilize, again, kind of invoking a state middle class thesis, although the empirical evidence for that, Parker Magyar has from Yale has kind of questioned this. But it is also the case that if we just read the literature on protest and mobilization and democratization of MENA over the last several years, this thesis is being increasingly used and invoked to try to explain persistent authoritarianism in the region. Now, against this backdrop, we have some hesitations. So we do know that there are a series of empirical studies from people like Hasan Gandil, my co-author, Soraida Reis, looking at contexts like Jordan. I've also had something to say about this, that there are compelling empirical cases in which we see labour market insiders or the state middle class mobilising. And so there's reason to think that maybe this argument is over-determined for perhaps several different reasons. So this is our kind of emerging theoretical framework to try to make sense of this. And that is that what we want to argue is that this kind of causal mechanism of economic dependency is probably overdetermined. If you study protest enough, you know that humans are incredibly creative and imaginative and they often defy their kind of material conditions to do all kinds of extraordinary things. And so just seeing it as a kind of slightly hydraulic mechanistic argument of just dependency equals quiescence just rubs against the kind of empirical intuition and theoretical priors that we have. Instead, and this is very nascent, but we're kind of currently writing this section of the paper, so it's a little bit of a moving target. What we want to do is argue that these forms of incorporation into the state probably make you just very risk averse. And thinking in terms of risk aversion is quite a useful way to try to reconceptualize this. So we actually have some empirical evidence for this. If you look at World Value Survey data, this is all the MENA countries that this has been deployed in. We actually do find systematic evidence that the state middle class looks more risk averse than the private sector middle class. And we would

argue that this is as a consequence of these forms of dependency. that because you have access to all these benefits, you're less likely to want to take political risks. Now, there is an attending question, which is, is this selection or is this causation? Is it that certain risk averse individuals are more likely to go into the state, into the public sector, or does the public sector make you more risk averse? So nicely, we actually have at least for four countries, actually three of which we look at in the paper. for these four countries, we actually have university graduates, and we have their labor market aspirations. So these are current students who are not currently employed, they're currently in higher education. And in this, we have individuals who want to work in the private sector versus those who want to work in the public sector. And on the y-axis, we have their risk aversion. Actually, they're indistinguishable. They look like they're the same. And so this is at least some evidence to suggest it's when you get into the state, that you start to recalculate risk and how you're going to think about political inclusion. There is a threat to inference here, which is it could be that the state is selecting more risk-averse individuals, and we just can't arbitrate that, right? But our expectation is in context where like 50% of employment is going into the public sector, they probably don't have the mechanisms to be able to make those kinds of distinctions because the denominator is so large. Cool. So we're going to argue and try to give you a causal story to try to explain some protest episodes that's rooted in what is an individual level risk calculation. And the reason why we want to stress this is because when you start thinking in terms of risk aversion, all of a sudden you can start to see this as a calculation that may change, in which people engage in updating, they see something outrageous, and it doesn't matter how risky it might have appeared in the past, you're going to act because it's so compelling. Now, just to have some empirical expectations, in this framework, what we argue, and here what we're trying to do is to reconcile our findings with the kind of prior literature. We think that because people in the state middle class is going to be a bit more risk averse, they're probably going to be absent from just routine activism. They're not going to be around. They're going to stay this one out. Equally, during periods of regime stability, if you ask a state middle class individual in one of these contexts what you think about democracy, you're probably going to get an ambiguous response. They're probably going to prefer the status quo over something that could have negative externalities of disruption, of disorder, of potential loss of labor market status. However, we think that in the presence of strong shocks, when a corruption scandal, a rigged election, something that is outrageous, something that can't be tolerated, a norm violation, in the presence of this kind of shock, then we can expect that these are, after all, university graduates who are well-educated, these people might become prone to mobilization. And so the consequence of the framework is that in a kind of Timur-Quran sense, for those of you who have ever looked at preference falsification theories, you can actually have a large sector of society that is latently, potentially in opposition, but for an exogenous shock that will then switch them into being into public, outright, rambunctious, unruly, uncivil opposition. Is this all

