



Measuring Social Unrest

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Social unrest is widely covered in the news media



Tens of thousands march in largest George Floyd protests so far in the US

By [Nicole Chavez](#), [Ray Sanchez](#) and [Madeline Holcombe](#), CNN

🕒 Updated 10:42 PM ET, Sat June 6, 2020



Colombia unrest: President Duque pledges police reform after protests

🕒 6 June

FINANCIAL TIMES

London and Dublin call for calm after fresh riots in Northern Ireland

[Peter Foster](#) in Brighton and [Jim Brunsten](#) in Brussels APRIL 8 2021

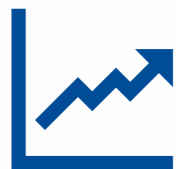
In this research, we....



Constructed a timely, transparent, broad and consistent measure of social unrest



Verified its internal and external validity



Found unrest to be **persistent** and **contagious**, and **not predictable by past unrest**

There are measures of unrest already, but they could be improved

	CNTSD	ICRG	ACLED	RSUI
Methodology	Researchers collect reports “mostly” from the New York Times.	Surveys of subjective risk perceptions	Researchers collect reports from secondary sources each week	Derived from number of mentions of unrest from major English-language newspapers
Frequent	Annual	Monthly	As it happens	Monthly
Transparent	Methodology is not publicly available	Underlying data and methodology is not publicly available.	Underlying data is not publicly available. Methodology is publicly available.	Underlying data and methodology are publicly available.
Broad	1815 – now: 200 countries	1984-2019: 146 countries	1997-now: 49 African countries 2010s-now: 106 countries	1990 – now: 130 countries
Consistent	NA	Human coding	Consistent coding across countries	Same query across countries

The Reported Social Unrest Index (RSUI)

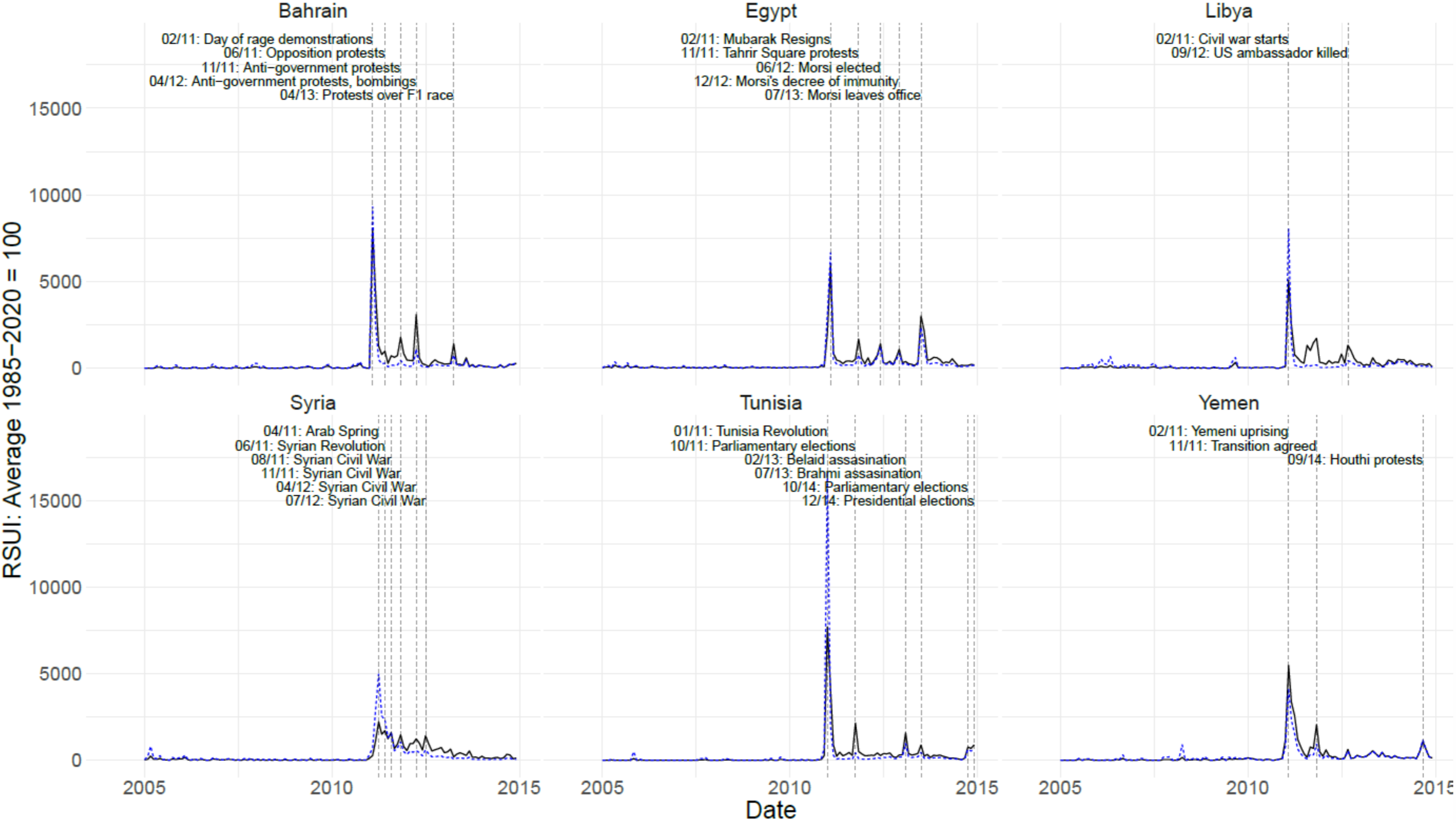
We create an index from media reports of unrest