clear so far? So in the paper, we actually look at 6 cases, but for the purposes of just getting through this in the next 20 something minutes, We're just going to look at one case, and in the Q&A I can talk about the other five cases. So the six cases are Egypt, Tunisia in 2011, Algeria, Iraq, Sudan, and Lebanon from 2019. So the 1st and 2nd wave of what is sometimes crudely periodized is the Arab Spring. So we're just going to look at Algeria for this context, because this is where we have our most developed theoretical story. So One of the really nice things about being a political scientist in 2026, and my stats students have heard me say this like a million times at this point, is that we have access to really high quality attitudinal behavioral data from the region. So the Arab Opinion Index is run from Azmi Bashada's shop in Doha, in Qatar. And it runs yearly or every one to two years, nationally representative surveys of 18 or 19 countries from the region. You can go online, you can download it for free and you can play with it yourselves. So in 2020, the Arab Opinion Index enumerates a nationally representative probability survey, a multi-stage stratified sample of roughly 1,500 Algerians. So this survey is fielded between late May to mid to late July of 2020. So We are, spoiler alert, interested in the Hurak movement here, right? The 16th of February movement that breaks out on the 16th of February, 2019, and continues up until 2021. However, this is a protest wave that unfolds. It's really in many ways, maybe bifurcated is the right way of describing it, in which you have a wave of continuous protests that lasts for about a year, and then COVID hits. So you have an exogenous shock that demobilizes people. And then it starts again in later in 2020 and continues into 2021. So we are capturing participation in the first part of the mobilization. And this is probably important because it's only a little bit later that the regime gets particularly nasty and repressive. So at this point, there's much less repression of protest participants. Now, one of the nice things about this survey is it actually has a very, very clear protest question, which in this case is just asked in Algeria and Lebanon. which is, have you participated in the protests that began in this case, in the Algerian case, February 2019. Now, of the 1,500 people, more than 25% said that they participated. And this is actually huge. Mark Lipbach argues that never more than 5% of a national population participates in revolution. In Egypt in 2011, in the 18 days of the mobilization, it's about 9%. We've got a couple of high quality surveys. So this is really a mass phenomenon. It's really quite impressive sociologically. But you're getting what we're doing here, right? We've now got representative individual level data and we know who protests, right? So this is the bit that if you're not econometrically inclined, you can close your eyes and it'll be over in a few minutes. So We have 3 empirical challenges here, right, to try to evidence our theoretical framework. First of all, I've got to show you that the state middle class are more protest prone. And then I've got to try and tell you a story that wasn't easy to infer from previous attitudinal and behavioral data, probably because of this risk aversion mechanism. And then I'm going to try to show you why it is that they switch. Why is it that they suddenly move from ostensible quiescence to outright opposition? So this is the first bit. we are going to just try to econometrically establish that the state middle class are more likely

to protest. So we've got from our survey instrument, people who mobilize, we then create, we've got two key indicators. We know in the survey instrument, the way that they record education, it's not as precise as perhaps you would want. It's got an ordinal scale from like one illiterate lbtidei, second, and then it goes through to Thanowin, like secondary school. And then there's a final section which is above secondary education, which we're going to call tertiary education. And we also have another indicator for employed in public sector, which we're going to interact. That is to say we're going to create a variable that is one for if you're employed in the public sector and you have tertiary education. Now, we were going through this yesterday, I think. So we, in the Arab Opinion Index instrument, there's actually a very nice question, which is just describe what your job is. So we can subset to those people, and they are the state middle class. They are teachers, university lecturers, civil servants, professionals and technical managers in public utilities. This is what the state middle class thesis is describing. Now, we want to have a causal inference, and so we're quite concerned that there are some potential factors that will make you more likely to protest that are post-treatment to becoming state middle class. And so these would be post-treatment mediators or colliders, potentially. So in the first specification, we're just going to concentrate on very plausibly pre-treatment variables. And then in a subsequent specification, We're going to throw the kitchen sink in it and let a machine learning algorithm called the lasso basically choose relevant confounders from a very, very long list of behavioral and demographic characteristics. And we're also, because we're worried that, you know, the nature of protest is that there's a focal dimension to it. People protest in, you know, if you live in a city, you just have more likelihood to protest in that area because there's more opportunity versus the countryside. Some places have cultures of protest. It's actually quite relevant for the Algerian case. And so we're going to use governor at fixed effects. So we're just going to confine attention to variation in respondents from within the same place. We're not going to compare people across places because those places are probably quite different. So at this point of the talk, it would be shocking if there was not a statistically significant positive relationship between being state middle class and going on to protest in the 2019 mobilization net of these pre-treatment confounding variables. The easiest way to see this is actually in terms of predictive probabilities. And what we find in the Algerian case is basically this. University graduates are just more likely to protest than non-graduates. But university graduates who are employed in the state, who are also just more prevalent, are themselves much more likely to protest. They're about 20% more likely to protest compared to graduates who are in what we would call the private sector middle class. So this is completely confounding of the state dependency literature. We should not be finding this relationship. And indeed, in the headline of the thesis, so in political science, there is an unfortunate tendency that I find, which is that you have a study which is elegant and well done and is like on a particular the country case study. And then in the final chapter, you have to show external validity. And so you basically have

to show or argue that your theoretical framework apply to other countries, sometimes that you don't work on or other regions. And this is how you make yourself relevant as a comparativist. So in the, I think the best articulation of the state dependency thesis, Brunn-Rosenfeld actually holds up Algeria as being precisely ground zero for where the state dependency thesis should hold. And I think it's pretty compelling that it doesn't. And in the appendix, if you want me to get, I've built some additional analyses. We can do the, we can throw the kitchen sink and try to introduce what I think are probably post-treatment colliders, but account for other factors that probably also correlate with protest participation. The finding doesn't change. It's super solid. These people are really over-represented. Michael's been sending me some qualitative ethnographic pieces recently about precisely the civil servant hierarchists who go out and protest in large numbers. Okay, so that's the first empirical task that I've set up, which is it really does seem that Algeria deviates from theory. It looks to be not very well explained by the state dependency thesis. So this begs 2 questions. One, why? And secondly, if it does deviate, why does it deviate along this particular causal pathway? So there is an argument that people working in the state dependency kind of genre have made, specifically with regards to Egypt in 2011. So we have got some evidence to suggest that in Egypt in 2011, actually the state middle class mobilized en masse against Mubarak from the very first days of the revolution. And one of the arguments for this is that in Egypt by 2011, the state was seen to be renegeing on the social contract. You start to have a retrenchment in terms of the kind of the public goodies that are on offer. Wages are not keeping up with inflation. And there seems to be an almost deliberate desegmentation process. Stefan has called it desegmentation by pauperization. That is to say, if you're a secondary school teacher, a university graduate working in a public school, these jobs are being deliberately made crap by the state. And so you have to go and moonlight and be a private tutor or something like this to try to make ends meet. That is to say, the reason why these people are protesting is not because potentially they have political imaginations and they want to see some kind of fundamental change. It's because of just pocketbook issues, right? So this is a potential alternative explanation. So again, Michael has been feeding us this kind of material now since we started the project. The first point to note is there's actually quite a rich qualitative catalogue of individuals mobilizing against the Bouteflika regime, including what we would call the state middle class, who deliberately, explicitly articulated politics, which is saying, we are not doing this because we are hungry. We are doing it because we are so outraged by the political context. And this, so to take an example, they are stupidizing us if this verb exists. This is why we say in Arabic, don't make donkeys of the people. We are not hungry people. We need ethical leaders, not corrupt ones. This is a video that Michael sent us where they're chanting, we are the free people. We the free people didn't take to the streets for our stomachs, right? This is, if any of you know the kind of social history people at E.P. Thompson, this is the antidote to the kind of spasmodic account of history in which people just mobilize because their bellies are