- Counts media mentions of relevant terms (“protest”, “riot”, “civil/social unrest” etc.)
- In 18 major English language newspapers and broadcasters (from US, Canada, UK).
- Covers 130 countries, monthly from 1986-present, updated ~5th of each month

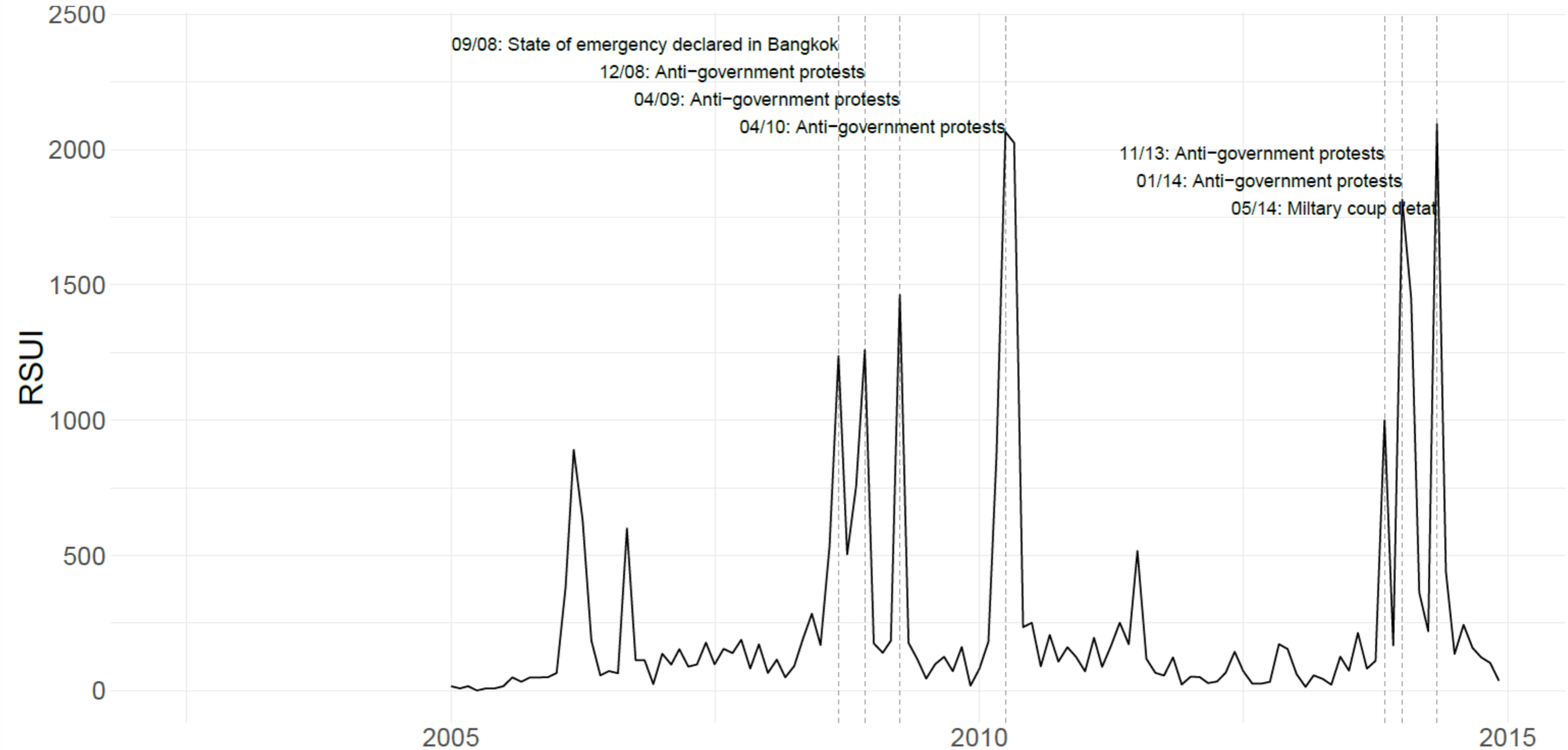
Code large spikes in the index as *events*

- Check every one of ~700 events and keep ~600 (mis-usage of words)
- All labelled with a name
- Use events to compare with well-established timelines

Case study: Arab Spring 2011-2015



Case study: Thailand 2006-2014



Discussion

Comparison to narrative source is the gold standard

- It is an end-run around many possible critiques: bias, omissions, etc.

Further checks

- Different sources, search terms, language
- Agrees with ACLED on a limited subset

Armchair theory of why this works

- Major protests/demonstrations etc. are very newsworthy
- “Even” in countries with little coverage normally, we see spikes
e.g. coups in Burkina Faso & Burundi 2015, protests in Togo 2017, Myanmar 2021

Rudimentary analysis of unrest events

- Unrest is rare (~1% of country-months) but more likely following a prior event in the same country (~4%) or a neighbor (~3%).
- Unrest events are sudden and prediction is difficult.

Recent applications

An emerging body of IMF work tackles two questions:

1. What drives social unrest?
 - Socio-economic determinants of unrest: [Hlatshwayo & Redl \(2021a\)](#)
 - Disasters (esp. pandemics): [Barrett & Chen \(2021\)](#)
2. What is the economic impact of social unrest?
 - Economic: [Hadzi-Vaskov et al. \(2021\)](#), [Hlatshwayo & Redl \(2021b\)](#)
 - Financial: [Barrett et al. \(2021\)](#)

Q&A