rumbling. Here we have a kind of universe of contentious performances and a symbolic universe that explicitly tries to say to the regime, it's not, you know, we're not going to be demobilized through economic concessions. We actually have really strong political demands and grievances. So because we're, because we're influential political scientists, we can actually do even more than that. So one of the nice things in the survey that the Arab Opinion Index did, is that they have an open form or an open text box reply option to a question, which is, why did you support the protests? And here what we've done is we've just subsetted to the 100 and something odd state middle class respondents who said that they had protested. And so these are our translations from Arabic into English. So we have instances like, The realization of freedom because the country was under the control of a gang. It was like Alisaba. This is often a term that is being invoked in this context. To exercise freedom of expression, to achieve demands and rights, because it's a way to voice our rights and to curb the regime's successes. So what we've done here is we've taken these first-person articulations of why they mobilized, and what we've done is we've used a large language model that works very well with Arabic, and we've annotated them, where we've said, given this text, is this an economic demand, a political demand, or is it neither? Is it something else? And so this is the finding in the aggregate. Overwhelmingly, our state middle class protest participants, when asked why they're supporting this mobilization, are articulating political demands rather than economic ones. And so this is kind of insulation against that, or it anticipates the response to that potential counter-argument which says, these are just individuals marching on their bellies. That doesn't seem to be the case in this instance. If you don't believe a language model, what we do is we take random samples of the texts and their annotations, and we give them to human beings with pulses, and we get these confusion matrices. Effectively, this is like the language model is saying that 40 are political and And our human coder is saying that, yes, 40 of these are political. And then what you're looking for is the diagonal is agreement and the off diagonal is disagreement. The only things to note is that the agreement around political and economic is very strong. It's like over 95% in the aggregate. The only difference is that some of the statements that the language model is called political, our human coder is actually saying neither. And when we scrutinize these, it's because it seems that some of the survey respondents slightly miss, they just read the question differently. And so effectively, they read the question to say, why are you using protest as a vehicle for politics? And so they're basically talking about the efficacy of protest and the importance of like street level demonstrations and so forth. But for our purposes, there's really no reason to think that we're miscoding economic demands as political demands. All clear? Cool. Just to drive the point home, to belabor it somewhat. Nicely, we also have, again, these are just descriptives at this point, this is not inferential, but it all adds up, I think, in the aggregate to point to the same direction. There is a survey item question, which is, what is the most important reason that drove people to protest? And so again, we're subsetting to the state middle class who

protested, And the findings in blue are political and in this kind of maroon color are what we would call economic. Note, falling wages, close to 0, cost of living, 1%. The overwhelming reason that people are giving are around Uta Fluke, who we'll go on to talk about in a second. and questions of a lack of civilian democratic authority and a failure to have a meaningful transition of power. Now, there's actually another question in the item, which is what's the second most important reason that drove people to protest? And those top two items flip. So instead of saying, Utaflik is standing for power for the fifth time, it becomes no peaceful transfer of power. So it's really quite clear what the signal is. that this is clearly a political grievance that is shaping things rather than a spasmodic economic one. Cool. What time is it? Great. So for our theoretical framework to work, we do need to set up some other things. So the first one is we do actually want to reconcile Algeria with this broader universe of cases that has made this state dependency thesis. And that is that we think that in periods of regime stability, statement of class might plausibly not look particularly democratic or particularly prone to protest. So we actually, again, because we've got really high quality survey data from the region, we've got our barometer data from 2016. So this is pre-outbreak of the mobilization. Now the footnote and health warning here is that These are not the same samples of people, and so this could be capturing sampling variants. That is to say, the people interviewed in 2016 are just fundamentally different in some way from the people who were interviewed in 2019, and we don't have a way around that, unfortunately. We don't have panel data. But the important headline is this. In the state dependency literature and in the broader democratization literature, there's often the use of this particular survey item, which is democracy is always preferable despite its limitations, or something along these lines. And in fact, we have in our survey instrument precisely the question that the state dependency alert has used previously. And the key finding is this. The state middle class, where the outcome variable is, do you like democracy, is democracy always preferable? The coefficient is actually negatively signed. Although, as you can see, the estimate contains the value of 0 quite some portion of time. So that is to say, it's at best ambiguous. So you could say this actually conforms to the state middle class thesis. In a moment of regime stability in 2016, the Algerian state middle class are not being hyperbolically supportive of the idea of democracy as a system of government. Equally, we also have from the same survey a retrospective question, which is, during the past three years, did you participate in a protest march or system? Now, we know that during this episode, during this timeframe, there isn't mass systemic or anti-systemic, unruly mobilization. There are forms of routine protest, obviously. And if we look at this, it also looks like the state middle class, they're not participating in this kind of more routine mobilization, which again, if you kind of front load a risk aversion framework, makes sense, right? Why would you put your job and all the benefits that come with it on the line for something that may not add up to very much and during periods in which the regime looks like it's not going anywhere at any time soon. Is this all clear? Okay, there's a statistics exam at

the end. So we've done like several empirical things. We've shown that the Algerian state middle class is really over-represented given what we would expect. They look to be particularly protest prone. And this is not because of economic reasons. It really looks to be political. And This couldn't be easily inferred from kind of historic survey data. Something has changed to these people to shift their willingness to participate in protest. So here we actually get into the case of Algeria and trying to think through what drives shifts or transformations in people's willingness to start being more pro-democratic or participate in mobilization. So We think, and I think this is non-controversial for those who know the Algerian case, the motivating grievance is Bouteflika announcing on the 10th of February 2019 that he's going to run for a fifth term. Now, by this point, he is the leader of a calcified regime. He hasn't been seen in public since his previous election. He had suffered quite a serious stroke, was broadly understood to be infirm, and was not a kind of in any way, a public presence in any way. Now, we're going to argue, and maybe there can be some pushback to this, that this announcement to stand for a fifth term is actually maybe unexpected. And that there was ambiguity about what the future political trajectory of Algeria was going to be because people were so convinced that Bouteflika was past it. And so we're going to exploit this. So between the 31st of January and the 18th of February, another survey, Arab Barometer 5, is in the field in Algeria. Now, if you take my stats class tomorrow, you're going to learn all about what are called unexpected events during survey designs. But the idea is effectively this. So you have a nationally representative survey in the field, and a little over halfway through the survey, who to Flika makes the announcement. What this creates is an as-if random assignment to a control group, and a treatment group, where the control group is just thinking about politics as usual, and in the post-announcement group, you have people who have been treated by this announcement. And this is, we could argue, as if randomly assigned or exogenous. So what we're going to do is we're going to subset to our state middle class respondents in this survey. And we're going to look at the same question that we looked at previously, which is this key indicator that the state dependency literature uses, which is that democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government. It's the most widely used survey item to capture democratic attachment and sentiment. And so what we're going to do is we're going to treat this as an as-if or quasi-natural experiment. where we're going to try to adjust for the fact that it could be that people who were interviewed before Wita Flika's announcement just systematically vary in some way. They just look different. There are sample compositions. Maybe the survey enumerators started in a poor part of the country and they moved to richer parts of the country later on, something like this. And so what we're going to do, again, if you come to my stats class tomorrow, you'll learn all about this, is we're going to use a matching strategy or really a balancing strategy where we're going to take each Well, I'm going to give you the simple, slightly incorrect version of this. We're going to take people in the treatment group, and we're going to find a comparable person in the control group. So let's say we've got a

state middle class, older female living in a certain urban area, and we're going to find the corresponding person with that same demographic profile in the control group so that we can try to hold constant those demographic differences. So for this strategy to make sense, The unexpected nature of the event does actually quite matter. It has to be the case that Algerians in the pre-period are kind of anticipating that Bouteflika might stand, or that people in the post-period deliberately sought to get themselves interviewed them because they wanted to have something to say about Bouteflika. It has to be, that is to say, Bouteflika's announcement has to be exogenous to the timing of the survey enumeration. So what we're going to argue is that during the pre-period, actually, it really was unclear that there was rampant speculation about whether, for example, Said Boutouflika, Abdulaziz Boutouflika's brother, may be running for office, or there may be some prominent general or some other member of the kind of regime power center who may want to run. But Boutouflika himself, as an infern man who hasn't been seen in public for several years at this point, is kind of not probably going to be the most likely candidate. So we can actually test this proposition. Again, like one of the amazing benefits of being a political scientist in 2026 is we have so much information about the world. So this is using Google Trends data. So what we can do is we can on a daily basis, even by sub-region, we can see what people in Algeria are looking for on Google, for example, where Google is the dominant search engine in the country. So to note here, what we've got is a target word, Hitaflika, And we can do it either in Arabic or in Latin characters. The results are actually identical. And so this is the search interest over time. And you can see it's spiking on the day after his announcement. This is what's called Bayesian change point analysis. So effectively what we're doing is we're looking for statistical evidence that there's been a meaningful break in the data. So the way to think about change point analysis is like, If you run a website and you're trying and you're under attack, you're going to be in like DDoS or something like that, where somebody's trying to flood you with IP requests, what you often need is a statistical tool to be able to see, is there a break in the volume of demands that is greater than what is expected? And so this is the intuition behind the change point analysis. And what we get in this case in a Bayesian setting is a probability density that a change point has occurred. And indeed, in our kind of analysis period, where our survey fieldwork starts here and it ends there, it's really the case that people are only really searching out information for Gutaflika just after his announcement. That is to say, we have some evidence to suggest this is unexpected, because otherwise what we would be, if people were anticipating the announcement, we would be expecting that people would be looking for information about this online. Does this make sense? Okay, cool. So again, we estimate a statistical model where effectively what we're doing is we are basically coding binary variable as one for if you're in the post-period compared to the pre-period and seeing how that predicts your likelihood to be more supportive of democracy. And what we find is striking, actually. This is maybe underselling it a little bit. Individuals in the post, state middle class individuals in the

post-period are statistically much more likely to start saying that they support democracy. And that is really interesting because this is actually happening. So one of the other threats to influence in this framework is what are called collateral events. So in the kind of classic setup for this, people look at, for example, the effects of terrorist attacks on public attitudes and Islamophobia. And so one of the problems is that after a terrorist attack happens, right-wing politicians or governments will implement policies that will amplify treatment in all kinds of ways that it can be quite difficult to disentangle. Actually, this is happening even before major protest kicks off. So the first protest happened in Nigeria on the 16th. The periodization typically dates the real emergence of mass nationwide protests on the 22nd of February. And so we actually don't have any collateral events. People are changing their attitudes, not because they have seen protests and updated. They're changing their attitude even before protest occurs. which is a really difficult thing to identify. And so the only comparison group that we've looked at are the private middle class. But if I go back in time, the private middle class here are just more likely to support democracy. Like there is a general tendency that they are just more democracy prone. So they don't really, their preferences to democracy don't actually change that much in response to Buteflika's announcement. It's the state middle class that changes. If you see what the significance of this is, it's actually really difficult to try to capture these kinds of attitudinal shifts before these other things happen. And so upstream of anyone having a protest, already the statement of class are mobilizing, at least in their minds, at least in their kind of stated political preferences and attitudes. So there's another way of doing this, which is, one issue is that we've only got a relatively small number of people in a relatively small timeframe. And so what you can do, and this may be getting too much into the weeds, but let me try it out with you guys. What we can do is do a series of placebo tests. So instead of, imagine this, we are saying, if you're interviewed after the 10th of February, you've been treated, but maybe there's like some other thing that happens in Algeria during this time period, or maybe the sample composition, the people in our survey respondents in pre and post, they're just like fundamentally different in ways that we actually can't account for. And so what we do is we estimate a treatment effect for a lot of other dates that should not be important. And so the assumption here is that if we do this, these are called placebo interventions, we are estimating the effect of dates that shouldn't matter at all in the pre-period and slightly in the post-period. Where the idea is that every time you estimate that placebo effect, you get a test statistic about how important that effect is, and then you compare the actual intervention effect to that distribution of placebos. And if you do that, actually, arsenals become even more precise. It's really, really bounded into this particular post-February 10th period, where people seemingly, the effect is only distinguishable when you take the treatment at that date, which really does seem to be the point when all of Algerians are searching for information for WTF, like this guy standing again. And our state middle-class individuals have flipped their preferences in ways that were not

discernible in any kind of pre-survey period. And so we're going to interpret this as a political shock that has shifted people's preferences, where they're going to start having a different state of political attitude. They're prepared to say in public to in-person survey enumerators. So in conclusion, We think that this state dependency thesis that has become very popular in political science and that has been invoked to explain the meaner is probably just overdetermined. It runs against all of our theoretical and empirical priors, actually about why people protest. They're not economic drones who, because their employer pays them a decent salary, means that they are incapable of criticism or mobilizing against that employer if they do something outrageous. And I think this tracks, like if you study democratization and protest, There are all kinds of instances in which, if you read like the transitology literature that comes out to explain the third wave of democratization, it's the soft liners that often turn against the regime, precisely the people, the beneficiaries who basically say, look, enough is enough. This is outrageous. We can't continue on with the status quo. And it's often the case that these shifts, the reason why political scientists and revolutionaries and states are so bad at predicting revolutions and mass mobilizations It's because you have large portions of the population that may be latently in opposition, but then switch to opposition openly as a consequence of these kinds of shocks. And so we're here thinking through in these other cases, like what other kinds of shocks we can look at, whether these are like stolen elections, really egregious episodes of repression that are seen to kind of cross a morally acceptable threshold, or in the case of Utuflika, a calcified, sclerotic dictator who should have been out of power already, trying to cling on to try to maintain the powers and prerogatives that his family have acquired. So in this, what we're going to say is this. The state dependency literature is perhaps actually fine, but it's actually what it's really doing is it's capturing the state middle class, this numerically, really large, sociologically very important proportion of any late developing economy. But they're capturing these people at a point where often these regimes are stable. And in these contexts, when you have, when they're just more risk averse, when you have these kinds of jobs, they're just less likely to participate in routine activism. You're not going to pick people up using empirical strategies that we typically use. Equally, in attitudinal settings, we shouldn't necessarily expect these individuals to be, you know, we love democracy. They're going to be ambiguous precisely because of the risks of openly advocating, often for political systems, that are orthogonal to the interests of their bosses. Equally, though, like, and this is what gets to, I think, a much more processual, a much more dynamic idea of human agency and the potentials of protest. Even people who are so dependent and so risky, you know, are potentially in quite fragile positions, can do heroic and heartwarming things. And there's no reason to think that university educated public officials in the MENA or elsewhere are not equally capable of responding to strong exogenous shocks of the kind that we saw in Algeria. And so the real implication is this, that during periods of stability, this key sociological chunk, you know, grouping in any late developing economy, they can look to be

quiescent, but actually in the presence of certain political economic conditions, they can actually switch into open defiance and in turn become important agents for democratic change. That's it. Thank you.